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Beyond the Battlefield: Unveiling the Therapeutic Depths of War Narratives in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

Candidate:
Ms. Nour LEFKIR

Board of Examiners

Dr. Tayeb BOUAZID	University of M'sila	Chairperson
Dr. Mohammed SENOUSSI	University of M'sila	Supervisor
Dr. Bachir SAHED	University of M'sila	Examiner

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Declaration

I, Lefkir Nour, hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Beyond the Battlefield: Unveiling the Therapeutic Depths in War Narratives in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*" is my own work and all the sources I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

Acknowledgments

All “praise to Allah, who has guided us to this; we would never have been guided if Allah had not guided us.” (The Qur’an, Surah Al-A’raf 7:43)

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Lefkir Nour

Dedication

To all the roads we did not take,

Echoes of choices we forsake.

Though, the unknown may quietly ache,

At least we have claimed what's ours to take.

For every fall, every turn, every bind,

Led us to where, our destiny aligned.

untrodden paths, in the recesses of our mind,

At least we achieved, something to unwind.

Lefkir Nour

Abstract

Across the generations, the process of trauma healing has undergone varying phases. In contemporary times, marked by mass destruction, perpetual wars, and increasing mental illnesses, a growing number of individuals have embraced scriptotherapy, thereby intertwining literature and mental well-being. Thus, the present research problem is to reveal the therapeutic power of writing and express that the mere act of writing and delving into one's psyche could be therapeutic for them. The study aims at exploring and analyzing the therapeutic power of war narratives on the human psychology, providing insights into scriptotherapy and how it might influence therapeutic interventions and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between literature and mental health. The findings of this dissertation point out that Kevin Powers, along with his fictional character John Bartle, have suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder upon returning home due to the brutality of war and the war crimes they have witnessed and committed. What has truly helped them surpass these intense emotions is expressing their experiences through writing and gaining understanding from it. As a means of meeting the research objectives, the dissertation adheres to three major theoretical frameworks, initiating with biographical criticism, transitioning to narrative theory, and finally trauma theory.

Keywords: War Trauma, Healing, Writing.

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General Introduction

> The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.
>
> -Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*

It is broadly acknowledged that the twentieth century experienced unprecedented turmoil, marked by events like wars, nuclear attacks, the Holocaust, racial violence, and religious conflicts, all of which profoundly affected global awareness. Shoshana Felman aptly terms it “a century of trauma” (171). Various forms of expression, including singing, artistic creations, and other meaningful presentations, emerged as responses to these traumatic experiences. Writing is seen as one of the numerous ways that were employed to discuss the trauma phenomenon. As such, it is an act that construes a narrative work throughout trauma. In the case of war veterans, it transcends its role as a historical record, becoming a cathartic process for navigating through traumatic experiences. Thus, “turning wounds into words hunts this category of writers, making it [a must] for them to both report the actual events of the battlefield with accuracy and make readers understand what lies beyond human civilization” (Ferr 13). In the recently published paper, “Scriptotherapy: Eighteen Writing Exercises to Promote Insight and Wellness” 2018, posits that writing is a therapeutic device that can be used for handling a variety of mental health problems like anxiety, depression, ambivalence, and trauma (Gladding and Wallace 380). That is, writing can take control of the psychological problems one has.

Poet and novelist Kevin C. Powers was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He joined the army at the age of 17, later serving a year as a machine gunner in Mosul and Tal Afar, Iraq, in 2004 and 2005, where he saw combat. Kevin Powers’ writing generally explores themes of memory, guilt, and the complexities of human experience, particularly in the context of war and its aftermath. His narratives often delve into the fragmented perceptions of characters,

reflecting the simultaneity of being in two places at once and the challenge of constructing a coherent narrative from fragmented memories. Powers' works are characterized by their exploration of the emotional and psychological impacts of war, the difficulty of reconciling past actions, and the search for meaning and redemption amidst chaos and loss. His first book, *The Yellow Birds* (2012), was followed by his poetry collection, *Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting* (2014), and two other novels, *A Shout in the Ruins* (2018) and *A Line in the Sand* (2023).

What led Powers to write his first book is his "war experience in Iraq as a machine gunner of the U.S. Army. [Through it, he depicts] the war and the risks surrounding the lives of everyone involved into his debut novel" (Satriawan and Rahayu 2). The novel revolves around Private John Bartle, who recounts the story of his service in the US Army in Al Tafar, Iraq, with his colleague, Private Daniel Murphy (Murph). The two soldiers served under Sergeant Sterling. The narrative switches back and forth in time with each chapter, beginning with a battle in Al Tafar, Iraq, then flashing back to a base in New Jersey before settling on a back and forth between events in Iraq and Bartle's post-war life in Virginia and then in Fort Knox, Kentucky. The narrative concludes with Bartle living in solitude on a mountain, gradually beginning to heal from the traumas of war and his past actions.

Current global concerns, hugely illustrate the necessity of documenting war experiences. Beyond merely preserving historical records, the act of documenting war serves as therapy and salvation. This is particularly evident when examining veterans' writings, whose narrative often becomes a direct reflection of the internal struggles they face in the aftermath of war, especially after realizing that they have been involved in committing war crimes. Thus, what makes *The Yellow Birds* assume significant relevance in the context of this dissertation is primarily due to the author's unique perspective, shaped by his firsthand experiences on the battlefield, which allows him to accurately depict the ugliness and terror of war. Through his characters, he delves

into the effects of war on the psychological state of soldiers and its far-reaching impact on their behaviors. In essence, Powers' novel is more than just a literary work; it is a testament to the significance of literature in unraveling the complexities of war and contributing to the ongoing dialogue surrounding its aftermath.

Although, the general perception of war is changing with soldiers' reviewing their ethos over the last few decades (Coker 120), there is a limited exploration of the role of writing in promoting therapeutic outcomes, especially in soldiers' writings. Therefore, this dissertation sought to explore and analyze the therapeutic power of war narratives on the human psychology, providing insights into scriptotherapy and how it might influence therapeutic interventions and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between literature and mental health. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives are introduced, In the first place, it examines the intersection of fiction and biography in conveying trauma narratives, and the way war veterans mold their experiences into literary works. By the same token, this research assesses the psychological effects of war on the human mind. As the last objective, it attempts to investigate the therapeutic outcomes of life narratives.

The dissertation will attempt to answer the following question: How does the act of writing serve as a therapeutic tool in post-traumatic events? To answer this question, the following sub-questions are introduced: To what extent do existing fiction and biographies interact and intersect with each other to impart a trauma narrative? How does Powers, as a war veteran, utilize narrative techniques to convey the psychological impact of war experience on veterans? What are the therapeutic outcomes of retelling war stories?

The Yellow Birds appeared to be widely studied around the world and attracted considerable critical attention. The novel itself presents complex, thought-provoking ideas. This appears through the range of articles and dissertations written to discuss the ideas within it.

In her article, “Reversing Absence. The Exploration of Memory in The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers” 2017, Amelia Precup dives into the multifaceted examination of memory as a tool for creating a space that is suitable for reconciling with the past and addressing traumatic events. She focuses on understanding how memory functions in the narrative, its impact on the characters, and how it contributes to the overall exploration of themes related to war, trauma, and human experience, building the view on how John Bartle tries to cope with the death of Murph, his comrade in arms. Her paper essentially delves into the way remembering a traumatic experience and trying to understand it allow the person to heal from it.

In “A Soldier’s Post-Traumatic Disorder in Kevin Powers’ The Yellow Birds” 2020, Faizal Yusuf Satriawan and Mundi Rahayu are directed toward a comprehensive understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as depicted in the novel by examining the underlies of the behavior of the main characters. The article uses “psychological analysis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the main theoretical [lens] to discuss the psychological aspect of human beings” (2), applying literary criticism in conducting it.

In his article entitled “Impact of War in Yasmina Khadra’s The Sirens of Baghdad and Kevin Powers’ The Yellow Birds” 2022, Mahmoud Gaddawi discusses the effects of war through the two novels. “The paper [Manely] focuses on the consequences of war, such as death, violence, loss of innocence, mental disorders of American soldiers, and the difficulty of readjustment after returning home” (8). Throughout the article, he examines how war crimes result in a loss of innocence as well as physical and psychological destruction.

M. Ikbal M. Alosman and Lamis Ismail Omar’s article study Kevin Powers’ *The Yellow Birds* in terms of victimhood and how the concept of victimization operates, particularly in regard to troops’ accountability for crimes during the 2003 Iraq war. To them, “victimization is perpetuated in the time of war to serve a pro-war narrative and justify violence against the other side of the equation. [Throughout the article, they] investigate the position of American soldiers

and locals in Iraq, both militant and civilian, and compare the novel's approach towards their status as war victims" (1). The article reveals how Kevin is explicitly giving voice to the suffering of American soldiers, forgetting the real struggle of Iraqis.

The dissertation will adopt an interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes various theoretical frameworks, including biographical criticism, narratology, and trauma theory. By weaving these diverse perspectives together, the study aims to construct a comprehensive tapestry that facilitates reaching the study's aims and objectives.

The work is structured into two chapters. The first chapter entitled "Discovering the Fusion: War Trauma, Literature, and Mental Health", is devoted to spotting the intersection of war trauma, literature, and mental health. For this end, it uncovers the Iraq war, examining its origins, unfolding events, and underlying motivations. Subsequently, it delves into the firsthand experiences of combat, shedding light on the psychological state of veterans upon their return home. Besides, it explores writing as a way of healing and the interconnected relationship between the act of writing and mantal well-being. Furthermore, it reveals the dynamics between the author and the work. Additionally, it puts trauma narratives under the lens. Finally, the chapter examines the interplay of trauma, recovery, and hope.

The second chapter entitled "Healing Through Words: The Therapeutic Power of Narrative" is devoted to the analysis of the novel using three major theoretical insights. It begins with an overview of the novel, followed by the exploration of connections between the author and his work using Samuel Johnson and Robert Brian's views on biographical criticism. The fifth section of the thesis deals with the text itself and how it was structured using Jahn Manfred's view on narrative theory. Finally, the last section examines how trauma is represented in the novel and how writing could be therapeutic by applying Ann Kaplan and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

Chapter One:

Discovering the Fusion: War Trauma, Literature, and Mental Health

1.1. Introduction

> I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades, doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story.
>
> - Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried

Across the span of history of warfare, writers have endeavored to comprehend its complexities, transforming the brutal realities of the battlefield into stories, aiming to extract meaning from its aftermath ("The Literature of War"). War literature is produced by soldiers and civilians, journalists and nurses, authors who have witnessed wars firsthand, and others who know it only through veterans and historians. Soldiers from the American Civil War to the fields of the two World Wars, and other wars that America has participated in, writers have sought to convey the complex experience of combat to civilians who have never witnessed it. Through this, they have unintentionally conveyed the emotional side of war, and thus, it can be a way of letting go of the horrible feelings associated with it. Thereupon, this chapter strives to offer a glance at the relationship between war trauma, literature, and mental health. The first part of the chapter delves into the origins of the Iraq War and its effects on the American soldiers who participated in it. The second part assesses writing as a tool for self-expression, reflection, and healing. Besides this, the third part inspects the relationship between the author and his work and how the life of the author could be reflected through his/her writings. This leads to the fourth one, which aims at exploring the apparent characteristics of narratives. Finally, the fifth part provides an explanation of the psychological impact of trauma on human psyche.

1.2. From Iraq to Home

As soldiers return from the battlefield, their journey involves a variety of experiences, challenges, and reflections. The transition made marks not merely a physical journey but also an emotional one; to some, this journey might be intense and filled with unpleasant feelings, thinking that they have done something wrong by participating in it. Hemingway confirms this in a forward for his book entitled *Treasury for the Free World*, saying, "[n]ever think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime" (Hemingway xv). Exploring these emotions and understanding them requires delving into the core of the reason behind them. This entails uncovering the genesis, events, and motivation behind the Iraq war. Additionally, it evokes an understanding of the haunting aftermath of war as veterans struggle with PTSD upon their return. Analyzing the above gives an understanding of the profound impact of war on individuals.

1.2.1. Iraq War Uncovered: The Genesis, Events, and Motivations

> States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger ... We'll be deliberate; yet, time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons. ("President Bush Axis of Evil Speech")

The Iraq War, extending from 2003 to 2011, denotes a sustained armed confrontation between a United States-led coalition force against the regime of Saddam Hussein. The war was part of a broader campaign against terrorist activity known as the Global War on Terror. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US is central to understanding the war on Iraq, even though Iraq was in no way involved in it. Simultaneously, this attack revealed a terrible threat to the

United States that stemmed from the Middle East and the Muslim world, hardliners in the Bush administration who had long supported an invasion of Iraq saw it as a chance to gather support for a war they believed would be pivotal in changing the Middle East to serve American interests (Hinnebusch 2, 3), That is the United States alongside its allies used the 9/11 attacks to pursue their ambitions in the Middle east.

After 9/11 attacks, the United States started grappling with a newfound sense of vulnerability and an urgent need to prevent further attacks. "To turn the war on terrorism against Iraq ... Bush had to claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida and was actively developing weapons of mass destruction which he might turn over to terrorists or use on their behalf, and hence that Iraq represented an imminent threat to the US" (Hinnebusch 3). As he asserted in his 2002 State of the Union which laid out US strategy that the Iraqi regime has been planning to create anthrax, nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for more than ten years ("President Delivers State of the Union Address"). The US claims that Iraq has a history of using poison gas against its own people, resulting in numerous deaths. Despite initially agreeing to international inspections, the regime later expelled the inspectors, suggesting it has secrets it wants to keep hidden from the global community.

By 2002, Iraq was in breach of the terms of the Gulf War Settlement, which mandated weapons inspections by the United Nations and adherence to no-fly zones. The US officials claimed that Saddam Hussein violated these terms by denying access to military facilities for inspections and repeatedly breaking regional airspace restrictions ("Saddam Hussein's Defiance of United Nations Resolutions"). The Central Intelligence Agency warned US officials that Iraq was actively pursuing the development and procurement of weapons of mass destruction. This allowed them to portray the country as a major national security problem. As a result, the United States considered Saddam Hussein as a terrorist.

As a response to the preceding events, President Bush coined a term of axis of evil. He asserted that "there were some States backing terrorism and pursuing for weapons of mass destructions, and that especially North Korea, Iraq and Iran as well as their terrorist cliques constitute an "axis of evil" which are threatening peace and stability of the world" (Yongtao 101). On November 8, 2002, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1441, warning of serious consequences if Iraq did not offer unrestricted access to UN weapons inspectors. On August 26, 2002, in a speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention, Vice President Richard Cheney remarked,

> Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. And there is no doubt that his aggressive regional ambitions will lead him into future confrontations with his neighbors -- confrontations that will involve both the weapons he has today, and the ones he will continue to develop with his oil wealth. ("Iraq War")

Stating this, he explicitly confirms that Saddam Hussein is a part of a terrorist organization that threatens the US security.

After an unsuccessful bid to secure United Nations approval for military action in Iraq, the United States, alongside troops from "the United Kingdom, Australia, [Denmark,] and Poland" (Carney 6), initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003. As George W. Bush declared, "[m]ajor combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed [, because] the regime [the Iraqi dictatorship of Saddam Hussein is no longer existing]" ("President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended"). On May 1, 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was formed by "General Tommy Franks, the commander of U.S. Central Command, [who] issued a Freedom Message to the Iraqi People, in which he noted that [he is] creating the Coalition Provisional Authority

to exercise powers of government temporarily" (Feith 418). Despite this, the war has not ended yet.

Ladies and gentlemen, we got him! exclaimed L. Paul Bremer, leader of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, as he declared the capture of Saddam Hussein by U.S. forces. This historic event occurred on December 13, 2003, around 8:30 p.m. local time in Iraq, when Saddam was discovered hiding in a spider hole near a farmhouse in Ad Dawr (DIA Public Affairs). After a standing trial, he was executed "[o]n December 30, 2006, [and] was led into a dank execution chamber in Baghdad, Iraq" (Blinderman 153). Nevertheless, his death did not end the violence in Iraq, as George W. Bush claimed, it further complicated the issue.

Amidst the upheaval of 2006, President George W. Bush decided to increase the amount of troops deployed to Iraq by 20,000, known as the surge (Mansoor 97) declaring that,

> It is clear that we need to change our strategy in Iraq ... So America will change our strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad. This will require increasing American force levels. So I've committed more than 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq. ("President's Address to the Nation")

In November 2008, the Iraqi parliament endorsed a U.S.-Iraqi agreement outlining a timetable for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces. This plan mandated the departure of American troops from urban areas by mid-2009 and their full withdrawal by December 31, 2011. Following his election in February 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama announced that combat forces would exit Iraq by August 31, 2010, with the remaining troops scheduled to leave by the end of 2011 ("Bush Admin. May Not Get Iraq Security Deal Before End of Term"). Following the implementation of these withdrawal plans, U.S. involvement in Iraq gradually decreased.

Surpassing expectations, the last combat troops left Iraq on August 18, 2010—two weeks earlier than planned—leaving behind 50,000 soldiers as part of a transitional force

(Belasco 2), as Barack Obama stated in his 2010 speech, "a transitional force of U.S. troops will remain in Iraq with a different mission: advising and assisting Iraq's Security Forces, supporting Iraqi troops in targeted counterterrorism missions, and protecting our civilians" ("Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq"). The formal conclusion of the U.S. military's mission in Iraq was marked by a ceremony in Baghdad on December 15, 2011, and the final U.S. troops departed the nation three days later, as asserted by Obama in 2010, "[c]onsistent with our agreement with the Iraqi government, all U.S. troops will leave by the end of next year" ("Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq"), marking the withdrawal of United States troops from the Iraqi soils.

In essence, The Iraq war was the result of various factors, some of which are obvious while others require deeper investigations. The causes of war are also unrelated events that lined up to culminate in the Iraq War. Notably, the initial justifications surrounding Saddam Hussein and Iraq largely failed to materialize. As no weapons of mass destruction were ever found in Iraq, and there was never any proof that Saddam had any connections to Al-Qaeda. The situation is not rooted only in geopolitical and strategic discussions, as there are other effects of war that are overshadowed by it. Many soldiers returning from Iraq have faced significant mental health challenges. These challenges can be linked to the morally ambiguous combat situations they encountered, along with the disillusionment caused by the unfulfilled justifications for the war.

1.2.2. Returning from the Iraq War with PTSD

In the variegated human nature, "[h]e is a villain or a hero; spat upon or splitting. He is an accessory to war crimes; an anti-war crusader. He is a tic-ridden time bomb; a paraplegic demon lover" (Carruthers 26). He is an Iraqi war veteran, one among the numerous individuals who experienced the complexities of war firsthand. Amidst the 466,985 U.S. personnel

deployed for the invasion of Iraq by April 30, 2003, as reported by T. Michael, a U.S. Central Command, Combined Forces Air Component Commander (3), he bore witness to the realities of conflict and its profound impact on human lives. "With the formal end of the war in Iraq in late 2011 and a continued disassembling of the large US military presence, veterans [began] transitioning back to civilian life" (Institute of Medicine, et al. 481). Beyond doubt, not all of them returned home. Among those who did, each brought their own story of war and survival. Ergo, they do not merely come home. They carry with them the traumas they have encountered on the battlefield, which make them quite disturbed by it.

For many Iraq War veterans, a whole new phase of struggle begins when they return home from war. In a documentary produced by Frontline, Sergeant Rob Sarra, serving in the First Marine Division, articulated that distance from combat failed to alleviate his personal struggles; instead, he felt a sudden shift within himself (Fanning 00:23:00 - 00:28:00). This experience was not distinctive to Sarra; Staff Sergeant Andrew Pogany, a military interrogator and a member of the U.S. Army Special Forces, encountered similar challenges. Less than a week after landing in the country, he began suffering from panic attacks. In the same documentary, he revealed that "[he] started shaking, [he] was sweating, it got to the point that [he] was hallucinating," and "the most frightening or bizarre thing about it was that [he] had no clue as to what was happening" (Fanning 00:23:50 - 00:24:00). Because none of them accepted what they had done and rationalized it, they spiraled into depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to a study commissioned by Anxiety and Depression Association of America on the army of troops who have come from Iraq, one in five exhibited symptoms of depression, anxiety, or PTSD ("Facts: PTSD by the Numbers"). This shows the enduring effects of war on the human psyche.

In discussing the influence of traumatic experiences on mental health, it is critical to understand the nature of the conditions that can arise from such occurrences. Chadwick has

defined “[p]ost-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, abuse, and violent personal assaults such as rape” (2). To him, people afflicted with PTSD frequently undergo the re-experiencing of traumatic events through nightmares and flashbacks, struggle with sleep disturbances, and feel disconnected or detached. These symptoms can be intense and prolonged, leading to significant disturbance in their everyday functioning (2). This condition is not only a clinical concern but also a significance issue among military personnel.

As per Satriawan and Rahayu, “The increasing number of the United States war veteran who has post-traumatic stress disorder has received much attention from the public, the condition is called “battle fatigue”” (3). This condition occurs “as the response to individual memories that happen because of the chemical changes inside someone’s brain after experiencing threatening events” (3), which could affect the changes of people feeling, people behavior, and people mind. The situation extends beyond these symptoms, as it further aggravates into suicide. Jeff Lucey has committed suicide in his own house months after returning from the battlefield. At first, his family thought that he was doing well. Yet after a while, he started to drink more, isolated himself in his room, and began to talk about hearing voices and hallucinating. His girlfriend, Julie Proulx, stated that “when he would talk about Iraq, he was distant. He was speaking, but staring off into space, like he was reliving it almost” (Fanning 09:21:00 - 09:32:00). What happened with Jeff was that when he returned, he began to struggle internally with what he experienced and what he did. Hence, he could not cope with the invisible injuries he had, which made him put an end to his life.

Ultimately, the narrative of the Iraq War veteran includes a variety of experiences that resist simple categorization. Many find themselves battling inner demons upon their return. The high rate of PTSD among veterans emphasizes their need for support systems to address

their mental health needs after what they have done on the battlefield. Thence, they return home carrying not solely physical scars but also the weight of their regret and the invisible wounds of war, as stated by Nguyen, “all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory” (4). In this context, through creative writing, journaling, or participating in therapeutic writing programs, veterans can begin to process their emotions and start a journey of healing and recovery.

1.3. Writing as Catharsis: Authorship and Mental Well-Being

In times of emotional turmoil and inner conflict, “[w]riting serves as a form of therapy; sometimes [one] wonder how all those who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation” (Greene 10). Some stories are better written than told, especially traumatic events. Writing does not only offer solace to the author, providing a space to confront their thoughts, but also liberates them from the constraints of societal judgment. Through penning down those experiences, one “slowly reassemble[s] an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical context” (Herman 177), which allows one to understand them. By way of explanation, “[w]hen writing is enacted with trauma, it permits the person to cognitively access the event and regain a sense of control, and thus reducing the work of inhibition” (Osaminia and Djafri 243). Indeed, engaging in a creative process has a positive effect on mental health.

Through writing, individuals can delve into their inner thoughts, processing what their conscious self does not allow them to reach. “The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or disassociated ... As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, it is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories” (Leys 16). By delving into the unconscious through writing, individuals can revisit moments, understand themselves more deeply, and confront their experiences. This indicates that writing may also be helpful in

identifying and overcoming the psychic disturbances a person goes through. In this concern, Riordan assumes, "properly framed, writing is thought to assuage obsessive internal ruminations and continued negative emotions that can exacerbate health and psychological problems" (263). When adequately directed through writing, all the emotions and negative feelings one has could be alleviated, leaving behind the internal struggles one might have.

In their book *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Well-Being*, Stephen Lepore and Joshua Smyth observe that "in addition to drawing on traumatic life experiences as a source of inspiration, poets and novelists for centuries have viewed writing as a way of transforming trauma and healing themselves and others" (6). In an interview, poet, novelist, and playwright Dorothy Hewett argued that turning painful autobiographical material into fiction was "therapeutic and helpful" (Baker 198). She added, "[s]ome people go to psychiatrists ... but I use writing. I think a lot of playwrights use their craft to try and make a pattern out of life. I think this is one of the driving forces behind writing, because life is so unpatterned" (198). This deeply resonates with many authors who have found solace and healing in transforming personal experiences into literary works.

Exploring further, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* assumes to be a foundation for exploring the weight of war on veterans. His short stories' collection blurs the lines between fiction and autobiography, as O'Brien utilizes his firsthand experience as a soldier to transfer the physical and emotional burdens carried by the soldiers. Four decades after the conflict, he still carries it with him. Speaking to host Neal Conan, he reflects, "I carry the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam — the people of Vietnam, my fellow soldiers." "More importantly," he continues, "I carry the weight of responsibility, and a sense of abiding guilt." Thus, as he said in his book, "this too is true: stories can save us" (144). To be saved, there is no better way than by transcribing it into script, which led him to craft a narrative that transcends the specificities of time and place.

There is dissent among scholars that the mere act of writing is not necessarily therapeutic. Psychologists Marlo and Wagner expresses concern in their article "Expression of Negative and Positive Events through Writing: Implications for Psychotherapy and Health" 1999, as they determined that if individuals solely recount traumatic experiences in writing, they become emotionally exposed and may struggle to get through their feelings independently (212). Besides, Pennebaker insists that "catharsis or the venting of emotions without "cognitive processing" has little therapeutic value and people need to build a coherent narrative that explains some past experience in order to benefit from writing" ("Telling Stories" 10, 11). An instance of this phenomenon could be the case of Sylvia Plath. Although she claims that "[w]riting, then, was a substitute for [her]self ... It is also much more: a way of ordering and reordering the chaos of experience" (453), she failed in reaching the therapeutic aspect of it. Despite the fact that, she has been known for transcribing her trauma through writing, as intense feelings echo through every line of her writings, she committed suicide.

Using literature as a therapeutic tool is not merely about expressing emotions or recounting a traumatic experience; it is about deriving meaning from writing and looking for solutions. Namely, "[o]nce an experience has structure and meaning, it would follow that the emotional effects of that experience are more manageable. Constructing stories facilitates a sense of resolution, which results in less rumination and eventually allows disturbing experiences to subside gradually from conscious thought" (Pennebaker and Seagal 1243). Once put on paper, it becomes easier for the person suffering from a traumatic experience to manage the emotions associated with it, as the act of writing organizes the thoughts and feelings into a coherent framework.

By and large, the act of writing serves as an effective form of therapy, offering individuals a safe space to express their innermost emotions and traumas. That is, through writing, individuals can navigate the complexities of their experiences, gaining insights and

understanding that may otherwise remain unattained. Anne Frank further elaborates on this saying: "[w]hen I write, I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived!" (158). While some may argue that the mere act of writing is not inherently therapeutic, the process of creating coherent narratives and pulling meaning from one's experiences is what truly aids recovery. This therapeutic aspect is particularly relevant when authors delve into their own life experiences and emotions to create works of literature.

1.4. Fictionalizing Reality: The Product and the Producer

As a matter of fact, "[t]here is no work itself, no independent formal entity which is its own sole context; the [text] is the sum total of many contexts, all of which must be known to know it and evaluate it. Only connect! should be the motto of all critics, and the connective link between the [text] on the page and most of its rewarding contexts is precisely biography" (Fiedler 267). Nevertheless, referring to biographical criticism, which is, according to Benson, a form of literary criticism that can "never stands alone. It is always employed as part of a larger system of related contexts which, in turn, is constantly open to the world outside language" (110), becomes a necessity to better understand a work of literature. By situating a text within the broader context of its creator's life and times, one gains a deeper appreciation of its underlying themes and concepts.

In the realm of literary analysis, biographical criticism was developed by Samuel Johnson, who asserts that delving into the lives of poets and truthful accounts of their lives allows for a deeper comprehension of the various nuances embedded in their writings. The 1980s saw a reconsideration of extrinsic approaches to understanding literature. While New Criticism had largely dismissed historical and contextual approaches in academia revealing the true meaning if a text based on the text itself (Tyson 136), movements like New Historicism and Cultural Criticism aimed to restore the significance of context in interpreting texts authentically. These movements aim to re-establish a connection between a piece of work and

the era it originated from, associating it with the cultural and political currents of that period. New Historicism holds that every work is a reflection of the historical circumstances that gave rise to it, as it "pays more attention to the historical and cultural context of the literary text" (Lyu 1075). Through the emphasis on contextual understanding, the interpretations of literary texts are enriched, providing for a more comprehensive understanding of the text's meaning and significance.

Accordingly, biographical criticism, as determined by Frank H. Ellis, involves "the relation between a written work and the biographical experience of the author" (971). more specifically, the product of an author's life experience, and through a better understanding of important details pertaining to these experiences, a reader may better understand the work of an author. Biographical criticism shares in common with New Historicism an interest in the fact that all literary works are situated in specific historical and biographical contexts from which they are generated (Ramadan 31). Hence, similar to New Historicism, it rejects the concept that literary studies should be limited to the internal or formal characteristics of a literary work and insists that it properly includes knowledge of the contexts in which the work was created.

Typically, biographical research tends to adopt a pragmatic orientation, focusing on commonalities in approaches and procedures. The emphasis is on purpose, to gain insights into individual lives as perhaps reflecting the wider cultural meanings of society rather than dwelling on differences in methodological and theoretical assumptions. Furthermore, it examines how the life and ideas of an author shape their work. Meaning that, it "sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times" (Guerin 51) Additionally, "biographical criticism seeks to illuminate the deeper meaning of themes, conflicts, characters, settings, and literary allusions based on the author's own concerns and conflicts. For biographical critics, a literary work is a reflection of the author's life and should

be studied in conjunction for full meaning and appreciation" (Purba 22). Although it examines the effect and influence of the writer's life on his or her work, "[t]he focusses remains on the work of literature, and the biographical information is pulled in only as a means of enhancing [the] understanding of the work" (23). The assertion does not imply that all literary works are explicitly autobiographical, or biographical; rather, it posits that the life experiences of the author invariably exert an influence on the creation of literary works.

As with any literary theory, biographical criticism encounters critics. The rigid approaches that dominated a large part of the 20th century through the lens of philosophies like Formalism and New Criticism assert that through methods such as close reading and strictly textual interpretation, all textual meaning can be explicated. They believed that meaning could be found independent of authorial intent, reader response, or historical circumstance. Russian formalist Manfred Kridl argues that "a literary work transcends individual psychology. In the process of objectification, the artifact becomes separated from its creator and acquires life of its own" (102). Withal, the interpretation or value of a piece of work can be influenced by the author's intention, which is referred to as the intentional fallacy. "They believe that this approach tends to reduce art to the level of biography and make it relative (to the times) rather than universal" (Purba 25). Along with the biographical fallacy, "which is a term used in cultural criticism to critique the view that works of creative art, literature, or music can be interpreted as reflections of the life of their authors" (Winslow 7), the intention is to emphasize that artworks should be interpreted and assessed as constructed artifacts rather than expressions of the emotions of specific individuals.

1.5. Narratives through the Lens of Narratology

> This is the paradox of every poetics, and doubtless of every other activity of knowledge as well: always torn between those two unavoidable commonplaces - that there are no objects except particular ones and no science except of the

> general - but always finding comfort and something like attraction in this other, slightly less widespread truth, that the general is at the heart of the particular, and therefore (contrary to the common perception) the knowable is at the heart of the mysterious.
>
> - Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*

Depicting one's life in a work of literature implies that the language itself mirrors the psyche of the writer intertwining the intricate elements of their experiences, emotions, and perceptions into the narrative. The beginnings of narratology go back to Plato's (428–348 BC) and Aristotle's (384–322 BC) distinction between mimesis (imitation) and diegesis (narration) (Jahn, *Narratology* 1, 2, 4). "For Aristotle, diegesis is one of two modes of poetic mimesis, the other being the direct representation of events by actors speaking and performing before the public" (Genette and Levonas 1). The two terms are crucial, and "some have used them as their basic terminology in their studies. One such writer and theorist is Chatman, who uses these concepts to distinguish between diegetic narrative genres, which include epic narratives, novels, and short stories, and mimetic narrative genres, which are plays, films, and cartoons" (Panggabean and Rangkuti 184). Aristotle's Poetics (c. 330 BCE) is often considered the foundational work of narratology. In this type of narration "[t]he events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. Here no one speaks. The events seem to tell themselves" (Genette and Levonas 9). For Aristotle, narrative works are based on incidents and events. Focusing on tragedy, he lists a hierarchy of essential elements, with plot as the most important. Aristotle's ideas, like his definition of plot as an ordered sequence of events, continue to influence narratology today.

As a discipline, narratology started to take form in 1966, marked by the publication of a significant issue titled "The Structural Analysis of Narrative" 1969 in the French journal Communications. It was only three years later that Tzvetan Todorov introduced the term

narratology to denote the theory of narrative structures. At this point, narratologists sought to examine and elucidate the structural elements within narratives. Todorov introduced the French term narratologie (narratology) in his 1969 publication *Grammaire du Décaméron* (Prince, "Narratology" 524). As Phelan states, he employed this term in conjunction with fields like biology and sociology, indicating a notion of the science of narrative (19). This makes narratology considered a multidisciplinary field.

Basically, the study of narrative can be simply described as narrative theory. The mere objective of this theory is to describe "the constants, variables, and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies)" (Jahn, *Narratology* 8). Other theorists have defined narratology. According to Prince, it is "the study of the form and functioning of narrative" (*A dictionary of Narratology* 8). Meister, on the other hand, said that it is a "humanities discipline that is dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation" (329). collectively, these perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of narratology, emphasizing its role in dissecting the logic, principles, and practices encapsulated within storytelling.

To understand the complexities of storytelling, it is essential to delve into the study of narratology, as scholars often turn to it. In addressing the complexities of narrative structures, Jahn presents a thorough framework for categorizing various elements of storytelling. As Panggabean and Rangkuti note, "[i]n narratology, a narrative is analyzed from the point of view of its constituent components" (186). His technique helps in understanding how different aspects of a narrative contribute to the overall affect and meaning of a story. Jahn suggests three broad categories. The first of these is narration (voice), focalization (mood), and narrative situation; the second is action, story analysis, and tellability; and the third broad category is about tenses, time, and narrative modes.

The first category suggests that narrators may be overt or covert. An overt narrator is one who refers to himself or herself in the first person, one who directly or indirectly addresses the narratee, and one who offers reader-friendly exposition whenever it is needed. A covert narrator, in contrast, is "one who has a more or less neutral (nondistinctive) voice and style, one who is sexually indeterminate, one who does not intrude or interfere, one who lets the story events unfold in their natural sequence and tempo" (Jahn, *Narratology* 4). Gennet suggests that narrators might fall into three main categories which are, homodiegetic, autodiegetic, or heterodiegetic, which are determined by the narrator's connection to the narrative (248). According to Panggabean and Rangkuti, "[a] homodiegetic narrator is present as a character in the story ... [in] autodiegetic narrator, ... the narrator here is the protagonist. But in heterodiegetic narration, the story is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who is not present as a character in the story" (186). The classifications discussed provide a framework that allows for examining the interpretation of a narrative.

Building on the discussion of the first category, focalization serves as a reinterpretation of perspective or point of view in narratology. It elucidates how narrative information is chosen or limited based on the narrator's understanding and their relationship with other elements. Its central inquiry revolves around who perceives? Genette delineates three types of focalizations, zero, internal, and external. (Jahn, "More Aspects of Focalization" 3) Zero focalization, also known as the omniscient narrator, surpasses the knowledge of any character, the narrator here knows more than the character (Genette 189). In defining internal focalization, restricts the narrative to only what a specific character knows (189). Thus, the amount of information the narrator and the character know is the same. External focalization presents a narrative perspective where the narrator reveals less than the character knows, maintaining an objective and detached stance. This external focalization "marks the most drastic reduction of narrative information because it restricts itself to "outside views," reporting what would be visible and

audible to a virtual camera" (Jahn, "Focalization" 98). In fact, focalization serves as a lens through which one view the world of narration.

Narrative situations, however, look at different patterns in stories, including how involved characters are, how far away the narrator seems, and how reliable they are. In fact, "narrative situation describes where the narrator is located, how overtly or covertly the narrator makes its presence felt, and what relationship the narrator has to the characters, in one or more of whom perspective may be invested" (Kenn 33). Narrative situation is partitioned into three types, including first-person, authorial, and figurative narrative. According to Stanzel, in "the first-person narrative situation, the mediacy of the narration belongs totally to the fictional realm of the characters of the novel" (4). That is, the universe of the characters is similar to that of the narrator. In the case of "the authorial narrative situation ... the narrator is outside the world of the characters" (4), which makes him/her absent from the events of the story. Conversely, in the figural narrative situation, "the mediating narrator is replaced by a reflector: a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator" (4). This immersion into the character's perspective can create a more intimate and immersive reading experience.

In the second category, action refers to "a sequence of acts and events; the sum of events constituting a story line at a narrative's level of action" (Jahn, *Narratology* 58). It is, in fact, "causal connectivity between story units" (58). This denotes that each event within the narrative should be connected to the one preceding and following it in a coherent manner, allowing the story to progress and continue. Alternatively, "[t]ellability [..] proved extensible to all kinds of narrative, referring to features that make a story worth telling. [It] is dependent on the nature of specific incidents judged by storytellers to be significant or surprising and worthy of being reported in specific contexts, thus conferring a "point" on the story" (Baroni 836). Sacks and Jefferson further elaborate on this, stating that "the sheer telling of a story is something in

which one makes a claim for its tellability" (12). By simply telling a story, one is implicitly making a claim about its tellability—that is, asserting that the story is worth hearing or sharing.

In the third and last category, Jahn distinguishes between narrative past and narrative present tense, which might change throughout a narrative, known as a tense switch or tense shift. To Jahn, "a text's use of tenses relates to and depends on the current point in time of the narrator's speech act. Naturally, the tense used in a character's discourse depends on the current point in time in the story's action" (Jahn, *Narratology* 61). He further categorizes tense based on the relationship between discourse-now and story-now, resulting in retrospective, concurrent, and prospective narration (Jahn, *Narratology* 62). Retrospective narration allows the narrator to reflect on past experiences. As defined by Jahn, "it produces a past-tense narrative whose events and action units have all happened in the past" (Jahn, *Narratology* 62). Concurrent narration, also known as simultaneous narration, deals with the presentation of events that occur at the same time. Jahn claims that in this case "discourse-NOW and story-NOW are identical" (Jahn, *Narratology* 62). Prospective narration, however, focuses on describing future events or outcomes "that have not yet occurred" (Jahn, *Narratology* 62). This reveals the dynamic nature that exists within storytelling. Allowing one to understand the manipulation of tense influences the portrayal of events, characters, and themes within a narrative.

The second component, which is time analysis, focuses on three questions: When? How long? and how often? This includes order (chronology), duration (proportioning of story time and discourse time), and frequency (repetition of events) (Genette 48). "Narratology [, essentially,] address[es] the functions of duration, repetition, the chronological or anachronic reordering of events out of a progressive temporal linear sequence, the role of the narrator and the various levels of discourse, along with their hierarchical or architectonic relationships, which constitute narrative structure" (Wolfreys et al. 70, 71). Terms like flashback and

flashforward are used to describe shifts in chronology, while duration is explained in terms of discourse time and story time. For Jahn, a flashback is "the presentation of events that have occurred before the current story-NOW" (63), while a flashforward is "the presentation of a future event before its proper time" (63). This results in a non-linear narrative structure, providing insights into the characters' past and future.

As a last component, Jahn distinguishes between telling and showing (mimesis and diegesis). Showing directly involves the reader experiencing events without narratorial mediation, while telling involves the narrator's control over the presentation of actions. As Klauk and Koppe put it in, "in the showing mode, the narrative evokes in readers the impression that they are shown the events of the story or that they somehow witness them, while in the telling mode, the narrative evokes in readers the impression that they are told about the events" (846). In his book Making Shapely Jerome Sterns asserts that, "every great writer does considerable telling along with showing. Showing--that is, rendering sensation in detail--takes a lot of space. ... Telling can be efficient, crisp, and ... evocative. It's a way of summarizing" (219). That is, although both of techniques look different from each other, they can work interconnectivity leading the reader to see and fell the events of the story.

1.6. Trauma, Recovery, and Hope

> Trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life
>
> - Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*

History, with its changing rhythms, has not only molded societies but also profoundly influenced the trajectory of the field of literature. "In line with the [fluctuating] traumatic conditions, the field of psychology developed new theories to understand large-scale trauma, from depressed veterans to Holocaust victims and nuclear bomb survivors" (Ferr 12). In any

endeavor to place positive psychology in its place, Graham Richards argues, it is crucial to locate it "somewhere within the bloodiest century on record – a location which must, in turn, have reflexively affected the character of Psychology itself" (373). The history of trauma, argues Schönfelder, "is a history of repeated gaps and ruptures, with cyclical periods of attention and neglect, of fascination and rejection" (27). That is, across the ages, trauma has gone through periods where it was acknowledged and accepted, then through periods where it was overlooked and rejected.

Etymologically speaking, trauma is the Greek term for physical wound, defeat, or injury that is inflicted on the body ("Trauma") This wound, according to Ruth Lys, is "a surgical wound, conceived on the model of a rupture of the skin or protective envelope of body resulting in a catastrophic global reaction in the entire organism" (19). The origins of trauma in academic studies date back to the 1860s, when it was first described by physicians such as John Erichsen and Herbert Page (Erichsen 113). For them, the effects of trauma were mostly associated with railway accidents, resembling to the nervous shock after a railway accident, and were called railroad spine. From this genesis, the role of mental factors, especially that of fear and the desire for compensation, was recognized in the onset of symptoms (Erichsen 144). Thus, the concept of trauma as a physical injury was extended to include psychogenic ailments whose starting point was the experience of fear, conceived as a memory of traumatic pain. "It was discovered early on that fear seemed to play an important part in cases of both surgical and nervous shock; fearful patients sometimes died before their surgery, and the surgeons linked their deaths to the power of their emotions" (Young 33). That is, medical professionals began to recognize the powerful interplay between emotion and physical condition, suggesting that the mind's influence on the body could be life-threatening.

Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth discuss the historical ties between psychological trauma and hysteria, dating back to the establishment of psychiatry as a scientific

field. According to them, early psychiatrists such as Janet observed that traumatic memories differed from ordinary memories in that individuals struggled to comprehend their significance (33). Freud took this to another stage; between 1892 and 1896, he examined the causes of hysterical attacks. In Freud's early work, he argues that traumatic hysteria develops from a repressed, earlier experience of sexual assault. Freud and Breuer emphasize in *Studies on Hysteria* that the original event was not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. The process of remembering not only inflicts psychological pain but also ascribes value to a previously repressed experience in the unconscious. "This traumatic remembering is termed "pathogenic reminiscences" for the pathologic symptoms the memory causes" (Breuer and Freud 40). Essentially, if not controlled, the process of remembrance of a traumatic experience might cause the development of a mental illness.

During the course of the twentieth century, the profound influence of wars and their catastrophic consequences on humanity significantly shaped the evolution of concepts related to trauma. For instance, during WWI, combat disorders were known as shell shock. As for the second world war, Abram Kardiner, an American psychoanalyst, characterizes the symptomatic response that ensues from traumatic events as a type of adjustment or coping mechanism, and the combat disorders were described as combat fatigue (Leys 4, 5). Although the terminology has not yet settled into the form it is in nowadays, the Korean War, in which "soldiers and prisoners of war (POWs) experienced gross stress reaction and manifested poor concentration and memory as well as clinical depression and social alienation" (Shin and Yim 553), and other post-WWII military engagements further contributed to the medical community's growing awareness of the psychological impacts of combat. The recurring observations of the psychological condition of veterans underscored the need for a more accurate and thorough diagnostic framework. "It was up until the Vietnam War that the American Psychiatric Association introduced the contemporary usage of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in its

1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)" (Ferr 13). Post traumatic stress disorder is, in fact, a disease that develops in some individuals after facing a traumatic experience, including natural disasters, rape, sexual assaults, and essentially war and combat.

The term trauma theory first appears in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*. For Caruth, it is crucial that cultural representations preserve the full force of trauma, especially its incomprehensibility, "The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 154). According to Caruth, "trauma demands a mode of representation that textually performs trauma and its incomprehensibility through, for example, gaps and silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding" (*Unclaimed Experience* 115). However, unlike other theorists, including Hartman, Whitehead, and Vickroy, who "place less emphasis on the incomprehensible and unspeakable aspects of trauma" (Schönfelder 31), she focuses on narrative impossibility rather than possibility and claims that it is anti-therapeutic. Her concept of traumatic realism emphasizes the inherent difficulty of representing traumatic events through language and narrative. She contends that traditional modes of storytelling may fail to capture the fragmented and disjointed nature of traumatic memories, and that attempts to impose coherence through narrative can actually intensify the trauma. "For poststructuralists, there is a break between word and world; for trauma theorists, there is a break between word and wound [...] For Caruth, the nonreferential quality of words and wounds renders the former appropriate for communicating the latter" (Kurtz 100). Thus, language only effectively conveys the traumatic horror when the ability of words to reference it starts to break down.

During the course of the 1990s, the view of Caruth has been challenged. Certain studies have approached storytelling and healing with a reduced level of skepticism (Schönfelder 34).

Ann Kaplan, in *Trauma Culture*, separates herself from Caruth's emphasis on trauma being unspeakable and unrepresentable. She asserts that recounting narratives of trauma can, to some extent, facilitate a process of emotional healing for the survivor, as she says, "telling stories about trauma ... may partly achieve a certain 'working through' for the victim" and "permit a kind of emphatic 'sharing' that moves us forward, if only by inches" (37). By writing down their stories, survivors can begin to make sense of their trauma, and find a path towards recovery. Kaplan's argument suggests that storytelling is not only a way of expressing life narratives but also a therapeutic tool that can help survivors to take control of their own experiences.

Further supporting the preceding view, "new neuroscience research demonstrates not only that fictions stimulate the brain, but as Annie Murphy Paul puts it, it may even change how we act in life" (Kaplan, *Climate Trauma* 27). Furthermore, this transformative power is vividly illustrated in "Deborah Horvitz's reading of women's trauma in *Literary Trauma, Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, where she identified the female protagonists' capacity to use art, mainly writing, as a creative tool of "working through" or healing from trauma" (Boukhalfa 38), concluding her book with a notable perspective on the beneficial results of sharing trauma stories, which contrasts starkly with Caruth's pessimistic outlook.

> [P]ower lies in the capacity to find or create individual, personal meaning from a traumatized and tortured past. If traumatic events are not repressed, they can be used: victims remember and imagine stories to be repeated and passed on. That is, when the stories of the past are consciously recognized, the cycle of violence can end, because the narratives, not the sadomachism or the trauma, are repeated and passed on. (Horvitz 134)

As Hartman claims, "[t]here is more listening, more hearing of words within words, and a greater openness to testimony" (541). Hence,

> The survivor did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghost from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life. (Laub 77)

In this regard, recalling and sharing the realities of horrific events are essential steps toward the healing process for survivors. Those who have endured such traumas often recount their experiences with intense emotion and in a fragmented manner, because, as said by the psychologist, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "when the rupture of one's sense is a daily occurrence ..., old memories fuse with new ones. The narratives of trauma told by victims and survivors are not simply about facts. They are primarily about the impact of those facts on victims' lives and about the painful continuities created by violence in their lives" (86). Once the truth is acknowledged, survivors can commence their journey towards healing (Gautam 2), and they find a way to surpass the feelings associated with the traumatic experience.

1.7. Conclusion

Ergo, the intertwining of war trauma, literature, and mental health is inevitable. This theoretical chapter has discussed the Iraq War and its effects on veterans, especially after returning home, and confronted the realities of what they have done on the battlefield. It further sheds light on the way writing serves as a therapeutic tool in post-traumatic events. Moving to the relationship between the writer and his work of literature as a way to prove that fiction and real-life events can intertwine to pull up a person from a depressive episode. The subsequent title delves into narratology as a discipline and displays its relevance to understanding how narratives work in literature and other forms of storytelling. The chapter concludes by

providing a comprehensive exploration of trauma theory, digging into the profound impact of history, particularly traumatic events such as wars, on the fields of literature and psychology and how they interact and intersect with each other.

Chapter Two:

Healing through Words: The Therapeutic Power of Narrative

2.1. Introduction

If, as they say, some dust thrown in my eyes

Will keep my talk from getting overwise,

I'm not the one for putting off the proof.

Let it be overwhelming, off a roof

And round a corner, blizzard snow for dust,

And blind me to a standstill if it must.

-Robert Frost, Dust in The Eyes

Writing operates as an instrument in the process of healing. That is, writing allows the writer to engage in an active physical activity that improves cognitive abilities, reinforcing the processes associated with positive therapy results. Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* is used as primary data to prove this, considering that "[b]eing a witness to oneself" (Laub 62) permitted Kevin to transcribe his experiences and embody them in his character. This chapter aims to analyze *The Yellow Birds,* applying a range of theories to track how the mere act of writing could be therapeutic in itself. The chapter begins with an introduction to the novel. Subsequently, by using Samuel Johnson and Robert Brian's views on biographical criticism, the chapter will demonstrate how real-life experiences could be molded into fiction. Moreover, Jahn Manfred's view on narrative theory illuminates the profound influence of the psychological impact of war on the process of writing literature. The last part sheds light on the therapeutic power of writing by applying Ann Kaplan and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

2.2. A Semiotic Overview of Powers' *The Yellow Birds*

Kevin Powers' first book, *The Yellow Birds*, received wide popularity upon its publication. Besides being a finalist for the National Book Award and winning the Guardian

First Book Award, the book was listed by the editors of *The New York Times* as one of the ten best books of 2012. In a review for *The New York Times Magazine*, Benjamin Percy claimed, "Kevin Powers has something to say, something deeply moving about the frailty of man and the brutality of war, and we should all lean closer and listen" ("Kevin C. Powers"). Asked about the best book of 2012, writer Dave Eggers stated to *The Observer*,

> There are a bunch of books I could mention, but the book I find myself pushing on people more than any other is *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers. The author fought in Iraq with the US army, and then, many years later, this gorgeous novel emerged. Next to The Forever War by Dexter Filkins, it's the best thing I've read about the war in Iraq and by far the best novel. Powers is a poet first, so the book is spare, incredibly precise, unimprovable. And it's easily the saddest book I've read in many years. But sad in an important way. (Day)

To wit, what makes the book worth reading is the author's firsthand experience, which allows it to offer profound insights into the human experience of trauma, specifically war.

The title of the novel is derived from a traditional marching cadence in the American Army entitled *A Bird in a Window Sill*,

> A yellow bird
> With a yellow bill
> Was perched upon
> My windowsill
> I lured him in
> With a piece of bread
> And then I smashed
> His ... head (Powers 6)

The quote has also been used as a prelude to the novel, offering insights into the upcoming events and themes. It explains the mentality of war, where there is no mercy or sorrow. As Raihanah and M.Alosman claim, "The poem ... personifies war as a person who "lures" the soldiers with something they desire only to heartlessly kill their mind, body and soul" (192). In essence, the chant expresses the brutality and senselessness of war, which is as surprising as it is casual, alongside the loss of innocence or the dehumanizing effects of violence, which are clear in the course of the novel.

Set in the contemporary, twenty-first-century political world, Kevin Powers' book *The Yellow Birds* portrays the journey of a soldier before, during, and after serving in the Iraq War, shedding light on the profound physical and psychological effects of such a horrific ordeal. The novel alternates between Iraq, Germany, and the United States, allowing the reader to discern the protagonist's precise location. In the same sphere, it is written in the first person, enabling the readers to have a second-hand experience in which they are immersed in the narrator's emotions, sensations, and observations.

The opening chapter is set in Al Tafar, where a battle is about to start. The two main characters, Bartle and Murph, are introduced in this chapter. Thus, it offers an introduction to the novel, stating what it is exactly about. In this chapter, the reader sees how Bartle, the narrator, describes the death of Malik, the interpreter, with no compassion, offering a realistic, non-heroic picture of war. Bartle also reveals that his friend will die sometime in the future. In the second chapter, Bartle sends a letter to Murph's mom in his name after his death. Simultaneously, he recalls the promise he made to his mother when they first met that he would certainly bring him back home, which makes him not want to get close to Murph to avoid feeling responsible for him. The third chapter jumps forward in time to after Bartle's duty is over. Yet, war has not ended in his head. He is still haunted by it, along with Murph's death.

Going to the church is the only solution for him, where he hopes to find a kind of relief; however, his attempt proves to be meaningless.

The remaining chapters alternate between the timeline in Al Tafar and the timeline following Bartle's return to the U.S., each steadily progressing toward the events surrounding Murph's death and their inevitable consequences. Chapter four returns to Al Tafar, where Murph receives a breakup letter from his girlfriend, marking the beginning of his breakdown. The chapter also explores the realities of war and the hypocrisy of its leaders. However, the fifth chapter details Bartle's return to the U.S. Upon disembarking the plane, he experiences an uncomfortable interaction with the bartender, who wants to offer him a coffee as a gesture of appreciation for his service to the country's safety. Despite the bartender's intentions, Bartle refuses, believing that he has done nothing more than survive.

The next installment of the Al Tafar timeline follows the two friends through a battle in the orchard, during which they witness a young medic's death. The soldiers gather around him as he dies, expecting him to say something, yet he passes away without uttering a word. The death of their fellow soldier affects all the soldiers, especially Murph, prompting Starling to ask Bartle to take care of him. The seventh chapter returns to Richlon after Bartle's return home, depicting his malaise and constant shrinking. He is unable to return to normalcy, overwhelmed by feelings of shame. This causes him to harshly avoid going out and to refrain from speaking with anyone.

The next chapter jumps ahead in time to November 2005 in the post-Iraq timeline. Bartle has been arrested by the Criminal Investigation Division, which blames him for Murph's death. Additionally, it is revealed that Sergeant Sterling committed suicide after suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. The tenth chapter explores Murph's psychological condition and his gradual descent into suicide. Finally, the last chapter serves as the novel's denouement, jumping several years into the future as Bart is about to be released from prison

after serving his three-year sentence. Despite his efforts to connect his memories of war, he realizes that everything is random and that there is no connection.

One of the main aspects discussed in the novel is the portrayal of war. It is characterized as a living, breathing being that hunt those involved in it. Videlicet, war is depicted as a complex force that imposes a heavy burden on the human psyche, leaving lasting wounds in its aftermath. Furthermore, it illustrates how young soldiers lose their innocence as a reflection of the harsh realities they are confronted with. Unequivocally, war has a tremendous psychological influence on people. As a result, trauma is represented in the novel not merely as a singular event but as a complex web of emotions and experiences that shape the characters' perceptions and interactions. Moreover, the novel explores the effects of trauma, illustrating how it resonates through relationships and communities long after the war ends. Traumatic events, especially war, do not end without leaving a sense of guilt after the actions committed on the battlefield. Therefore, the novel delves into the psychological costs of war, illustrating how it is demonstrated, from the survivor's guilt to the haunting memories of past actions.

2.3. Bringing the Author Forward: Biography and Fiction

In exploring the dynamic relationship between literature and mental health, it is important to consider how the text interacts with its writer. As Farkas puts it, "[t]he literary text, rather than being a fully autotelic entity that can, and indeed should, be interpreted and/or enjoyed in its solitary self, is something that can fulfill its multiple functions in a rich contextual field defined by such externalities as the reader, the world, and last but certainly not least, the writer" (17). That being said, the overall portrayal of *The Yellow Birds* proves to be a depiction of Powers' experience during and after his serving as a machine gunner in the Iraq War. Namely, in the process of writing the novel, the author is always "in a continual process of reconsideration ..., of reflective restructuring, and of repositioning the actions, events, occurrences, interactions, efforts, aspirations, achievements, intentions - in short [their] words,

deeds, and everything in between that, taken together, form the teleological trajectories, the narrative threads, of [their] selves" (Hagberg 6). Verily, the novel is not so much a fictional book as a war report from the frontline, a book that offers a rare and essential perspective on the realities of war.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Powers claims that he "is happy to acknowledge the shared biographical and geographical details" (Lewis) between him and Bartle, the protagonist of the novel. Upon examining the life trajectories of Kevin and Bartle, striking similarities emerge between the two. Kevin, prior to his involvement in the war, lived in Virginia, mirroring his character's hometown. Additionally, both of them dropped out of university and chose to join the army. Moreover, they entered the military at the same age, during the same time period, and in the same location.

Besides the biographical parallels, the emotional and psychological parts of the novel mirror the inner self and the emotional core of Powers. In an interview with *Idaho Public Television*, he reveals that the genesis of the novel started as an accumulation of urgent questions he had about his experience in his own mind (Franklin). He adds in an interview with *The Gardian* that "[the] core of what Bartle goes through," he says, "I empathised with it. I felt those things, and asked the same questions: is there anything about this that's redeeming; does asking in itself have value? The story is invented, but there's a definite alignment between his emotional and mental life and mine" (Lewis). Thence, while the story in itself is a work of fiction, Powers directly confesses the deep connection with the experiences and emotions of his character Bartle in the novel.

At a tender age, Powers enlisted in the army, believing that the military was where a person would develop the qualities, he had admired in those he knew. He saw the army as a place that would make him a man. Correspondingly, Bartle reflects, "I'd been trained to think war was the great unifier, that it brought people closer together than any other activity on earth"

(Powers 13). In a reflective moment echoing Powers' life and the motivation behind choosing the army, Bartle contemplates in an internal monologue, "cowardice got you into this mess because you wanted to be a man, and people made fun of you and pushed you around in the cafeteria and the hallways in high school because you liked to read books and poems sometimes ... and really deep down you know you went because you wanted to be a man" (92). Yet, Powers as well as Bartle were wrong in their belief that war would bring them certain benefits or fulfill certain desires. In fact, war brought them nothing in the end but anxiety, trauma, and guilt.

During the course of the war, Kevin claims that he distinctly felt he had very little control over anything beyond his immediate surroundings, and even within that realm, there were moments when he realized that whatever might happen to him was not necessarily within his own volition. In this context, Bartle is shown to be unable to adjust to this feeling of powerlessness,

> [o]f course, we were wrong. Our biggest error was thinking that it mattered what we thought. It seems absurd now that we saw each death as an affirmation of our lives. That each one of those deaths belonged to a time and that therefore that time was not ours. We didn't know the list was limitless. We did not think beyond a thousand. We never considered that we could be among the walking dead as well. I used to think that maybe living under that contradiction had guided my actions and that one decision made or unmade in adherence to this philosophy could have put me on or kept me off the list of the dead. (Powers 14)

Akin to Kevin, although Bartle never directly mentions the government's responsibility in starting the war, it becomes obvious that war itself is more than individual soldiers, who are obliged to follow orders.

In Kevin's head, the whole idea of war seemed absurd, and he appears to regret his decision to participate in it. In an interview with *Idaho Public Television*, he claims that war is

"something [they] shouldn't have done" (Franklin). Similarly, Bartle believes that before going to war, there may have been alternatives or different paths available at some point that he should have taken, stating, "For we had no alternative. Perhaps we'd had them once: alternatives, other paths to take. But our course was certain then, if unknown" (Powers 21). This idea of the absurdity of war is shared with almost all war veterans who participated in the Iraq war, as they created an organization named "Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)" (Levinson 4). The purpose of this group is mainly, talking about the cruelty of the war on Iraq. Although they "think the world is a mess but, [they] cannot quite stop trying to make it better" (Levinson 41). Thus, their main aim is to create a world free of unjust war. For that reason, akin to their fellow soldiers, both Kevin and Bartle express a sense of regret, which leads them to question their involvement in war, implying profound disillusionment with the decisions that led them into conflict.

For Kevin, as for Bartle, the regret of what they have done on the battlefield is the same. Following his words in the prior interview, Powers utters, "The novel happened with me sort of going over memories that I had and trying to figure out my personal culpability for things that I had participated in" (Franklin). In a scene where he and his group had to kill a man, it is clear that Bartle is against the idea of killing innocent civilians. As the man attempts to escape, Bartle's immediate instinct is to encourage him, shouting, "You made it, buddy, keep going" (Powers 18). Moreover, he contemplates urging his comrades to cease fire and questions their moral compass, pondering aloud, "[w]hat kind of men are we?" (18). In his novel *Generation Kill*, Wright elaborates on this saying,

> they will enter Baghdad as liberating heroes only to witness their astonishing victory crumble into chaos. They will face death every day. They will struggle with fear, confusion, questions over war crimes and leaders whose competence they do not trust.

> Above all, they will kill many people. A few of those deaths the men will no doubt think about and perhaps regret for the rest of their lives. (22)

Thus, this form of absurdity becomes both the cause and the consequence of soldiers' unease. During war, it makes them lose trust in the nobility of their fight and makes them question their deeds, and after war, it keeps them from getting back to civilian life.

Through exploration of the book, a profound connection emerges, enabling readers to grasp the full scope of the novel and the context in which it was crafted. As Samuel Johnson posits, delving into the author's life allows the reader to understand their ideologies and perspectives, a principle exemplified in Powers' *The Yellow Birds*. His exploration of war's harrowing impact on both himself and his comrades is clearly embedded within the narrative. This sentiment is echoed by Robert, who asserts that using biographical criticism not only highlights the author-book parallels but also unveils broader societal themes (8). Meaning that, without delving deep into his personal background and biography, the novel would be a mere fictional story devoid of depth.

One might question the intense fascination with the author's personality, as though reading his work is akin to reading a soldier's account, allowing "[t]hose who have had any such experience as the author ... see its truthfulness at once, and to all other readers it is commended as a statement of actual things by one who experienced them to the fullest" (Ransom 7). The emotional depth of the book allows the reader to sense the psychological state the writer experienced during the writing process, As explained by Foucault, the notion of the author is, "more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description" (112). Certain passages seem to require the writer to be in the midst of a severe emotional crisis to pen them. Here, the background of the author and his experiences on the battlefield come into focus. In essence, the intertwining of the author's personal

experiences with the emotional depth of the narrative is clear in the novel, offering a profound insight into the human condition amidst the turmoil of war.

2.4. "Stitching a Tattered Quilt": Exploring the Fabric of Storytelling

When an author writes, the significance of their work extends beyond the individual words chosen; it lies in the ways those words are combined together to create a coherent work. Thus, the author's personal experience influences their narrative style, thereby affecting the language and style used in the novel. *The Yellow Birds* is no exception. The language, style, characters, sequence of events, themes, as well as the fabula of the novel are highly affected by the writer. This self-reflection "has a power to stimulate an individual's awareness of his or her emotion in a better way with which to grow emotionally better with respect to better self-development" (Nurhamidah and Purwanto and Ekaningsih 195). That is, the way he intentionally or unintentionally crafted the narrative deeply reflects his experiences as an individual.

Delving into the book's contents, one could spot the intense use of personal pronouns, particularly in segments that convey emotional depth. Namely, in Bartle's internal monologues, he frequently uses I, me, and my to convey his inner upheaval and struggles with guilt and trauma. This classification makes the narrator "overt", or "dramatised" or "intrusive" (Barry 235), as "[h]e has witnessed, learned about and participated in the events he narrates and interacts with the other characters of the novel" (Sefertzi 16). This narrative style not only enhances the emotional intensity but also provides a deeper insight into Bartle's psyche.

The narrative situation immerses characters, notably Bartle, deeply within the story's events, rendering it subjective and emotionally charged. Thus, he seems close to the events, offering intimate details and reflections as a soldier in the Iraq war. Instances of this could be seen when Bartle describes scenes of killing civilians, as he mentions in the first chapter the way a young girl was killed in cold blood,

> The car stopped in the middle of the road, but Sterling did not stop shooting. The bullet ripped through the car and out the other side. The holes in the car funneled light, and the smoke and dust hung in the air. The door opened, and she fell from the old car. She tried to drag herself to the side of the road. She crawled. Her old blood mixed with the ash and dust. She stopped moving. (Powers 19)

This, alongside other scenes, does not only bring the reader closer to the horrific realities of war but also underscores the subjective nature of Powers' experience, where emotions and memories intertwine with the events themselves.

The story is, in fact, internally focalized, enabling the reader to see through Bartle's eyes. As Genette highlights, the author often "does not tell us immediately all that he knows" and nothing "prevents a writer from indefinitely prolonging this external point of view with respect to a character who will remain mysterious up to the end" (190). Michel Herr explains this stating that the problem with telling war stories is "that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed there in your eyes" (20). This means it takes time to fully grasp the events and articulate them. Hence, the narrative is largely restricted to his perspective, revealing only what he knows and experiences firsthand.

As a character in the story and the protagonist, narrating his own personal journey as a soldier in the Iraq War, Bartle could be characterized as homodiegetic. Grounded in lived experience, Kevin Powers glorifies Bartle's existence in the story by making him the center of the novel, reflecting his immersion in the harsh reality of combat and its aftermath. This portrayal offers a glimpse into the internal struggles, moral dilemmas, and psychological traumas faced by Powers himself during wartime. Given that, every aspect of the novel revolves around his experiences, beginning with his promise to Murph's mother, his time in Iraq, to his struggle with the aftermath of war. In the same vein, "Powers' purpose in designing

the main character John Bartle was intended as a medium through which Powers would be able to articulate how he defines his experiences in the Iraq War and connect them to his experiences of epistemology" (Patel 52). allowing readers to sense the sincerity of his words.

The whole sequence of the story begins when Bartle is deployed in Iraq, illustrating the shift that occurs between his life in his hometown and his experiences on the battlefield. Bartle reflects,

> [b]eing from a place where a few facts are enough, where a few habits can fill a life, causes a unique kind of shame. We'd had small lives, filled with a longing for something more substantial than dirt roads and small dreams. So we came here, where life needed no elaboration, and others would tell us who to be. When we finish our work, we want to sleep, calm and free of regret. (Powers 27)

Meeting Murph marks a turning point in Bartle's life, as everything that happens to him becomes intertwined with Murph's fate. Alongside this, combat engagements are central actions in the novel's storyline. Throughout the narrative, Bartle vividly describes the horrors of combat and the tragic outcomes for innocent civilians. On one patrol with his squad, he recounts the aftermath of an attack and the resulting losses with a profound sense of regret and guilt,

> There was a wet spot where the body had been, its remnants scattered in pieces—some small, some large, others seemingly infinite like the pieces we found near our feet: fragments of skin and muscle, entrails. Some were larger, like an arm and bits of legs closer to where he had been. No one said a word, but in the silence, we replayed the last moments of his life in our minds. We saw him struggling, begging, and invoking Allah for salvation, only to realize he would not be saved as they cut his throat, and his neck bled, and he choked and died. (Powers 82)

These vivid depictions of Bartle's experiences in Iraq highlight the profound shifts in his perspective and the moral dilemmas he faces on the battlefield.

What truly affects Bartle's psyche is the death of Murph and the blame he bears for it, as he is always haunted by his death. Bartle reflects, "I don't remember what I dreamed, but Murph was there, Murph and me and the same ghosts every night" (73). As written by Rebekah Smith, "[t]he narratives of combat veterans often portray the replaying of a friend's death through nightmares and flashbacks, and the survivor continually questions "what if?" wondering if he could have done more, if he could have saved his buddy, or if he should have deserved to meet the same fate" (14). Bartle's emotional reflections on what could have been done illustrate the lifelong struggles of combat veterans struggling with their guilt and the constant questioning of their actions during war.

Clearly, Murph does not merely serve as a character in the story but also as a moral conscience, questioning the ethical implications of war and challenging Bartle to confront its moral ambiguity. Thus, John's acceptance of being sent to prison highlights his belief that no one is truly responsible for what happened during combat, but that everyone, including himself, is likely guilty of something. As he reflects, "It's impossible to identify the cause of anything, and I began to see the war as a big joke, for how cruel it was" (Powers 98), demonstrating his troubled state of mind where the seriousness and gravity of the war's brutality are juxtaposed with a sense of absurdity or disbelief of committing war crimes.

The text of *The Yellow Birds* is constructed in terms of time sequence and shuffles between the past and the present, resisting both spatial and temporal horizons. The chronology of telling does not correspond with the order of happening; thus, some portions have a flashback, which may be called analepsis, while others have a flashforward, which can be called prolepsis (Genette 47, 48, 67). Yet, the novel predominantly uses the narrative past tense, with Bartle reflecting on his past experiences and the way he felt about them. An example of

this occurs in the fourth chapter of Al Tafar, where Bartle recalls his memories of home while reflecting on the gap between his current situation in Iraq and his past life in Virginia, "I thought of home, remembering the cicadas fluttering their wings in the scrub pines and oaks that ringed the pond behind my mother's house outside Richmond. It would be morning there. The space between home, whatever that might mean for any of us, and the scratched-out fighting positions we occupied, collapsed" (Powers 53). In this way, through the use of the narrative tense alongside analepsis and prolepsis, the novel explores the memory of the character and the perception of the events, blurring the lines between home and war zone.

The events of the novel do not occur in the same time frame, as they shift back and forth in time, moving between the time spent on the battlefield and the times before and after it. As Powers used different types of narration while writing his book. The narrative primarily utilizes retrospective narration, as the story is largely told from the perspective of the protagonist, providing perceptions into his thoughts, emotions, and memories of war and combat. The text also contains aspects of concurrent and prospective narration, particularly in flashbacks or flashforwards. In the second chapter, set in New Jersey in 2003, before even going to the battlefield, Bartle progresses forward in time, illustrating his initial interactions with Murph. Although the text includes segments where Bartle understands and talks about his emotions in the moment of recalling the events, Powers continues to use the past tense to narrate his experiences with hindsight, reflecting on the impact of his actions and the events that unfolded during his deployment.

For Bartle, as for Kevin,

> All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have on Earth that

> one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (Powers 22)

Hence, Bartle becomes "unstuck in time" (28), perceiving "the past, present, and future synchronously in a way that emancipates him from the illusion of earthly chronology" (Ferr 118), which is what Powers wanted to convey. Through flashbacks, flashforwards, internal monologues, and the non-linear narrative of the story, he does not only revisit the past to recount the events but also to imagine a better alternative that could have led to a better destiny in the future. As John reflects, "[m]aybe if things had happened a little differently in Al Tafar, it could have been like that. But things happened the way they happened without regard to our desire for them to have happened another way" (Powers 43). Therefore, the events unfolded as they did, regardless of any hopes or desires for a different outcome. That is, the course of events was beyond the control or influence of the individuals involved.

The duration of Bartle's internal monologues is relatively long, proportioned to emphasize the psychological toll of war. He is immersed in his thoughts until something external interrupts him. He recounts, "the door opened while I was distracted by my thoughts" (Powers 44). Yet, in fact, the door interrupted his stream of thoughts as it opened. In the ninth chapter, while he was questioning whether what he had done in war is wrong or not, "[t]he call of a whip-poor-will outside the window opened [his] eyes" (144), pulling him back from what he was thinking about. In the section of Bartle's long internal monologue in the seventh chapter, in which he finally confronts all of the emotions that war has left him with, "the yelling closed [it] in" (94). As though each attempt to comprehend his emotions and feelings is interrupted by intrusive memories of war, preventing him from attaining a stable mental state.

The effects of flashbacks on Bartle's mind does not end in simply being interrupted by the memories of war but also make him feel that he has no control over his body or mind

anymore. This is evident in his internal monologue in the seventh chapter, as he starts having a sort of stream of consciousness, saying,

> but really it doesn't matter because in the end you failed at one good thing you could have done, the one person you promised would live is dead, and you have seen all things die in more manners than you'd like to recall and for a while the whole thing ... ravaged your spirit like some deep-down shit, man, that you didn't realize you had until only the animals made you sad, the husks of dogs filled with explosives and old arty shells and the fucking guts and everything stinking like metal and burning garbage and you walk around and the smell is deep down into you now and you say, How can metal be so on fire? and Where is all this ... rash coming from? and even back home you're getting whiffs of it and then that thing you started to notice slipping away is gone and now it's becoming inverted, like you have bottomed out in your spirit but yet a deeper hole is being dug because everybody is so ... happy to see you, the murderer. (Powers 99)

Looking deep into the passage, one can notice that there is no punctuation, no capital letters, only words following each other, depicting the multitudinous thoughts that haunt Bartle.

By employing both techniques of telling and showing, the reader is able to engage with the text using all of their senses, providing a complete and integrated experience of the writer's lived reality. For instance, through employing descriptive language and vivid imagery, Powers describes Al Tafat city, writing,

> The war tried to kill us in the spring. As grass greened the plains of Nineveh and the weather warmed, we patrolled the low-slung hills beyond the cities and towns. We moved over them and through the tall grass on faith, kneading paths into the windswept growth like pioneers. While we slept, the war rubbed its thousand ribs against the ground in prayer. When we pressed onward through exhaustion, its eyes were white and

> open in the dark. While we ate, the war fasted, fed by its own deprivation. It made love and gave birth and spread through fire. (8)

Through showing technique, the passage makes it clear that war is a relentless force that pervades every aspect of the soldiers' lives. Explaining the same thing, he employs a technique of telling, saying, "It's impossible to identify the cause of anything, and I began to see the war as a big joke, for how cruel it was" (98). It is obvious that Powers here used a straightforward declaration without immersing sensory details. What Powers achieved is a balance of showing and telling techniques, resulting in an exact portrayal of the human experience in conflict, capturing both the visceral immediacy of combat and the lingering emotional scars it leaves behind, which offers a deeper understanding of Kevin's experiences and the broader implications of war on his psyche.

2.5. "It Took War to Teach it": Crafting Fiction and the Path to Recovery

Unlike many soldiers who were "unwilling, or unable, to talk about their experiences" (Russell 94), Kevin Powers articulated his experience through the character of John Bartle. Akin to many author-veterans, he found comfort in turning his true stories into fiction, allowing himself to take charge and own their stories with a degree of separation from reality. Generally,

> In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. When a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes ... and float outside yourself. When a guy dies ... you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed. (O'Brien 44)

The challenge of conveying the truth of wartime experiences is evident, as the writer faces difficulties separating what actually happened in war from how it was perceived and experienced. Leys defines this situation as,

> An overwhelming set of emotions of terror caused by certain events, cause the mind to split or dissociate: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness: instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. These memories intrude the victim's mind generally through symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, numbing, guilt, violence. (2)

Yet, in fact, no matter how these experiences seem unreal when recounted, they nonetheless represent the exact truth as they were perceived by the individuals who lived through them.

The decision to enter the military is often influenced by a complex mix of personal and socio-economic factors. As Smith highlights, "[a]ll of the soldiers in the Iraq war willingly chose to enlist, but for some, this choice was made out of a lack of other options, a desire to prove one's own masculinity, or a quest for a greater purpose" (27, 28). Perhaps all the traumatic experiences came about in the first place because he is the one who chose to volunteer. Uncertain of his reasons for doing so, Bartle thinks back to when he first joined the army, reflecting, "I can feel how young I was. I can feel my body before it was scarred ... I can see myself for what I was. Barely a man. Not a man" (Powers 28). Although Kevin and John have expectations for their experience and are willing to bring them masculinity and power, they are unprepared for the trauma and the impact it could have on their lives. As it was discovered later on that the number of Iraq War veterans suffering from PTSD is particularly high. According to *The Veterans Health Library*, research shows that 10 to 18 out of every 100 OIF Veterans are likely to have PTSD after they return ("Combat Experiences and PTSD").

That is, neither of them considered the reality of war and the actions they would have to take in its course; thus, they are not fully prepared to witness death by their own hands and the hands of others.

By crafting his story, Bartle created order from the chaos, trying to see where things went wrong and get rid of his feelings of guilt. Undoubtedly, both Bartle and Kevin struggle with PTSD after their return home, which plagues them with flashbacks and feelings of loneliness and guilt. Everything around him reminded him of war. As he introspects, "[b]ack home everything had begun to remind me of something else. Every thought I had blossomed outward and backward until it attached itself to some other memory, that one leading to another, impermanent, until I was lost to whatever present moment I was in," he continues, "the yelp of dogs echoing out from where they rolled in wet garbage in the shadow of the Shamash Gate. If I heard the caw of ugly crows swing down from the power line that they adorned in black simplicity, the cows might strike in perfect harmony with the memory of the sound of falling mortars" (Powers 86). This feeling is not new to him, as he experienced it also in the battlefield in Al Tafar, "[e]very moment feels like combat, and around every corner could be death. They must be on high alert, and every civilian, even women and children, must be considered the enemy, armed and dangerous" (Smith 38). As stated by Bartle in the first chapter, "[war] tried to kill us every day, but it had not succeeded ... We were not destined to survive. The fact is, we were not destined at all. The war would take what it could take" (Powers 8). Indeed, war surrounded him from every direction, suffocating him and holding him back from healing.

Become a killer instead of a dier, is the motto for all war soldiers. As Murray confirms in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, "in theory, to kill a person in direct confrontation. If he dies, you cannot. To kill him is to gain life-credit. The more people you kill, the more credit you store up. It explains any number of massacres, wars, executions" (126). That is "[t]he killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life. Watch

others squirm. See the blood trickle in the dust" (DeLillo 126). Before even getting deployed, Bartle and his unit were told by their sergeant, "[p]eople are going to die ... It's statistics" (Powers 39). Hence, they become accustomed to this mentality before even holding a gun in their hands. "Nothing seemed more natural than someone getting killed" (13), says Bartle.

Although they witness death almost every day, it becomes something they do not pay attention to. As Bartle says, "[w]e only pay attention to rare things, and death was not rare" (Powers 13). Though, when death comes close to them, it seems horrifying, and they prefer seeing other people die instead of themselves. On numerous occasions, Bartle expresses his relief that another person died instead of him, as in "[w]e were glad. Not that she was killed, only that we were not" (14), and "[t]hank God he died and I did not. Thank you, God" (79). So, in this case they follow the saying, "[b]e the killer for a change. Let someone else be the dier. Let him replace you, theoretically, in that role. You can't die if he does. He dies, you live. See how marvelously simple" (DeLillo 126, 127). Yet, in reality, he did not know that he would regret saying this after returning home. As he utters his regret for being alive and killing civilians,

> [o]r should I have said that I wanted to die, ... because there isn't any making up for killing women or even watching women get killed, or for that matter killing men and shooting them in the back and shooting them more times than necessary to actually kill them and it was like just trying to kill everything you saw sometimes because it felt like there was acid seeping down into your soul and then your soul is gone and knowing from being taught your whole life that there is no making up for what you are doing, you're taught that your whole life. (91, 92)

In such settings, "[f]eelings of guilt are especially severe when the survivor has been a witness to the suffering or death of other people. To be spared oneself, in the knowledge that others have met a worse fate, creates a severe burden of conscience" (Herman 54). That is, war

veterans, especially Bartle, grapple with the weight of their actions, which makes them feel ashamed of doing nothing to stop the killing of people. This affects their psyche by causing them to run the situations over and over in their minds, wondering if there was something more they could have done.

On the way home, the memories of war still haunt him, giving him moments of detachment from his own body. He claims that "[he] knew where [he] was ... But [his] body did not" (Powers 38). Although he was heading home and the war had ended, he felt nothing, stating, "I was supposed to be happy, but I cannot recall feeling much of anything except a dull, throbbing numbness" (38). The situation exacerbates as he reaches home and begins trying to make sense of it all. He recounts, "I was tired of my mind running all night through the things I remembered, then through things I did not remember but for which I blamed myself ... I could not tell what was true and what I had invented, but I wanted it to stop ... I wanted to go to sleep and stay there, that's all" (86). Because his mind is unable to give meaning to the overwhelming events he went through, his mind starts to recreates those moments through dreams. Caruth further elaborates on this claiming that, "[d]reams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (*Unclaimed Experience* 59). Inasmuch as "every moment has turned over in [his] mind since [he] came back from Al Tafar" (42), he started to think that his mind was playing tricks on him to the point where "[he] had less and less control over [his] own history each day" (42). That is, despite his attempts to understand everything, he "could not pattern it. None of it made sense" (114) to him.

In order to escape government-designed healing programs destined for soldiers returning home, many of them knew which boxes to check to bypass direct intervention. Consequently, a majority of them required assistance but opted against seeking it, leading to severe consequences. Bartle, along with Powers, are two soldiers who made this choice.

Disregarding the officer's instructions while explaining the questionnaire, Bartle began filling it out, denying any experience of stress, anxiety, or mental illness. In response to the second question, which says, "[a]fter a murder-death-kill, rate your emotional state and indicate it by checking one of the ... boxes" (Powers 115), Bartle selects the option "[d]elighted" (115) despite the stark contrast with his actual condition upon returning home. His behavior manifests in heavy drinking, excessive sleeping, and wandering around town alone; he does not even want to meet his friends or go out with them.

Clearly, his choice stemmed from a desire to inflict suffering upon himself, seeking to experience guilt, shame, and regret akin to what his fallen comrade had experienced, recognizing that "[a]ll pain is the same. Only the details are different" (Powers 84). His desire towards self-torment escalated to the point of trying to commit suicide, with Bartle making multiple attempts in the first few months back home. He describes his urge as a desire that is "not in the sense of wanting to throw myself off of that train bridge over there, but more like wanting to be asleep forever" (91). Describing the scene of his suicide attempt, Bartle says, "[a]t the edge of the river, I waded in. It was hot then, but the river cooled me, and the moon above the trees on the hilltop, blocking the streetlights, kept the river flickering softly, and I felt myself calmly fading in it. As I leaned forward and floated, I drifted a little, a little down, a little to sleep" (93). Thereby, his overwhelming guilt compelled him to seek a fate akin to that of his friend. As Powers remarked in a *PBS* interview, "the danger doesn't end when you step back on U.S. soil. It may be a danger of a different kind, but it's just as grave, and the results can be just as deadly" (Brown). This different kind of danger refers to the internal struggles and mental anguish faced by returning soldiers.

In the journey of healing and understanding the traumatic event, the act of sharing one's experience becomes crucial. By doing so, "[t]he survivor not only needed to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive ... One has

to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (Laub 77). Generally, trauma survivors often feel stuck in that particular moment, unable to move forward, and unable to have new experiences not shaped by the trauma. Throughout the novel, Bartle struggles with intense guilt and PTSD, feeling stuck in the traumatic moments of the past and unable to move forward. As Bartle reflects,

> I was still struggling to find a sense of urgency that seemed proportional to the events unfolding in my life. I remember feeling relief in basic while everyone else was frantic with fear. It had dawned on me that I'd never have to make a decision again. That seemed freeing, but it gnawed at some part of me even then. Eventually, I had to learn that freedom is not the same thing as the absence of accountability. (Powers 26)

This illustrates the internal conflict and the process of coming in terms with his experiences, which ties to the idea that trauma survivors need to share their experiences to heal. Sharing their experiences becomes a coping mechanism, a way to process, forget, and eventually heal. "When they revisit those feelings, strive to gain a better understanding, and start to share the story, they regain their agency because they gain a sense of control over what has happened to them" (Smith 19). That is, the action of writing one's own story is not about how well it is written; it is in fact about how therapeutic it is to the person himself.

David Finkel states that the way to recover from those feelings is to "[r]eturn to the traumatizing event. Remember it in detail. Think about it through therapy and by writing about it" (37). This was recognized long before when Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet were conducting research on finding an explanation for women hysteria, as they assumed that "these women had to put their feelings into words in order to recover from this hysteric behavior" (Herman 12). This phenomenon was referred to by Breuer as the "talking cure" (Freud and Breuer 30) In the case of Powers he used the writing cure. In which writing about his trauma helped him overcome it. Kevin Powers, through his fictional character Bartle, follows a similar

path by returning to Iraq, remembering his experiences, and writing about them to understand and heal from them. In an interview with Judith Herman, she discusses the therapeutic process of recounting traumatic experiences, which helps survivors to "mov[e] from passively experiencing symptoms to an active understanding and retelling of what happened" (Caruth, *Listening to Trauma* 141). This, in fact, empowers survivors to gain control over their own feelings and thoughts, as suggested by Hames, who asserts that "by sharing and reliving traumatic events, a person is taking charge of what happened and acknowledging that he has moved on" (1) from his traumatic experience.

Notwithstanding the hardship that accompanies remembering and talking about traumatic experiences, it brings ease and comfort. Bartle recognizes that "all remembrances are assignations of significance" (Powers 43). This implies that remembrance involves not only recalling past events but also infusing them with value based on perception and emotions at the time of recollection, which leads to healing. That is, trauma survivors can only heal through "remembering how to forget" (Leys 1). Leys adds in this concern that, "the patient is only capable of doing this when the trauma story is put into words and hence when a narrative language is developed. When he recollects and communicates the story, it is possible to give a meaning to the trauma" (177). Ann Kaplan further elaborates on this, stating, "[t]rauma can never be "healed" in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being "translated" via art" (*Trauma Culture* 19). Embodying what Powers felt upon completing the book and releasing himself from the grip of its haunting emotions, Bartle finally expresses that his life has returned to normalcy. As he states, "[m]y life had become ordinary as I could have hoped for" (Powers 133). He acknowledges that "[he does] feel ordinary again. [He] guess[es] everyday becomes habitual. The details of the world in which we live are always secondary to the fact that we must live in

them. So [he]'s ordinary" (138). Though challenging, the act of remembering and narrating a traumatic experience becomes an important step in the healing journey of trauma survivors.

Although there are other ways to overcome war trauma, as Herman claims, when soldiers "suffer from acute traumatic symptoms, [they] get a crisis intervention. They get a brief treatment and then have to return to combat [and life] as fast as possible" (165), This strategy merely helps the soldier to recover from acute trauma symptoms, not completely readjust. What really assumed to be the best method for recovering from trauma is the participatory account, "through self-mastery and self-knowledge the patient is now able to master the intrusive traumatic symptoms independently, in other words the patient is now capable to regain his previous determination and courage" (Leys 89). This participatory account includes putting down one's experiences and traumas into paper, which makes the person actively engage with their experiences, understand their feelings, and gain control over their symptoms. Powers, along with his fictional character Bartle, only began to heal from the traumatic experience once they stopped seeing it as a fragmented, unexplained event, thereby regaining control over their own minds and emotions. Through this process of transformation and acceptance, both Powers and Bartle demonstrate the transformative power of art and storytelling in navigating the complexities of trauma and finding a sense of peace and normalcy amidst the chaos of war.

2.6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, Powers' *The Yellow Birds* embodies what psychologists nowadays term scriptotherapy, i.e., "a discursive space within which all the psychological wounds one suffers from are re-enacted with the purpose of making them heal" (Henke 4). The author not only progressed into stitching a fictional book but also poured his emotions, fears, and trauma onto the pages as a means of catharsis. All of the novel's events are causally connected, influencing each other and leading to the central point of the novel, which is Bartle's perception of the

unnecessary brutality and senselessness of war, intertwined with his deteriorating mental state and the harrowing battle with PTSD upon his return home. As Sapphire puts it, "[t]elling your story git you over that river" (108). Through his writing, Powers testifies to his own story and finds healing from his battlefield experiences. James Pennebaker further elaborates on this, stating, "[b]y talking about upsetting events, people achieve insight into the events and learn more about themselves" (11). To the unaided eye, his actions may seem to be no more than crafting a narrative and engaging in the literary world. However, delving deep, Kevin weaves disparate events together as if he is stitching a tattered quilt of falling stars. Nothing seems organized in the novel, yet within his mind, everything seems to go towards a coherent structure, which is healing. This process of re-enactment and reflection through storytelling not only serves as a therapeutic outlet for Powers but also invites readers to confront the human cost of war on those who have no decision in it.

General Conclusion

In recent times, besides the focus on mental disorders, there has been a widespread interest in mental health and mental well-being. This makes the field of psychology intersect with various fields, including literature. In this regard, studies have found that using writing as a therapeutic tool is primarily beneficial for overcoming traumatic experiences. It not only reduces feelings of emotional trauma but also allows the person to understand what they have gone through and thereby heal from it. Powers, in his book *The Yellow Birds*, confirms this. As a war veteran who has experienced the turmoil of war and the intense emotions associated with it, he successfully depicts the stages one goes through in the process of healing. Through his fictional character, Bartle, Kevin tries to understand those feelings and convey them to the reader. In this process, he simultaneously heals from his trauma. His novel appears to be a discursive space within which all his psychological scars are reconstructed with the purpose of making them heal.

The first part of the dissertation delved into the therapeutic power of writing, alongside a range of theories that help track the relationship between mental well-being and the act of writing. First, the study discussed biographical criticism theory, offering insights into the intersection of the author's life and his work of fiction. It revealed the manner in which the life experiences of the author are depicted through the characters and events of the work of fiction. After that, Jahn Manfred's view on narrative theory explained how psychological trauma can affect the construction of a narrative. It showed the process by which the author's experiences, emotions, and perceptions are woven together to form a narrative. The last part of the first chapter dove into Ann Kaplan and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. It explained the means through which the fragmented and disjointed nature of traumatic memories can be transferred through a work of literature, leading to healing.

Chapter one introduced the notion of linking the work to the author's life, asserting that the text can never stand by itself. The meanings associated with a literary text are, in fact, shaped by what surrounded the author while writing it or what led them to craft it. To deeply understand a work of literature, one should closely examine the author's life and experiences. In discussing Jahn Manfred's narrative theory, the chapter posited that narratology mainly focuses on understanding how stories are told, including the rules, methods, and techniques used in creating and interpreting narratives. In this vein, Jahn introduced three categories by which the narrative should be interpreted and analyzed. These categories are as follows: the first includes narration, focalization, and narrative situation; the second consists of action, story analysis, and tellability; and the third category encompasses tenses, time, and narrative modes. The last part of the chapter explained how trauma can be expressed through narration, despite having a special way of representation due to its nature. It also delved into Ann Kaplan's perspective, which posits that writing about traumatic experiences can facilitate healing.

The analysis part, entitled "Healing Through Words: The Therapeutic Power of Narrative," explored the events of the novel, providing a semiotic overview in which the title, the events, and the main aspects of the novel are analyzed. In addition, it investigated the relationship between Kevin Powers, the author of the novel, and his fictional character, John Bartle, identifying intersections between the two. These intersections do not merely include life events, but also the emotional part of the experiences they had before, during, and after combat. Then, it analyzed the narrative itself, offering insights into how the text of *The Yellow Birds* echoes the psychological state of the writer. Moreover, it revealed that the creation of a work of literature is shaped by the writer's psychology, and the feelings he/she has in the moment of writing the work. The last section examined how trauma is represented in the novel, delving into Bartle's psyche and the emotions he experiences during combat. It also inspected

the changes that occur within Bartle and Powers' minds by the end of the novel and the stable psychological state they reach.

As a matter of fact, Powers successfully entwined his experiences within the folds of his fictional work. Upon examining the traumatic experiences Powers discusses in his novel, one familiar with Kevin and what he went through in Iraq during his years of combat can see that he embodied these experiences through his fictional character Bartle. The second part of the second chapter explains how the components of the narrative are shaped by the author's traumatic experiences. War, with its changing rhythms and the feelings associated with it, including fear, guilt, and psychological damage, greatly affected Bartle as a representative of the author and the author himself, and this is apparent through the structure and the components of the narrative text. The last part describes the process that Bartle and Powers went through to reach healing. At first, they tried to understand the traumatic experiences, examining how they started and what caused them, in order to take control of them. By doing so, they attempted to create order from the chaos that existed in their minds. This chaos not only consisted of the remnants of trauma but was also associated with the guilt of committing and witnessing war crimes. The chapter ends with the ease and comfort that come after recalling, talking about, and understanding the traumatic experiences.

This study concludes that trauma cannot heal without recalling it, understanding its genesis, and talking about it. Writing is the perfect way to do so. Creating a coherent narrative that includes all the feelings associated with such an experience can demonstrate the writers' power to surpass it. Yet, writers who are also trauma survivors never know this until they actually overcome it. Kevin Powers is not the only one who has done this. Authors including Tim O'Brien, Matt Haig, J.K. Rowling, and others, have also done so. Through the styles and narratives of each of these authors, they have turned their personal traumas into powerful stories that mirrors their experiences. These works show that the act of writing not only helps

to process and understand trauma but also provides a path to healing. Eventually, the final result always culminates in the end of suffering, displaying the therapeutic power of narration.

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الملخص

على مر الأجيال، مرّت عملية الشفاء من الصدمات بمراحل مختلفة. في الأوقات المعاصرة، التي تتميز بالدمار الشامل والحروب المستمرة وزيادة الأمراض النفسية، اعتمد عدد متزايد من الأفراد على العلاج بالكتابة، مما يربط بين الأدب والصحة النفسية. وبالتالي، تكمن مشكلة البحث في الكشف عن القوة العلاجية للكتابة والتعبير عن أن الفعل البسيط للكتابة والتعمق في النفس يمكن أن يكون علاجياً لهم. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف وتحليل القوة العلاجية للسرديات الحربية على النفس البشرية، وتقديم رؤى حول العلاج بالكتابة وكيف يمكن أن يؤثر على التدخلات العلاجية ويساهم في فهم أكثر شمولاً لتقاطع الأدب والصحة النفسية. تشير نتائج هذه الأطروحة إلى أن كيفين باورز، مع شخصيته الخيالية جون بارتل، عانا من اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة الشديد عند عودتهم إلى الوطن بسبب وحشية الحرب وجرائم الحرب التي شهدوها وارتكبوها. وما ساعدهم حقًا على تجاوز هذه المشاعر العميقة هو التعبير عن تجاربهم من خلال الكتابة والفهم منها. كوسيلة لتحقيق أهداف البحث، تلتزم الأطروحة بثلاثة أطر نظرية رئيسية، تبدأ بالنقد البيوغرافي، وتنتقل إلى نظرية السرد، وأخيراً نظرية الصدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صدمة الحرب، الشفاء، الكتابة.