

J. D. SALINGER'S EXPLORATIONS OF WAR TRAUMA

by

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzes the various traumatic experiences of Salinger's characters during World War II as well as the responses of soldiers enduring these horrific events. Chapter One introduces Salinger's experiences during WWII as they relate to his exploration of trauma in his fiction. His war experiences illuminate the trauma his characters, and real soldiers, encountered during war. The use of contemporary trauma theory by Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, and Dominick LaCapra advances my analysis by using their concepts regarding responses, symptoms, and processes of recovery from trauma. Chapter Two utilizes these concepts in a more in-depth way to examine Salinger's later stories, which illustrate how soldiers in active combat and veterans who have survived war attempt to put their trauma into narrative form, hoping to cope with, understand, and recover from their war experiences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Salinger, War Trauma, and Fiction	4
Chapter 2: War Trauma and Recovery: Disconnection, Reconnection, and Healing	30
Conclusion	64
Works Cited	66

INTRODUCTION

While Jerome David Salinger (1919-2010) was hospitalized for extreme psychological distress related to his experiences in World War II—from the Allied landing in Normandy, through five battle campaigns, to the opening of a Dachau subcamp—he wrote a letter revealing his mental state to Ernest Hemingway. Salinger says that he was “in an almost constant state of despondency and [he] thought it would be good to talk to somebody sane” (Carlos Baker Collection of Ernest Hemingway, Firestone Library, Princeton University). His experience of “despondency” is intriguing; considering World War II had recently ended at the time of this letter, a veteran being in a “constant state of despondency” raises multiple questions as to why those feelings exist when the war is over and if those feelings existed while the war raged on. Because these questions lead only to speculations, this research will not reflect on Salinger’s “despondency” as part of a biographical narrative. Rather, I will examine the ways in which Salinger’s fictional narratives explore his vision of the traumas and sufferings of other soldiers during and after WWII.

Salinger’s collected, uncollected, and unpublished fiction illuminates his exploration of trauma endured by ordinary soldiers and its effects on those who love them. My study looks at Salinger’s fiction in view of his personal war experiences in order to provide the perspective of one who has served in the war. Utilizing concepts elaborated by trauma theorists Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, and Dominick LaCapra throughout my study provides a lens for analyzing Salinger’s fictional investigations of war trauma as it affects soldiers and also ripples throughout the society that sends soldiers off to fight.

The scholarly conversation on Salinger’s work has been erratic and primarily focused on arguing that his fiction is an autobiographical representation of his life, personality, and attitude.

Scholars such as Julia Judlin, Kenneth Slawenski, William Purcell, Eberhard Alsen, and others note Salinger's depiction of war trauma in his fiction, but they do not do so within the context of trauma theory; that is, they use the term "trauma" as a general descriptor but in an untheorized, and quite loose way. These scholars discuss the importance of the historical accounts of the war experiences Salinger's Army unit shared, and occasionally refer to specific events regarding Salinger's job in the Counterintelligence Corps (CIC). Their work, however, does not aim to analyze Salinger's fiction for the insight it yields about war trauma; instead, it reads the fiction as autobiographical and uses historical information to speculate about what Salinger "must have" seen, felt, or experienced. The present study discusses Salinger's biography with the intention of examining the events of World War II that were traumatic for many soldiers and accounting for Salinger's deep understanding of war trauma in his later short fiction. By analyzing the multiple war-related traumas that Salinger explores in his works, it becomes evident how he experiments with the functionality of storytelling—that is, putting past trauma into narrative form—can produce significant revelations and is essential in the characters' personal recoveries from trauma after multiple losses during and after WWII.

Chapter One examines Salinger's war experiences and four of his uncollected short stories in light of contemporary trauma theory to demonstrate how this theory elucidates his explorations of war trauma; by way of contrast, the chapter first looks at two of his earliest war stories that do not yet delve into the suffering inflicted by war. Examination of his stories "The Hang of It" (1941), "Personal Notes on an Infantryman" (1942), "Last Day of the Last Furlough" (1943), and "Soft-Boiled Sergeant" (1943) reveals Salinger's increasing understanding of the costs of war to the ordinary soldier. His stories reveal this understanding as he moves from superficial, yet marketable, "gimmick" stories to deeper examinations of the anguish of young

men thrust into war, aching from the loss of their brothers-in-arms. Within the context of contemporary trauma theory, I will demonstrate how Salinger's war experiences illuminate the trauma evident in his stories, rather than argue that the stories reflect his personal life as some scholars have done.

Chapter Two looks at Salinger's later unpublished, uncollected, and collected stories that include more detailed accounts of post-traumatic responses to war trauma. Many characters analyzed in this chapter narrate their traumatic event, though their full understanding of it is delayed; this belatedness causes post-traumatic symptoms to arise intrusively later in life. The characters demonstrate psychological and psychosomatic symptoms caused by traumatic experiences and some attempt at recovery by putting their trauma into narrative form. Trauma theorists suggest that this act of narration aids recovery by allowing individuals to become aware of their trauma and to fully comprehend it, which they are unable to do during the event. Salinger meticulously and skillfully recreates the thoughts, actions, and feelings of many real soldiers and veterans during the war through his characters. The stories analyzed in this chapter show Salinger's exploration of trauma becoming more complex and layered, as one story often displays multiple traumatic events affecting more than one individual.

CHAPTER 1: SALINGER, WAR TRAUMA, AND FICTION

Salinger's war experiences began when he received his draft notice in 1942 and by summer of 1943, he was promoted to Staff Sergeant and later became an agent of the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC). Although Salinger was not involved in direct combat, from 1944-1945, his 12th Infantry Regiment was involved in some of the most brutal events of the War. Salinger's involvement in the CIC of the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during WWII exposed him to devastating wartime experiences that shaped the knowledge he conveys through his fictional characters in multiple stories. While serving as a CIC agent, Salinger participated in many battles and witnessed a handful of SNAFUs that highlight the absurdity of war, its anti-heroic characters, and the senseless loss of life it often entails—insights that Salinger embodies in his war fictions.¹

One of the first SNAFUs that Salinger experienced occurred just prior to the landing at Normandy, at Slapton Sands in England, on April 27 and 28, 1944 during training exercises for D-Day. Salinger and his detachment witnessed their brothers-in-arms injured and killed by friendly fire. A simple miscommunication between the Army and Navy caused British allies to kill more than one hundred American soldiers. Witnessing this absurd, disastrous loss constitutes the kind of sudden, overwhelming shock that Freud associates with what he called “war neuroses” and what we call PTSD. The military required that the SNAFU be kept secret until after the plans for D-Day, Exercise Tiger, had been executed. The CIC was responsible for ensuring the survivors did not disclose those plans, which meant that they could not discuss the catastrophe at Slapton Sands. The silence surrounding this SNAFU remained until forty-five years later. The deceased soldiers from Slapton Sands were reburied in France after D-Day and

¹ SNAFU is a military acronym standing for “Situation Normal—All Fucked Up.” Historicists commonly refer to the following events discussed as military SNAFUs.

“were listed as having died during the D-Day invasion” (Alsen 44). This disaster, for obvious reasons, had the potential not only to spark distrust and loss of respect for soldiers’ own leaders and government, but also to cause delayed traumatic effects on the survivors, given Freud’s understanding of the origin of war neuroses in such events.²

After the tragic friendly-fire incident at Slapton Sands, Salinger participated in the D-Day invasion at Utah Beach. Roughly 30 soldiers, including Salinger, were packed into a landing craft where violent waves crashed down upon their craft. As they were tossed around within the vessel, large warships fired guns that filled the air and sky with light and noise. Drawing closer, soldiers saw the sands of the beach exploding into the air under heavy artillery fire. Their landing craft smashed onto land and the soldiers had to walk through the shallow waters toward the beach, while sand and bullets flew around them.³ Salinger did not face the same conditions as the 12th CIC Detachment since his landing craft had drifted beyond the intended landing spot. He was taken ashore with the 4th CIC Detachment in less severe conditions, though his 12th Regiment brothers-in-arms fought for two days and nights resulting in a loss of 300 men. Slawenski notes that during June 1944, 76 percent of the 12th’s officers and 63 percent of the enlisted men had been lost. The scale of these losses suggests the collective trauma shared by soldiers and their brothers-in-arms who experienced the deaths, and other losses, from D-Day.

Another SNAFU that resulted in unnecessary deaths occurred at Saint-Lô in France just three months after Slapton Sands and one month after D-Day. According to Alsen, General Omar Bradley developed Operation Cobra, in which American and British bombing planes were

² Cathy Caruth discusses Freud’s astonishment at the resistance of society during WWI to study “war neuroses.” She notes in one example: “The returning traumatic dream . . . is a literal rerun of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5).

³ Descriptions of these events come from three significant sources: Ken Burns’ film, *The War* (2007), Kenneth Slawenski’s work *J. D. Salinger* (2010), and “Archive Video Of The D-Day Normandy Landings” (2014).

ordered to “breach the German lines” (62).⁴ Due to yet another miscommunication, the planes were not aware that the British had called off the bombings because of low visibility. Some of the planes turned back, while others dropped bombs on the grounded American troops instead of German positions as planned. There were 131 wounded Americans and twenty-five killed. This second instance of death by friendly fire constituted yet another absurd and anti-heroic loss of lives. It did not end there, though. They continued Operation Cobra the next day where 490 troops were wounded and 111 were killed. General Bradley ordered the troops on the ground to remain at a certain distance; however, that distance was not far enough and soldiers on the ground were killed, yet again, by friendly bombings. Within two days, 621 troops were wounded and 136 were killed by friendly fire. As with the SNAFU at Slapton Sands, Salinger’s responsibility as CIC was to keep the survivors’ mouths shut “because it would have lowered the morale of the entire army” if news of what happened spread (63). As testimony to the traumatizing effects of this SNAFU and others, there were hundreds of reported cases of “combat exhaustion” from the events at Saint-Lô, though it would be accurate to assume there were hundreds more that went unreported.

Unlike the friendly fire debacles at Slapton Sands and Saint- Lô, the Battle of Hürtgen Forest in which Salinger’s unit participated was a gruesome three-month battle.⁵ Hürtgen was full of trees that had grown extremely close together; the entire forest was dark, dense, and threatening. The forest ground contained numerous trip wires that activated German Schrapnellmines.⁶ These mines shot up from the ground to emit up to 350 steel balls in all

⁴ Fortunately, this SNAFU did not affect the liberation of Paris in August 1944. There, Salinger met Ernest Hemingway.

⁵ Several scholars have noted the similarities between this battle and narrative incidents within Salinger’s collected and uncollected short stories. The stories often studied include “With Love and Squalor” and “The Stranger.”

⁶ These were also referred to as “S-mine” or “Bouncing Betty.”

directions with the potential to injure or kill an entire squad (“German Schrapnellmine”).

Freezing rain began to fall near the winter months and eventually snow and ice covered the forest ground. The soldiers were forced to kneel in their snow/ice-filled foxholes for safety. The foxholes provided the men only partial cover, though. Germans employed tree bursts that exploded trees upon artillery impact, causing an excess of shrapnel to wildly fly through the air and rain down. Documentary accounts of the months-long fighting in Hürtgen reveal the traumatic effects of the brutal conditions on soldiers: “Hundreds of men shot themselves in the foot or hand rather than endure any more. Hundreds more collapsed psychologically, sat staring in the distance, as if no battle raged around them” (“Battle of Hurtgen Forest” 6:48-7:01).

Salinger’s 12th Regiment originally had 3,142 soldiers; by the end of the battle, there were 1,493 battle casualties in addition to 1,094 nonbattle casualties caused by trench foot and frozen limbs. In total, the U.S. Army had 33,000 casualties. Slawenski notes that the “pointlessness of it all” created even more traumatic effects and led to Hürtgen being considered “a military failure and a waste of human life” by historians (Slawenski 113). While Alsen mistakenly assumes that Salinger suggests in his fiction that he himself came close to being killed at Hürtgen, there is no evidence to support this claim. There is, however, evidence that the deaths of Salinger’s brothers-in-arms during this event impacted his writing, despite his being stationed five miles away from the combat. “Even Hemingway,” Slawenski says, “found it difficult to write for years after his experience there,” and notes that “silence was the overwhelming reaction” (114). This time, Salinger did not have to keep the soldiers’ mouths shut—they kept them shut on their own. Instead, the duties of CIC during this battle were securing the American positions by preventing civilians from entering the dangerous warzone, as well as “screen[ing] the local population for Nazi officials and for members of the Nazi party” (Alsen 71). Salinger may not have been on the

front lines during Hürtgen Forest, but he was indirectly affected by not only the horrific effects of combat on his brothers-in-arms during and after the battle, but also the scenes of devastation in the local population from the enormous battle.⁷

Soon after The Battle of Hürtgen Forest ended, the soldiers in Salinger's regiment were sent to a new position in Luxembourg to rest and recover. About a week after arriving, however, the Battle of the Bulge erupted in their new position. The 12th Infantry Regiment was attacked by German forces, destroying the communication centers, cutting them off from the other divisions and isolating entire platoons. Slawenski writes, "It meant more nights sleeping in the snow. It meant more fighting in the forest—this time in Ardennes. It meant more exhaustion and blood" (Slawenski 121). For three days the men struggled with diminishing food supplies, lack of winter gear to protect them from the cold, and constant artillery fire. The battle is considered the biggest, bloodiest, and "the costliest engagement in American military history," causing around 80,000 casualties (Slawenski 121). Eventually, the German forces ran out of fuel, men, and ammunition, which inevitably led to an American victory, but not without tremendous attrition of their own.

When the Battle of the Bulge ended, American troops marched through the snow, presumably to Berlin, as Slawenski mentions. As they marched through Hürtgen Forest, soldiers were reminded of the horror from the Battle—reminded that they were forced to leave the bodies of their brothers-in-arms behind, unburied on the frozen ground. They marched past thousands of thawing, stiff corpses, some of which were in fragments.

⁷ There is some discrepancy on Salinger's specific whereabouts during the battle; however, Salinger was in the general location, working with the civilians and witnessing the destruction and death from the battle.

The last major event Salinger participated in just before the end of the war was the liberation of a Nazi concentration camp—Kaufering Lager IV, part of the Dachau complex near Landsberg, Germany. Salinger arrived at the camp a day after its discovery, as estimated by Alsen. Numerous accounts relate the sights and smells that veterans experienced upon entering concentration camps, and Salinger's experiences were no different.⁸ Since the Nazis had set fire to the barracks after locking prisoners inside, soldiers approaching the camp smelled the burnt bodies well before entering the camp. Soldiers entering the camp had to walk past rows of dead prisoners, the stench of rotting flesh hanging in the air like a thick fog. Corpses of prisoners who attempted to crawl out of burning hovels added to the scenes of horror. The prisoners' causes of deaths included gunshot wounds, starvation, typhus, and severe burns. Salinger's daughter, Margaret, notes in her memoir that her father told her, "You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose entirely, no matter how long you live" (*Dream Catcher* 55). Witnessing horrific events as they happen and/or seeing the aftermath traumatized many veterans, as studies by Mulvey, Madigan, and Cuervo-Rubio demonstrate. Salinger's war fiction bears witness to the immediate and lingering effects of war on soldiers who had lived through battles like the ones in which he participated.

Shortly after the war ended, Salinger suffered from extreme combat-related psychological stress that, according to Alsen's research, was triggered by Salinger's liberation of the concentration camp; however, it is more likely the cause of his suffering resulted from the cumulative effects of all his war experiences: the invasion of Normandy, the battles of Hürtgen Forest and the Bulge, and witnessing the horrors at Kaufering IV. In July of 1945, Salinger

⁸ In "New Light on the Nervous Breakdowns of Salinger's Sergeant X and Seymour Glass" (2002), Alsen quotes veterans who discuss the horrors of witnessing concentration camps firsthand.

checked himself into a hospital in Nuremberg for “battle fatigue.”⁹ About a year before he was admitted, he wrote two letters: one dated August 20, 1944, shortly before the Hürtgen Forest battle, and another November 24, 1944 in the middle of that debacle.¹⁰ These two letters indicate Salinger’s complex mental state and his movement toward committing himself for psychological care in Nuremberg. They also suggest his direct insight into war-related trauma that ordinary soldiers endured, and the ripple effect of traumas endured by those who have lost someone in the war. From those two letters, certain excerpts stand out the most: “To tell you the truth, I can’t remember very [accurately] what happened in the early weeks... And that’s nice I feel as sane as ever, despite the time, place and weather. We’ve been issued galoshes, which I wear constantly, usually over my head” (Ian Hamilton Working Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University). The first part of this excerpt from August illustrates a man with memory loss, intentional or not, which can be attributed to the “numbing” effect that trauma has on its victims. Salinger cannot, or does not want to, remember those “early weeks.” The second part of this excerpt, which should be read as playfully sarcastic despite the underlying trauma, demonstrates Salinger’s effort to feel sane “despite the time, place and weather,” all of which create a sense of defenselessness in which galoshes are just as good as a helmet in defending against whatever artillery might rain down.

A letter written to Elizabeth Murray, May 13, 1945, is an instance that proves even more suggestive of Salinger’s gradual awareness that the trauma of war has affected him psychologically; Salinger tells Murray about how his “own little war” continues as WWII

⁹ Since 1980, we have exchanged “battle fatigue” for a clinical, diagnosable term: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). National Institutes of Health claims that “PTSD was recognized as a disorder with specific symptoms that could be reliably diagnosed” in 1980 and “was added to the *American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.”

¹⁰ These letters are available at the Firestone Library of Princeton University included in Ian Hamilton’s working papers for his biography of Salinger.

progresses. Like many soldiers during WWII, Salinger confesses his curiosity if he “fired a .45 slug neatly, but effectively, through the palm of [his] left hand” and if he would be able “to learn to type with what was left.” He includes the fact that he has three battle participation stars, though immediately tells Murray that the war is a “tricky, dreary farce” while lamenting the men who have died during battle (Ian Hamilton Working Papers).

These two letters, in addition to Salinger’s letter to Hemingway, show an important side of Salinger: a soldier who is witnessing horrific battles and deaths constantly; who feels threatened, vulnerable, and inadequately protected; who is trying his best to be resilient and remain sane; who feels himself moving toward desperate, self-damaging acts; who finds glorifying his war participation a “farce”; and who broods on how many of his “brothers-in-arms” are dead.

These brutal events during WWII demonstrate the various ways soldiers were, and still are, exposed to traumatic experiences. Witnessing the innumerable explosions, bloody dismemberments, and deaths, as well as participating directly in combat, traumatized many WWII soldiers, as studies and articles of aging veterans demonstrate.¹¹ When considering Salinger’s experiences in light of contemporary trauma theory, it becomes clear how these traumatic events have shaped his stories that primarily focus on WWII battles, soldiers, and veterans.

Starting in 1944, Salinger’s stories begin exploring the intense, personal experiences of despondency, death, loss, grief, and so on, that ordinary soldiers experience during war. The traumas Salinger explores in his fiction not only reflect what he observed or experienced in war,

¹¹ A few sources that illustrate the war trauma are “The Long Echo of WW2 Trauma” (2019) by Stephen Mulvey, “Their War Ended 70 Years Ago. Their Trauma Didn’t” (2015) by Tim Madigan, and “The Secret War” (1995) by Raul Cuervo-Rubio.

but mirror what many of his brothers-in-arms during WWII suffered, usually silently. Studying the silence of soldiers and veterans in light of their frequent diagnoses of “battle fatigue” demonstrates the negative influence of the diagnosis because of the stigmatizing language used to describe it.

Despite the end of WWII, the trauma that affected many veterans was minimized due to the claims that they simply needed to rest (i.e., battle *fatigue*). Wan Yahya and Ruzbeh Babae, in their article “Salinger’s Depiction of Trauma in *The Catcher in the Rye*” (2014), write that the 1950s was “an era of optimism, uniformity, and harmony” (1825). The assumption was made that the end of WWII was meant to bring happiness and comfort, but the truth hiding behind the façade tells a different story, a truth that Salinger reveals in his stories. Raul Cuervo-Rubio notes in “The Secret War” (1995) that veterans were silent, keeping their trauma to themselves due to the stigmas attached to the diagnosis of “shell shock” and “battle fatigue.” The words “shock” and “fatigue” imply that the individual is to blame, that the soldier was too weak to handle the horrors of war, and this stigmatization, in turn, encouraged soldiers’ silence and denial. Yahya and Babae note that some soldiers returned home happily, without difficulties, while others returned “suffering from psychic pain”; however, Cuervo-Rubio discusses that numerous veterans withheld discussing their trauma because of the stigma attached to diagnoses of “battle fatigue.” The soldiers who were assumed by Yahya and Babae to have returned home unscathed by the war were likely suffering in silence, according to Cuervo-Rubio. Veterans, specifically from WWII, were taught to keep their mouths shut. And, for many, they remained shut even after the war ended, despite their internal struggles coping with their traumas.

Salinger eventually explores trauma in a way that give voices to those who have remained silent about their suffering, but only after publication of his earlier war stories,

including his first two, “The Hang of It” and “Personal Notes on an Infantryman.” These two stories seem more interested in experimenting with genre and style—particularly the “trick ending”—as well as marketing stories rather than examining war trauma. Salinger’s story, “The Hang of It,” was originally published in July 1941 in *Collier’s*, and was also published in *The Kit Book for Soldiers, Sailors and Marines* (1942-1943), which was “intended to accompany servicemen into the field, ... and was carried into battle by countless soldiers” (Alsen 38).¹² Alsen claims that this story was used as “recruitment propaganda” because of its upbeat, patriotic tone (24). When this story was originally published in *Collier’s*, it provided Salinger with both profit and recognition; however, in a letter dated May 29, 1941, Salinger wrote, “Kindly refuse to read the *Collier’s* story” (Ian Hamilton Working Papers). He was not particularly proud of this work due to its “lack of serious content,” but acknowledged stories such as “Hang of It” were “easily sold to popular magazines” (Slawenski 38, 41).

“Hang of It” introduces the narrator as the father of Harry, who recently enlisted in the Army. The narrator says that Harry reminds him of “another Bobby Pettit” (*Collier’s* 22). Readers are then presented with the story of Bobby Pettit, a new soldier in 1917, who simply could not get “the hang it,” a phrase repeated throughout the story. Sergeant Grogan often says to Bobby, “*Wutsa matter with ya? Ain’tcha got no brains?* [sic]” (22). Bobby struggled with properly pitching a tent, hitting his target during practice, and more requirements for basic training. Each time Grogan would confront him, Bobby would say, “I’ll get the hang of it” (22). This story implies that being “another Bobby Pettit” is not ideal while in the Army, yet the trick ending discloses that Bobby did, in fact, get the hang of it: he became a colonel. Bobby’s

¹² *The Kit Book* is a collection of poems, stories, and cartoons that reflect the military culture. “The Hang of It” is the last story in the collection, followed by a short poem by Richard Armour: “Liking their looks / But not their notions, / I view the sex / With mixed emotions” (*Kit Book* 336).

persistence and eventual success are critical as current and future soldiers read his story. Salinger makes it clear that participating in the Army is difficult work, but with determination and persistence, any soldier can get the hang of it. The other trick ending is that Harry's father, the narrator, is Bobby Pettit. Salinger was clearly experimenting with the short-story form here, rather than attempting any deeper examination of a soldier's experiences. Slawenski refers to this trick ending trope when he mentions Salinger's dissatisfaction with the story's content. Compared to Salinger's later war fiction, written after he had witnessed war trauma, "Hang of It" does not yet begin to discuss the realities of war or the trauma that soldiers endured.

After Salinger was drafted, *Collier's* published a second story in December 1942: "Personal Notes on an Infantryman." The story follows the simple narrative formula of "Hang of It," complete with a trick ending and lack of "serious content." This story depicts an older man, Lawlor, who is trying to enlist in the Army. At the Induction Station, he reports to the narrator, who readers find out at the very end is actually Lawlor's son. The narrator continues to talk about what "a darned good soldier" Lawlor is becoming and mentions his desire to get shipped off to see "action" (*Collier's* 96). Lawlor's attempts to enlist and be shipped over to war emphasize what Slawenski describes as "patriotism and a warmth toward the military" in Salinger's two early war-related stories (55). The fact that Pete, the second son of Lawlor, "lost an arm at Pearl Harbor," encourages Lawlor's decision rather than forms any distaste for the military or war. Salinger did not highly regard nor praise "Personal Notes" and "Hang of It"; however, they form a bridge between the time when he was not successfully publishing at all and his "more discerning works" (Slawenski 56). They mark his first attempt to write about war, and they do so with none of the insight into the suffering that war inflicts, which his later stories demonstrate.

From 1944 on, his war-related stories became focused on the trauma surrounding different experiences and perceptions of the war and the loss of brothers-in-arms while giving voice to the traumas that many WWII soldiers were enduring in silence.¹³ The evident shift from easily published propaganda stories, like “Hang of It” and “Personal Notes,” to Salinger’s post-1944 stories suggests his deepening fictional engagement with questions of war and the emotional or psychological wounds ordinary soldiers sustain—from the moment they have to “ship out,” through their experiences on the battlefield, to their alienated existence when they return to a society that does not, and cannot, understand what they have been through.

One story that illuminates the isolation soldiers may experience in civilian society before shipping out is “Last Day of the Last Furlough” (*The Saturday Evening Post*, July 15, 1944). In this narrative, Salinger fashions characters who begin to contemplate the severity of engaging in war, the ways in which society glorifies war from a distance, and the cost of war that ordinary soldiers pay. The story opens on Babe Gladwaller, a character who appears in several of Salinger’s uncollected war stories, reading in his room. He thinks to himself, “*Maybe I can take them with me. Sir, I’ve brought my books. I won’t shoot anybody just yet*” (*The Saturday Evening Post* 26). Soon after his mother enters with milk and cake, he leaves with a sled to pick up his little sister, Mattie, from school. While the two of them begin walking, Babe thinks, “*I’m happier than I’ve ever been in my life: ... this is better and bigger than myself. All right. Shoot me, all you sneaking Jap snipers that I’ve seen in the newsreel. Who cares?*” (27). Babe is ambivalent about the killing required in war and would rather be killed than kill, although the thought of fighting to defend his beloved sister makes him feel part of a necessary cause. Throughout the

¹³ The only exception to this claim is “Soft-Boiled Sergeant” (1943) published in *Saturday Evening Post*. This story is the earliest published, though officially uncollected, narrative involving trauma related to war experiences.

story, it becomes even clearer that Mattie is the most important person in the world to Babe. Later that evening, Babe has the urge to tell Mattie something, but he is unaware of what that is exactly. He goes through a long monologue at the edge of his bed before going to Mattie's bedroom; all he ends up actually telling her is "to be a good girl" (64). Babe wants to hide the fact that he will be going overseas, but Mattie is aware and confronts him in their final scene together. She wants him to be safe and he wants to protect her:

This is my home, Babe thought, This is where I was a boy, ... But this is where Mattie is sleeping. No enemy is banging on our door, waking her up, frightening her. But it could happen if I don't go out and meet him with my gun. And I will, and I'll kill him. I'd like to come back too. (64)

Babe's protective thoughts over his sister are a way to justify his active participation in the war—the "killing Nazis and Fascists and Japs" (62). He justifies the killing despite his ambivalent feelings expressed earlier in the story during dinner, and here also as he states his desire to survive.

Vincent Caulfield, Babe's brother-in-arms and friend, is shown silently suffering in the background of the main plot. Vincent's biological brother, Holden, is missing from his Army unit.¹⁴ Vincent and Babe briefly discuss Holden's disappearance, though they do not dwell on it. Vincent tells Babe, "He wasn't even twenty, Babe. Not till next month. I want to kill so badly I can't sit still" (61). It is not explicitly noted that Vincent's desire to kill is because his brother is missing, but the sequence of statements strongly implies this motive. It is not even specified who Vincent wants to kill, only that he wants to kill. Vincent's struggle with his brother missing in

¹⁴ Although Holden Caulfield is the name of the main character in *The Catcher in the Rye*, it is important to see these characters separately. The short stories including any Caulfield name are not connected to *Catcher*. Some may argue that they are; however, this study will not.

action and his friendship with Babe are developed in other stories, which are analyzed further in Chapter Two. In “Furlough,” though, Salinger is only beginning to explore the trauma brothers-in-arms experience.

When Vincent and Babe are called down to dinner, Babe’s father talks glowingly of war and Babe cannot restrain his disgust with those who praise war as a test of one’s heroic manhood. Babe feels that the way his father talks about World War I is “as though it had been some kind of rugged, sordid game by which society of [his] day weeded out the men from the boys” (*Collier’s* 62). Babe continues to say that they all can agree “war is hell,” but that the veterans from WWI act “a little superior for having been participants in it” (62). Babe’s monologue confronts the danger of juxtaposing war and masculinity, as well as the danger of romanticizing war, both of which prolong and encourage war. He argues that men in Germany likely spoke like his father, glorifying WWI, which led “the younger generation in Germany [to be] ready to prove themselves as good or better than their fathers” who fought in WWI (62). Babe goes on to say that he believes in WWII, but he also believes “that it’s the moral duty of all men who have fought and will fight in this war to keep our mouths shut, once it’s over, never again to mention it in any way. It’s time we let the dead die in vain. It’s never worked the other way, God knows” (62). He expresses the morality of himself, and other soldiers, “to keep [their] mouths shut” when they return, and never to speak of war as a grand, heroic opportunity to solidify one’s masculinity. There have been too many instances where people have refused to let soldiers die in vain by their praising of the “heroic sacrifices.” Babe argues that this acclaim over the killed soldiers has not ended war, rather it has exacerbated war. Instead, Babe suggests that silence is necessary in order to prevent future generations from receiving unnecessary praise and wanting to “prove themselves as good or better than their fathers”; he urges that society should

let the soldiers die in vain—that is without any recognition or glory—in order to prevent future wars.

Critics Julie Ooms and Slawenski argue that some of Salinger's characters took a vow of silence, especially Babe, who refuses to become a hero or encourage stories of war heroes. Salinger's fiction shows that soldiers die by absurd deaths or witness senseless deaths, rather than die as heroes. After solidifying Babe's oath to silence, Ooms suggests that "Salinger holds true to his 'oath' that it is the 'moral duty' of veterans to keep their mouths shut, and to protest senseless deaths honestly" (8). The senseless deaths, in this particular claim, are the characters dying during WWII. Salinger's later war stories explicitly attempt to reduce the attraction of war by protesting and refusing to capitulate to society's demand for stories about war that mythologize and glorify it, while simultaneously calling attention to its irrationality. Salinger's writing suggests what Babe mentions: let the soldiers die in vain, without praising the dead for being heroes.

Thus, one must consider a trope, which I choose to call "hero-refused," defined as a form of protesting "heroes" by consciously and actively refusing to become or create a war hero. This concept combines the ideas of Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" with Charles D'Ambrosio's concept of "suicide/silence refused." Considering Campbell's monomyth, hero-refused characters may decline the call to adventure or depart for the adventure without ever completing it. Often times, the hero-refused will begin the adventure, but will stop just before they are transformed; thus, the hero-refused fails the heroic duties as Campbell explains them and remains in a state of separation while attempting to build new meaning apart from the hero myth. The hero-refused will often change their perspective without being reborn or returning to the "real world."

D'Ambrosio claims that death by suicide is joined by a shift away from the "real world" where the individuals feel the need to defend themselves from danger so much so that they give up and become defenseless. Parallel to the monomyth, the hero would accept the call to adventure, begin their journey, but sense too much danger to proceed, leaving them in a dangerous, unreal world. However, as long as the individuals are actively defending and protecting those they love in this unreal world, they remain alive: they refuse suicide. Silence accompanies death by suicide, though. D'Ambrosio argues that when a person dies by suicide, they take secrets with them and these secrets are equivalent to silence among the living. Even if the person claims no secrecy at the time of their death, their silence remains permanent by their physical absence. If a person refuses suicide—if they defend and protect—they are also given the opportunity to refuse their own silence.

These two concepts by Campbell and D'Ambrosio, though I am combining their complex theories for my own purpose here, are crucial to understanding the trope I call hero-refused. Salinger's fiction demonstrates a desire to change the way war is perceived by society, to make known the harm of stigmas surrounding the mental health or psychological distress of combat veterans, and to protect the veterans, as well as to protect the characters he has created; Salinger's work is a loud, artistic protest of the social injustices and stigmas surrounding war and trauma, giving a voice to those who remained silent for so many years. Salinger, while protecting and defending his characters, is also an example of the hero-refused since he often teases his readers with the possibility of a war hero-narrative, but never follows through to satisfy the readers with the soldier's return to the "real world," that is, a return to an unalienated reintegration into civilian society after the war. By doing so, Salinger's fiction is actively refusing to create characters who complete Campbell's monomyth, resulting in a lack of a hero

narrative society so desperately desires. Salinger's stories create ordinary characters, avoiding any hero narrative that would have them die valiantly in order to honor a war, or even boast about receiving battle participation stars.¹⁵ Salinger's characters, mostly, suffer or die in silence and in vain. No one dies a hero as depicted in the stereotypical tropes that glorify and mythologize war. Salinger's work refuses the hero narrative in order to accurately explore the trauma soldiers experience rather than to aggrandize war.

Set as it is on two soldiers' last night home, "Furlough" does not yet examine the trauma soldiers experience in war, but it certainly questions the notion of war as a way to toughen up one's masculinity through heroic deeds. Likewise, it demonstrates the complexity of going off to war and the internal psychological conflict that inductees must process. It also reveals Salinger's experimentation with stories that have substantial, important topics going far beyond the cliché "war is hell," to begin examining the many hidden wounds that soldiers endure even before they see action (62). While "Hang of It" and "Personal Notes" clearly idealize war, "Furlough" begins to break down the illusion and grandeur associated with war to shed light on the truth about the cost that soldiers sustain as their brothers-in-arms are killed. "Furlough" also acknowledges the difference between civilians and soldiers and the alienation that soldiers feel in a society steeped in myths about war. As Babe's fellow inductee, Vincent, says, "It's no good being with civilians any more [sic]. They don't know what we know and we're no longer used to what they know" (62). Importance is then placed upon brothers-in-arms; the hardships and traumas experienced can be understood only by those who have experienced the same hell. "Hell" is an inaccurate word to use, though, considering Salinger's personal experiences and his fictional characters'

¹⁵ In some stories, Salinger indicates that when soldiers receive five battle participation stars, they then are awarded a single silver star that represents the collective five bronze. Some characters disregard their stars completely, while others choose to wear all five bronze instead of one silver.

experiences. What Salinger and many WWII veterans experienced cannot simply be summed up with the convenient cliché “Hell.”

Specific works of contemporary trauma theory by Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*), Cathy Caruth (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory*), and Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*) provide a lens that pulls into focus how Salinger’s nuanced examinations of the various kinds of traumas or lesser psychological shocks that soldiers experience during war go far beyond the cliché about the hellishness of war. These theorists’ works provide different perspectives used in Chapter Two, depending on three main factors: the type of trauma a particular Salinger story illuminates, the cause of the trauma, and/or the major societal events surrounding it. Judith Herman in her groundbreaking work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) delves into the various causes of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, whether it be war, domestic violence, sexual captivity, or child abuse. She discusses a three-stage process of recovery, which includes the establishment of safety and a trusting relationship, remembering the trauma through narrative storytelling and mourning, and reconnecting with society or reclaiming the world after personal beliefs and values have been challenged due to the traumatic event. Salinger was aware (as seen in his letters) that if he survived and returned to civilian life, after being an active participant in WWII, his perspective on the world would be challenged and thus changed. The majority of Salinger’s traumatized characters are notably disconnected from general society and even close relationships are affected because of the traumatic event they have experienced, as we shall see in Chapter Two. Herman writes, “The study of war trauma becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men in war” (*Trauma and Recovery* 9). This act of sacrificing young men’s lives during war is something that Salinger’s later fictional works address and challenge, as the next chapter demonstrates.

Cathy Caruth's ideas in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) also provide some clarifying concepts that are useful in analyzing Salinger's stories in the following chapter. Caruth argues that the traumatized person needs to speak aloud, or narrate the event that has caused the trauma, to a listener who can empathize with, and in some instances for, the traumatized; the reader or listener is a critical element in the process of trauma recovery, proving that recovery is difficult to attempt alone. The speaker is faced with a paradox, though: they must be able to recover the past, as well as accept their "inability to have access to it," such as not being able to remember "what happened in the early weeks" as Salinger mentioned in a letter (Caruth 152). Caruth discusses PTSD as a type of continuation of the response from the traumatized individual after the event becomes a historical event of the past. The continuation of response is what then creates the symptoms of PTSD, in the form of various "intrusive phenomena." Salinger's characters often relive past events, sometimes to the extent where they become obsessed with their past. Many of the characters act as the narrator of their own traumatic past, just as Caruth and Herman claim that the victim must come to terms with their trauma by putting the event into narrative form, hoping to control or end the intrusive eruptions into the present of their past trauma.

The work of Dominick LaCapra also informs the analysis in Chapter Two of some of Salinger's fiction about war and its lasting psychological effects. LaCapra's concepts of "acting out" and "working through" as a dialectical process of coming to terms with trauma are important, as he notes that coping and recovery are not synonymous. "Acting out" of trauma occurs when the victim repeatedly "relives the past" in the form of disruptions of one's conscious life caused by things like flashbacks, sudden startle responses, compulsive or repetitive actions that relive the trauma, as well as other disturbances that are not consciously

willed, but that erupt into the present. “Working through” constitutes the ability to come “to terms with the trauma, including its details” in a consciously willed way (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 144). He asserts that the traumatic event being relived in the present “may ... be (or not be) an accurate enactment, reconstruction, or representation of what actually occurred in the past. It may involve distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to processes of imaginative transformation and narrative shaping...” (88-9). LaCapra takes into consideration the way in which a historical traumatic narrative is told and/or written from the perspective of the victim, while noting how society perceives the truth/accuracy of the traumatic history. He stresses that “acting out” and “working through” are not linear and are not two separate processes, rather they both are part of a recursive process in which “acting out” may be a necessary part of “working through.” He questions whether there can ever be a final or ultimate “working through” of such devastating traumas as genocide and speculates that “working through” such traumas may always retain some degree of “acting out.”

Although Salinger was not aware of the ideas of Herman, Caruth, or LaCapra while actively publishing, his fiction suggests the usefulness of trauma theory in literature across multiple generations. The soldiers who returned after WWII ended were faced with a society of civilians, many of whom did not, and could not, comprehend the horrors and traumas they endured; however, using the previous theorists’ concepts to examine Salinger’s work allows for the recognition of the depth of suffering that war inflicts upon soldiers who often cannot articulate their loss and grief until much later, if at all. Hence, viewing his war fiction through this lens encourages compassion for this often-understated suffering.

After Salinger published “Hang of It,” “Personal Notes on an Infantryman,” and “Last Day of the Last Furlough,” his writing shifted to include narratives of the losses, grief, horrors,

and traumas many soldiers endured during WWII to possibly attempt to reach out and reconnect with the oblivious civilians. One story that displays a character reconnecting with a civilian through narration of a traumatic loss is “Soft-Boiled Sergeant” (*Saturday Evening Post*). The story begins: “Juanita, she’s always dragging me to a million movies, and we see these here shows all about war and stuff” (18). The narrator, Juanita’s husband Philly, proceeds to tell the unnamed listener, and also the readers, that war movies are nothing like actual war—handsome men can get shot in the face, soldiers do not always get to say last words, there are no speeches by the President at every fallen soldier’s funeral, and they are not all heroes. The specific listener to whom Philly speaks within the story is never mentioned by name. The lack of a specific listener, though, compels the reader to feel more immediately addressed by Philly.

Within the first page of the story readers can see the difference between Philly and Juanita; Philly is a veteran who is aware of the reality of war, who seems to be preoccupied by his losses in the war, while Juanita is a civilian who believes war is accurately depicted in movies as something grand and heroic. Philly says that he had told Juanita about Burke, one of his older brothers-in-arms who was killed during the war and who had served in WWI as a teenager. He says, “So I’m sorry I told her about Burke, sort of. I just figured it’d stop her from making me go to all them war movies all the time” (18). Philly is only “sort of” sorry because telling the story of Burke provided him with a reason to stop going to see the war movies, but more significantly it provided him an empathic listener with whom he could share his traumatic narrative, including Burke’s death. Clearly Philly deems it necessary to revisit his and Burke’s traumas at least twice since he verbally narrated the death of his brother-in-arms to his wife first.

He then narrates the trauma a second time to the person, or people, to whom he speaks at the beginning. It seems as though Philly needs to narrate the story of his loss to anyone who is

nearby and who will listen, and that includes the reader. His two forms of narration illustrate his attempt at traumatic recovery rather than becoming obsessed by the trauma of Burke's death, but the seeming suddenness of his narration to an unnamed listener also suggests that the loss of his fellow soldier will continue to haunt him, even as he "works through" his trauma. The "acting out" of his trauma—that is, his need to revisit the loss in what could be a compulsive way—appears to be a way of "working through," and the suddenness of the opening address to the unnamed listener suggests that this revisiting of his loss of Burke is a repetitive, ongoing, narration. As LaCapra suggests, one may never entirely "work through" a trauma, but "acting out" or repetitive encounters with it does not mean that the trauma will dominate or destroy one's life. The address to an unnamed listener, in addition, invites the reader to be the only listener *with* a name; hence, the story reaches out to the reader, inviting connection with a veteran and empathy for Philly's quiet grief.

The way in which Philly narrates the death of Burke also illustrates the concept of the hero-refused. Philly rejects, and is even disturbed by, the way war is depicted in movies because he knows the truth of dying in war. Burke is described by Philly as "a real ugly guy, with a two-toned voice, with a head that's too big for their shoulders, with them goo-goo-googly eyes" (82). Already, there is discrepancy between the men in the movies and actual soldiers—Burke is not handsome, and that did not matter. Burke was able to make the young, sixteen-year-old Philly feel calm all those years ago. He writes that he was "scared of all the big guys that walked up the barracks floor on their way to shave, looking like they was [sic] tough, without trying" (82). Burke saw that the young Philly was frightened and crying, so to make him feel better, he gave Philly his medals. Burke tossed them onto the bed next to Philly and told him to put them on his underwear. This is interesting for two reasons: 1) Burke had them wrapped in a handkerchief

instead of wearing them on his uniform and 2) Philly's enthusiasm about the medals was met with Burke's contempt about receiving them. Burke told Philly that he could keep the medals if he wanted to. Burke's disdain for the medals was so great that he was willing to give them to a man he had just met. This scene demonstrates the hero-refused by Burke's willingness to lend Philly his medals, symbols of bravery and honor, and significantly in his instructing the young man to pin them where no one can see them.

The details of Burke's death also suggest the trope of the "hero-refused." Although Burke endangers and ultimately loses his own life saving others, he is not directly involved in combat, nor are the men he saves who have blundered into danger. The only reason Philly knew about Burke was from another brother-in-arms, Frankie Miklos, who sent him a letter. Frankie explains that he was with Burke and a few other men in the shelter away from the bombings; however, Burke heard that there were men who locked themselves in a refrigerator to keep safe and he ran after them, knowing "that was no safe place at all" (85). Burke was able to get the men out safely, but he "got gunned by a Zero on the way" (85). He continues to run:

... and when he finally got them refrigerator doors open and told them kids to get the hell out of there, he give [sic] up for good. Frankie said Burke had four holes between his shoulders, close together, like group shots, and Frankie said half of Burke's jaw was shot off.

He died all by himself, and he didn't have no messages to give to no girl or nobody, and there wasn't nobody throwing a big classy funeral for him here in the States, and no hot-shot bugler blowed [sic] taps for him.

The only funeral Burke got was when Juanita cried for him when I read her Frankie's letter... (85).

This excerpt is critical to the narrative as it is important to acknowledge that Burke saved the soldiers—a heroic act—but ultimately the manner of his death highlights the absurdity of war.¹⁶ Burke did not die valiantly while killing enemy soldiers; he dies in a senseless way, attempting to open a freezer door to let out soldiers who thought they were safe. There was no extravagant funeral; no burial with full military honors; he died alone, not in some fellow soldier's arms; no lover or family member mourned his death; no one shed tears for him—until Philly told his story and Juanita wept for Burke and for the grief that Philly has endured silently.

While this story still contains remnants of a trick-ending seen in Salinger's other previously published short stories related to the war, the subject of death in war and the unremitting grief it causes are an important addition due to its traumatic plot. Although Philly does not discuss his own specific war experiences in "Soft-Boiled Sergeant," the trauma of losing a brother-in-arms during Pearl Harbor is clear. The short time the two men spent together had obviously had an impact on Philly's life, as he tells the story to his wife, and seemingly to anyone who will listen when the need to revisit the loss of Burke overtakes him. Philly, however, was not aware of Burke's death until he received the letter before the narration begins. Philly clearly desires, even requires, an empathic listener to help him cope with and heal from the death of his old friend. Philly's trauma of losing a brother-in-arms requires an empathic listener, as Herman argues is necessary in one stage of the recovery process, and Caruth suggests is important as one puts past traumatic experience into narrative form.

¹⁶ The editors of *Saturday Evening Post* severely undercut the seriousness of Burke's absurd death by placing an ad for Calox tooth powder, starring Rita Hayworth, next to the description of Burke's death. They demonstrate their priority of promoting tooth powder over encouraging human compassion by using the ad's images to diminish the readers' experience upon reading this tragic story of trauma and death.

According to Herman, the traumatized individual must share with a trusted listener their experience of having been harmed (i.e., by narrating the traumatic event) and then the person who listens to the individual's narration of the event—the empathic listener—must take action in order to help “rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice,” as well as the individual's sense of safety in the world, by acknowledging that event (70). The feeling of safety within society is essentially destroyed after a traumatic event, causing the traumatized individual to either feel defenseless or become extremely defensive in the “real world.” Philly seems to be defensive when discussing the war movies his wife takes him to see. Rightfully so, he displays anger toward the inaccurate depictions of war. Juanita initially can understand only so much from her husband's trauma, though, since she is a civilian. And the story suggests that Philly does not share with her the story of Burke's death in the war until sometime after he received the letter telling of it, although throughout their 12-year marriage he has told her the “beginning” of Burke's story—the part that is less painful to remember and share with her.

The distinction between the movies/civilians and reality/soldiers is a constant theme played throughout the story to illustrate the rift between the two realities: “I met more good guys in the Army than I ever knowed [sic] when I was a civilian” (82). Herman writes, “A supportive response from other people may mitigate the impact of the event...” (Herman 61). Fortunately, when Philly finally shares with Juanita the story about Burke not only “from the beginning,” but also up until the end when he is killed, he receives a supportive response from his wife, whose tears express her compassion for Burke and empathy for Philly. As we will see in Chapter Two, however, many of Salinger's characters are not granted the same compassion and empathy. In his later short fiction related to war, Salinger illustrates the persistent hauntings and intrusive phenomena that attend trauma, but “Soft-Boiled Sergeant” should be seen as the inception of

Salinger's exploring of the various ways trauma may manifest itself in the lives of those who have endured war and in the lives of their loved ones.

Chapter Two takes a close look at Salinger's war stories or war-related fiction that extend and deepen the insights that he reaches in "Soft-Boiled Sergeant" about the many ways in which trauma affects the lives of soldiers and its ripple effect throughout society as it touches the lives of their loved ones.

CHAPTER 2. WAR TRAUMA AND RECOVERY: DISCONNECTION, RECONNECTION, AND HEALING

Chapter Two examines stories speculated to be published between 1944-50, such as “The Magic Foxhole,” “The Last and Best of the Peter Pans,” “This Sandwich Has no Mayonnaise,” “A Boy in France,” “The Stranger,” and “For Esme—With Love and Squalor.” The analysis of these stories in light of contemporary trauma theory will examine the disconnection of characters from civilian life, the possibility of reconnecting, the way in which some characters demonstrate Dominick LaCapra’s ideas of “acting out” and “working through” their individual and/or shared traumas, and determine who is able to succeed in recovering from their traumas regarding Judith Herman’s process of recovery.

Two of these stories—“The Magic Foxhole” and “The Stranger”—primarily display the ripple effect of trauma through the main character’s telling of the traumatic story of a brother-in-arms; however, the main character’s responses to trauma and post-trauma demonstrate his underestimation of his experiences, perhaps deliberately avoiding his own traumatic experiences, responses, and symptoms. The characters mentally and physically struggle while coping with their traumatic experiences and are not yet able to reach recovery—that is, until Salinger writes about Sergeant X in “For Esme—With Love and Squalor.” Salinger explores the horrific, traumatic experiences soldiers endured during WWII with the specificity and intricacy of a man who has witnessed and experienced similar stories during his own time in the war. He presents the points of view from psychologically and physically traumatized soldiers and veterans who refuse to succumb to, and participate in, society’s demand for heroic war stories that ultimately idealize the deaths of millions. Through his later stories, Salinger explores and suggests the traumatic and post-traumatic stress symptoms of many veterans, illustrating the severe and

debilitating effects of their war experiences, such as their disconnection from civilian society, psychosomatic responses, and dissociation during instances of trauma.

“The Magic Foxhole” (1944) discusses the horror and reality of the D-Day landings in Normandy and the psychological effects they had upon participating soldiers.¹⁷ Although Salinger wrote this story in 1944, it remained unpublished after *The New Yorker* rejected it. One may easily speculate as to why the 21-page story, available only in its unpublished manuscript form, was rejected due to its graphic representations of combat and its traumatic effects during a time when the country preferred to ignore the devastations of war. Slawenski describes the story as “angry”: “It is a story that could have been written only by a soldier” (104). “The Magic Foxhole” represents two types of trauma: one obvious, where Gardner’s trauma is exposed through the narrator, who bears witness to the trauma of a fellow soldier, and the second, more concealed trauma that becomes apparent when the story is analyzed using contemporary trauma theories.

As in “Soft-Boiled Sergeant,” the narrator, in this case Garrity, begins telling a story about his comrade, Gardner, as he drives back and forth between his camp and the beach following the Allied landing. Garrity speaks not only to the soldiers he drives with, but to the reader as well. As in “Soft-Boiled Sergeant,” the narrator speaks so abruptly and with such immediacy that he seems to be addressing the reader directly. D-Day has ended and Garrity’s job is to fill up gas cans and transport them. While at the beach, Garrity notes the bodies of slain soldiers in companies A and B, as well as a priest crawling through the sand searching for his glasses until he ultimately perishes. All of this information acts as the introduction on just the

¹⁷ The story is available as read-only at Firestone Library, Princeton, New Jersey; thus, I will only be summarizing the story in lieu of textual evidence as I have read over the story multiple times, and direct citation from this story and the other unpublished works I examine is forbidden.

first page, setting the scene as Garrity tells the story of Gardner's psychological breakdown to his fellow soldier(s) as they ride between the beach and camp, and to the readers as well, who are "buttonholed" by the abrupt address in the opening.

Readers are introduced to both the Widow Maker's Swamp and the magic foxhole on the ninth page as the beginning of Gardner's breakdown. The Widow Maker's Swamp is the location of the battle in which Gardner and Garrity fought together. Gardner—because he was the "point man" in a deadly position—often had a foxhole to himself, despite most soldiers' having to share one to escape shrapnel. Gardner's being isolated is what made the foxhole magic for him. Garrity narrates that Gardner would hallucinate his future son in a high-tech combat outfit claiming to be fighting in a world war of the future. Aside from the shock of hallucinating his future son, Gardner is overwhelmed by the idea that there could be more wars. He mentions at one point that he thought they were fighting now to end all wars. Gardner is even aware of specific details of his future life: he marries Sylvia Bernstein, a woman he met at a party three years earlier; his son, Earl, is named after Earl Hommel, a man who gave Gardner his first job; and, he is a lawyer, a career he had before entering WWII. When Gardner confesses his magic foxhole to Garrity, he tells Garrity that the next time he sees his son, he is going to kill him. It is never explicitly said why he wants to kill his future son; however, Gardner may be trying to save his future son from war trauma. Through this perspective, Gardner would rather his son die in war than live with trauma or, perhaps, than perpetuate war. The next time Gardner hallucinates seeing his son, he ultimately decides not to kill him after his son confesses his desire to be there. As this hallucination is occurring, Garrity attempts to stop Gardner from getting "trigger-happy" in a foxhole. As Garrity runs towards his friend's foxhole, he gets hit in the back with shrapnel and wakes up in the hospital where he finds Gardner clinging to a pole, refusing to return to America

because of his “battle fatigue”—what we would today call PTSD. His refusal to return to America could be related to his desire to stop his future son from participating in another war. If Gardner stays and dies during battle, he will not have a son who goes through the same trauma and who perpetuates war.

Garrity describes Gardner as a man who was already afflicted with post-traumatic behaviors, without including the exact event that led to his breakdown. Gardner, after all, has just participated in the landing on Normandy, which has left the beaches littered with the dead and dying. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth focuses more on the disruptive and intrusive phenomena that affect an individual after a traumatic event, rather than discovering the actual cause of these effects. She briefly notes that PTSD is a reaction to “an overwhelming event or events” and “cannot be defined ... by the event itself,” while further defining the specific effects this reaction may cause, such as “intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event” (Caruth 4). The application of Caruth’s definitions demonstrate that Gardner must have been acting in response to a traumatic event through hallucinating his future son who does not yet exist. Additionally, Gardner’s behavior regarding the foxhole creates an even more dangerous situation for himself, as well as his brothers-in arms, whom he is obligated to protect. His actions are so extreme that Garrity risks his life to stop Gardner from endangering their own comrades during combat. Because readers are unaware of the actual event that causes this response, Gardner’s hallucinations and behaviors may or may not “[stem] from the event”; however, the narration focuses almost entirely on the war (with the exception of Gardner’s recalling his past via hallucinations), implying that war combat is what ultimately causes Gardner’s breakdown.

In view of Caruth's ideas, Gardner's post-traumatic responses to the events of war are clearly represented in this story and do not rely on much analysis to uncover his breakdown; however, Garrity's trauma is hidden within the narration of his brother-in-arms' breakdown, which requires a more thorough reading and discussion. This is because, as Caruth claims about the experience of trauma, "the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it" (6). While we witness Garrity's experience of traumatic events, as he drives along the beaches of Normandy surrounded by dead or dying soldiers, unlike Gardner, readers are only provided with Garrity's uninterested attitude. Garrity seems indifferent upon witnessing the tragedy and death that surround him: the priest dying on the beach, brothers-in-arms losing limbs, bodies of slain soldiers everywhere, and even his own injury that left him in the hospital. When mentioning these sights, Garrity says it so casually, as if it happens all the time—which, unfortunately, it does. This numbing and indifference act as a sort of coping mechanism to avoid comprehending the full devastation and trauma of the incidents. The denial during or after a traumatic event is not entirely deliberate, though, as Caruth argues, the individual may not be able to "fully witness the event as it occurs" due to the inability to essentially confront the true horror of the event as it unfolds (7). Despite these horrors he witnesses and his numbing in response to them, Garrity risks his life to save Gardner from firing at a hallucination in his private foxhole. Garrity knows the danger of leaving his semi-safe position to run across the swamp, dodging bullets and shrapnel; he goes anyway.

Garrity's traumatic responses, furthermore, can be elucidated in view of trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra's concepts of "acting out" and "working through" trauma; while Garrity focuses almost obsessively on Gardner's breakdown, he is simultaneously acting out and working through his own trauma from the same event. LaCapra defines "acting out" as the

tendency “to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if one were still fully in the past,” while “working through” simply means “coming to terms with the trauma”; thus, LaCapra regards the latter process as “desirable,” while “acting out” is repetitive and intrusive (142-144).

Similar to Philly in “Soft-Boiled Sergeant,” Garrity tells the story of his brother-in-arms to the readers and to any unknown company riding in the jeep—the lack of a specific listener, again, compels the reader to feel more immediately connected with the narrator. Gardner’s breakdown is implied to have been in the recent past and not occurring as the narration progresses. Considering this vague timeline, Garrity still feels the need to repeat the narrative and relive the past. LaCapra claims that “acting out is related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion,” while also noting that the compulsive repetition may be “destructive and self-destructive” (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 142-43). Although Garrity’s only physical traumatic effect is his back injury, his seemingly obsessive revisiting of the past situation where he not only witnessed his comrade’s breakdown, but also was injured, reveals hints of psychological distress and disturbance originating from that event.

At one point, when an unknown, silent passenger seems to ask Garrity what Gardner was “like” in combat, the conversation represents a simultaneous “acting out” and “working through,” as previously mentioned. LaCapra argues that “acting out” and “working through” are not considered “a dichotomy or a separation into different kinds or totally different categories, but a *distinction between interacting processes*” (144, my italics). That is, they are not dichotomously opposed binary terms, or two distinct stages of a linear process, but rather recursive and intersecting processes. When Garrity responds dismissively to the question about Gardner, claiming that he only worries about himself during battle, he is “acting out” by immersing himself in the past but avoiding his emotional reactions and specific details, such as

what Gardner was “like” during combat. At the same time, he is “working through” because he at least begins to put past traumatic experiences into narrative form in order to assimilate it into his conscious life’s story. In an interview with Yad Vashem, LaCapra poses another distinction of “trying to work out some very delicate, at times tense, relationship between empathy and critical distance” (147). Garrity is narrating the story of Gardner’s post-traumatic stress, though he often vacillates between empathizing with Gardner and maintaining distance from the events. He has not yet been able to do what LaCapra says is essential to “working through” trauma, which is to exert an “effort to articulate or rearticulate affect,” acknowledging the difference “between past, present, and future” (42, 143). Instead, Garrity repeats the event “as if it were fully enacted, fully literalized” (148). Garrity avoids speaking of his own affective response to the past, yet he garrulously buttonholes potential riders in his jeep and relives the past as though it were alive in the present.

Not only does Garrity seem to think this question from his companion is irrelevant, but he also blatantly lies. In addition to “acting out,” Garrity’s lie may indicate a feeling of survivor’s guilt because he was ultimately unable to protect and save his comrade. Garrity’s attempt to save Gardner from danger, referred to previously in synopsis, reveals the fact that Garrity did not worry about only his own safety, consistently keeping emotional distance from Gardner’s trauma.

The desire to protect loved ones and the guilt felt for failing to do so is common in traumatic events, as well as in Salinger’s stories, as they often depict families and close friends. In “The Last and Best of the Peter Pans” (1942), available only in unpublished manuscript form,

readers are introduced to mother and son, Mary (referred to as “Red”) and Vincent Caulfield.¹⁸ Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, writes, “Guilt may be understood as an attempt to . . . regain some sense of power and control. To imagine that one could have done better may be more tolerable than to face the reality of utter helplessness” (53-4). Although this particular story featuring Vincent is not entirely rich with traumatic events, it serves as an introduction to the trauma Vincent endures in later stories. The traumatic plot begins in this narrative, as Vincent finds an army questionnaire in a drawer, hidden by his mother. She explains that the army is no place for her son and that he wouldn’t be happy in the army; Vincent responds by telling her that *no one* is very happy in the army.

Vincent’s desire to fight in the war is presumably a way for him to protect his family as he has not been able to do in the past, but it may also be a way to deal with the guilt he feels because he feels responsible for the death of his younger brother. Vincent mentions that if he had been able to get the “best” doctor for his little brother, Kenneth, then he could have saved him from the heart attack he apparently had while swimming—the implication being that Kenneth’s weakened heart caused him to almost drown—an experience narrated in another story, “Ocean Full of Bowling Balls.”¹⁹ Vincent’s witnessing of the death of his little brother can be seen as what Judith Herman defines as a “long-lasting traumatic syndrome” (54). The trauma and guilt from the incident in which Vincent could not save his brother has followed him and has now led him to desire to protect his family the only way he knows how—to fight in the war—leading

¹⁸ As with “The Magic Foxhole,” this story is available as read-only at Firestone Library, Princeton, New Jersey. The story was accepted for publication in 1942, though Salinger decided to withdraw it and keep it unpublished, according to Ian Hamilton and Slawenski.

¹⁹ “Ocean Full of Bowling Balls” is another unpublished story available as read-only at Firestone Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

only to his witnessing and experiencing more trauma and guilt, as Salinger envisions Vincent's in further stories.

Published in the October 1, 1945 issue of *Esquire*, Vincent's narration in "This Sandwich Has no Mayonnaise" depicts his compulsive anxiety regarding his brother, Holden, who is missing-in-action, as well as his reflecting on memories of Holden and Phoebe. Vincent demonstrates dissociated behaviors during conversations with his brothers-in-arms while they are waiting to attend a dance. Some of the men begin discussing where they are from and where they have visited, then move on to the weather, specifically the rain. Throughout the conversations, Vincent actively participates, but in a mechanical way; however, his thoughts are constantly consumed by his concern for Holden. He thinks, "Where's my brother? Where's my brother Holden? What is this missing-in-action stuff? I don't believe it, I don't understand it, I don't believe it" (*Esquire* 55). As noted in analysis of "The Magic Foxhole," LaCapra argues that "acting out is related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion," while also noting that the compulsive repetition may be "destructive and self-destructive" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 142-43). Although Vincent's "acting out" does not seem to be physically destructive in any way, his compulsion to repeat words and phrases, such as "missing," "lies," "where's my brother," and "four must go" are demonstrations of his constant process of "acting out," while never quite reaching the process of "working through" either the "long lasting traumatic syndrome" manifested in his lingering guilt about his brother's death or the more immediate terrifying sense that he has lost another brother.

The narration progresses as Vincent's brothers-in-arms continue to discuss minor topics—the weather, girls, etc.—and Vincent continuously shifts between joining the conversations, wondering if Phoebe is taking their dog out, or denying Holden's likely death in action (*Esquire*

56). It is evident that Vincent is distracted, but he is simultaneously invested in getting all thirty-four men to the dance, even though “four must go”—meaning he must tell four men that there are no “dates” for them at the dance, thus they cannot attend (54). Other than his dissociated behaviors, Vincent also shows signs of violent thoughts directed towards any four men who “must go”: he “plan[s] to knife the first four men on [his] right” (54). Judith Herman notes, “[i]n the view of Traditionalists, a normal soldier should glory in war and betray no sign of emotion,” and that is one factor that contributes to the trauma of soldiers who are psychologically devastated by it (*Trauma and Recovery* 21). Vincent’s violent thoughts about injuring and killing his own brothers-in-arms act as his response to their trivial preoccupation and obsession with attending the dance while his own biological brother is missing in action. Vincent maintains a lack of emotion and regard for his comrades’ desires, as Vincent has more important matters on his mind: his missing brother. His actions do not match this desire to lash out, though his thoughts demonstrate a sort of calm and controlled violence, possibly a displacement of his anger about the wastefulness of war onto his comrades who seem oblivious of its costs. Despite these thoughts, such as knifing or shooting four men, he pretends not to realize there are four too many soldiers when the lieutenant questions him. Vincent ultimately acknowledges the importance of the dance and asks himself why he “want[s] them all to go” and even why he wants to go (*Esquire* 147). At first, he shows no emotional connection to his brothers-in-arms, especially while worrying about his missing biological brother, until he realizes how much the dance means to them all.

The story ends with a sort of simultaneous memory and denial as Vincent addresses his missing, and possibly dead, brother: “Stop letting people think you’re Missing. Stop wearing my robe to the beach. Stop taking the shots on my side of the court. Stop whistling. Sit up to the

table...” (149). LaCapra writes, “Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now...” (46). Vincent’s denial of his brother’s disappearance leaves him relying on past memories, pretending that Holden is still there within each memory and “not Missing, not dead, not anything but Here” (*Esquire* 149). This ending leaves readers unable to witness a process of healing, recovery, or “working through.” One may speculate that Vincent will never fully recover from the trauma of his missing brother. According to LaCapra, traumatized individuals may “resist working through” because they feel as though they are “betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past,” thus creating an “unconscious desire to remain within trauma” (22-3). The traumatic past that both Vincent and Holden share is their experience in war, and it is also their experience of losing their brother, Kenneth. Vincent may unconsciously desire to remain within not only the trauma of Holden’s missing-in-action status, but also the trauma of not being able to save his other brother, Kenneth. Vincent is aware of the possibility that Holden may not have survived through his traumatic war experiences while Vincent remains alive. Thus, he is living through his war trauma in addition to the trauma of possibly losing another brother while being locked into survivor’s guilt about not being able to save another. Even if Holden is alive during the narration, the unknown is enough to traumatize both brothers, who are not aware if either is still alive. Readers, then, become witnesses to Vincent’s trauma as he experiences post-traumatic symptoms without any sign of approaching recovery.

Appearing in the March 31, 1945 issue of *Saturday Evening Post*, Salinger’s short story, “A Boy in France,” focuses on Babe Gladwaller, a friend and brother-in-arms of Vincent Caulfield, who, like Vincent, lacks any strong sign of recovery from traumatic war experiences.

The “boy,” Babe, does not acknowledge the existence of his current trauma in the midst of war, either, likely as a way to fight against the traumatic situation and to simply survive in battle following “the long, rotten afternoon” he has just experienced in combat (*Saturday Evening Post* 21). Salinger creates the boy, Babe, as a struggling soldier facing the chaos and violence of combat while trying to survive and cope with the traumatic experience of it all. Simply put, “A Boy in France” exposes the “war is hell” motif in a way that civilians and veterans can emotionally respond to. The story emphasizes Babe as a young boy in order to demonstrate the young lives that are trying to survive in the midst of a brutal war. In this way, Babe, the boy, represents many of the real soldiers, like Salinger, who fought in WWII—the brothers, sons, friends, husbands, and so on, of civilians.

Because Babe acts as a representative of these men, Salinger carefully recreates the thoughts and feelings of many soldiers during the war through Babe—not only the physical experiences, but the psychological, as well. The story depicts a boy, Babe, struggling to maintain motivation and to find a safe place to rest in the middle of “wartime, crazy time, nobody’s time” in France (21). The trauma this particular boy endures is represented in a narrative manner unlike that of the other stories; “A Boy in France” is narrated bleakly and unhurriedly in order to allow the reader to fully comprehend the thoughts and feelings of the boy who has just survived active combat. Babe, who is only named in a letter he reads at the end of the story, is described as “dirty,” “aching,” and “hurting,” while his actions are “awkward,” “careful,” and “crumbily [sic]” (21, 92). These strong, poignant descriptions of the boy’s situation are no doubt meant to evoke empathy regarding the suffering this boy is forced to tolerate while searching for an empty foxhole because he is simply too exhausted to dig his own as his fellow soldiers have done.

Salinger details the numbing effect that combat trauma can exert over soldiers. When Babe finally finds a “Kraut hole,” he discovers that it contains “a terrible blanket on which some German had recently lain and bled and probably died” (21). He casually removes the blood-soaked blanket and tosses it into a nearby shrub. Once the boy settles himself and his gear into the foxhole, he discovers that it “was too short,” feels dirt fall down his back, and gets bitten by a red ant. He responds to the bite by reaching to kill the ant, but as he does, he “hissed in pain, remembering where that morning he had lost a whole fingernail” (21). The boy had been so numbed by the experience of direct combat and preoccupied with finding a safe foxhole to rest in after the battle that he had become incapable of the ordinary response of pain from losing an entire fingernail, until he physically injured it further by killing the red ant. His delayed response is due to the initial “forgetting,” or numbing of the actual pain. His recognition of the pain leads him to “work the kind of abracadabra familiar to and special for G.I.’s in combat”: pretending the pain away (21). This “abracadabra,” Salinger suggests through this scene, is familiar to G.I.’s so that they do not become preoccupied with their physical pain during battle. It represents a numbing of the self to feelings that overwhelm one’s capacity to respond. The denial helps keep soldiers focused and safe. While he attempts this “abracadabra” by hiding his injury, he imagines that his nail will have grown back, and he will have returned home:

I’ll put some coffee on the stove, some records on the phonograph, and *I’ll bolt the door*. I’ll read my books and I’ll drink coffee and I’ll listen to music, and *I’ll bolt the door*. I’ll open the window, I’ll let in a nice, quiet girl ... and *I’ll bolt the door*. I’ll ask her to read some Emily Dickinson to me—that one about being chartless—and I’ll ask her to read some William Blake to me—that one about the little lamb that made thee—and *I’ll bolt the door*. (21, my italics)

This paragraph is critical as it gives insight to Babe's internal thought process as he attempts to both escape and cope with his current situation. It also demonstrates his altered perception of the war and its effects on his home.

As suggested in Chapter One, analysis of "Last Day of the Last Furlough" reveals Babe's thoughts on his home and the safety he feels is present: "No enemy is banging on our door, waking her up, frightening her. But it could happen if I don't go out and meet him with my gun" (64). Previously, he felt as though he could protect his home by joining the Army and "killing Nazis and Fascists and Japs" (62). Now, it seems he realizes that it is not enough, that enemies could still infiltrate his home. Babe's imagination takes him back home, acting out scenarios that he wishes he could be doing instead of lying, injured, in a bloody foxhole. He envisions a girl reading specific poems by Dickinson and Blake, distancing himself even further from reality. This dissociation is not only about his injury, though it is about his entire situation during combat.

Another reason this paragraph is so intriguing is because of the different post-traumatic symptoms occurring simultaneously. Herman writes, "The many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories. These are called 'hyperarousal,' 'intrusion,' and 'constriction.' Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint or the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender" (*Trauma and Recovery* 35). Before Babe envisions himself back in his home, he was completely numb to the pain from his missing fingernail. Although he does not completely surrender to the situation, a symptom Herman suggests is part of constriction, Babe does escape his situation "not by action in the real world but rather by altering [his] state of consciousness," as Herman suggests can occur during the experience of trauma (42). Babe alters his

consciousness by hiding his injury under a blanket, imagining the pain away, and envisioning himself clean and home. One symptom of the intrusion category is repetition. Babe never claims that he will be safe at home while reading, drinking coffee, etc.; rather, he repeats the phrase, “I’ll bolt the door.” This phrase represents the trauma from combat haunting him, even as he imagines being home—no longer an entirely safe place—causing him to become hypervigilant, thus representing his need for security at all times. Babe’s constant desire for safety, even in his imagination, stems from his life being in constant danger during combat. The intrusive symptom of repetition relates closely to the hyperarousal category, as well, regarding this particular story. Herman claims, “After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto a permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment” (35). Babe’s safety is threatened in his reality and his imagination; this is why, ultimately, his “abracadabra” fails.

When Babe is finished with his “abracadabra,” he removes his hand to find “no change, no magic” and begins to read newspaper clippings and a letter from his little sister, Mattie (“A Boy in France” 21). The letters and clippings he reads after his dissociation suggests an attempt to stay connected with civilian society, as well as another way to escape the reality of being injured, exhausted, and alone in a small, bloody foxhole. As Herman suggests, “The capacity to preserve social connection and active coping strategies, even in the face of extremity, seems to protect people to some degree against the later development of post-traumatic syndromes” (58). Babe attempts to preserve his connection with society in order to postpone his full comprehension of his traumatic situation and to postpone being completely disconnected from society, thus attempting to stave off ongoing traumatic symptoms in the future. His attempt to avoid his current traumatic situation can be seen as a survival strategy in addition to a symptom of post-traumatic stress. Herman stresses how traumatic experiences can isolate or alienate

people from social connections, and one step in healing is to reestablish those connections. Babe seems to be fighting against any disconnection from his community, still holding onto any sliver of connection. Through Babe's attempts to control his current and future psychological stability, Salinger explores the internal, deeply personal sufferings and thoughts of soldiers during combat; however, this story does not yet suggest the beginning of his healing process, as Babe only acknowledges his current situation, attempts to cope with it as best he can, and cannot yet mourn or work through it.

The manner in which Salinger wrote this story brings about a vision of wounded, traumatized soldiers as symbols of how war trauma assaults the consciousness, thoughts, feelings, and actions of soldiers during and after combat. This claim is particularly enhanced when considering the fact that the word "trauma," from the Greek word for "wound," originally refer[red] to an injury inflicted on a body," a detail that is often brought up in works by Freud, La Capra, Caruth, and other theorists who deal with mental and physical traumas (*Unclaimed Experience* 3). Babe has a physical wound that symbolizes a much larger, more complex mental wound resulting from trauma experiences and accompanying traumatic responses to the overwhelming shock and horror of combat. Babe shows no emotional responses regarding his horrific encounters—seeking a foxhole for safety during combat or observing and removing the foxhole of a bloody blanket upon which a German soldier likely has been killed. He does not immediately respond to his physical wound, either. This lack of immediate response to traumatic circumstances is discussed by Caruth, mentioning how one is often overwhelmed by a traumatic experience so much so that the event cannot be "assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly" (*Explorations in Memory* 4). Babe does, however, respond and recognize at least his physical injury after he is safe—as safe as one can be during combat—in the foxhole. But

whatever emotional or psychological injury or wound he has sustained, he does not consciously process at the time.

As noted in Chapter One, Salinger in “Last Day of the Last Furlough” is only beginning to explore the trauma brothers-in-arms experience as Vincent Caulfield and Babe Gladwaller prepare to go off to war together. In “A Boy in France,” however, he establishes the traumatic experiences endured by young soldiers and the symptoms of their psychological wounds as seen in the actions of Babe. The third story involving Vincent and Babe is “The Stranger,” published in *Collier's* December 1, 1945 issue. Here, Salinger reveals Babe, now released from the Army, coming to terms with the realities of his deeply troubling war experiences and their post-traumatic effects as he attempts to reconnect with a civilian, “Vincent’s girl,” while clinging to his connection with his sister, Mattie. In terms of traumatic recovery, “The Stranger” demonstrates Babe’s not yet fully accomplished attempt at recovery—through reconnecting with society, attempting to narrate past trauma, and mourning—as he transitions back into civilian life and begins to reconnect with society. Salinger also explores the ripple effect of trauma in this story, shining light on the way war trauma of individual soldiers spreads out and affects surrounding family, friends, and loved ones. Salinger does not only concern himself with Babe’s post-traumatic suffering and recovery, but with the ripple effect Vincent’s death has on both Babe and Vincent’s ex-girlfriend, as well.

Salinger shows Babe and his little sister, Mattie, visiting Mrs. Polk, whom the narrator and Babe refer to as “Vincent’s girl.” The ability to properly name someone, or refer to them by their name, is an important concept that Salinger seems to experiment with in his stories. Babe is not named until about one third of the way into the story—the same technique used in “A Boy in France”—while Mrs. Polk and Mattie’s names are given almost immediately. Even though Mrs.

Polk is named in the beginning, her first name, Helen, is mentioned only once at the end of the encounter as Babe and Mrs. Polk are saying “goodbye.” Before he is named, though, Babe is referred to as “the young man,” in contrast to his title as “a boy” in “A Boy in France.” The change from a boy to a young man implies a growth and maturity that occurred in between these two stories while Babe was still in the Army. This maturity is also joined by multiple traumas: finding safety during combat in France; watching his brothers-in-arms die due to mortar fragments in Hürtgen Forest, as this story implies; and the implication of more experiences that remain unspoken, yet enter the present as Babe is reminded of the past through a collection of phonograph records—one record in particular.

Throughout the story, Babe is almost weaving in and out of the past and the present. The memories of his brothers-in-arms erupt into the present as he prepares himself to return to the story of Vincent’s death. In “The Stranger,” Salinger creates a scene with media as an object of focus that simultaneously mirrors Caruth’s idea that traumatic experiences erupt into the present, producing intrusive phenomena: “...[M]ost descriptions [of post-traumatic stress disorder] generally agree that there is a response ... which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event...” (*Trauma* 4). Although for Babe these intrusions are not as severe as nightmares or hallucinations, they nevertheless represent the traumatic losses by their connection to his memory of “when all the dead boys ... had been living” (“The Stranger” 18). The memories represent Babe’s experiences before the war, further demonstrating his inability to completely experience and mourn the deaths of his brothers-in-arms. As Babe waits for Mrs. Polk to arrive, he observes his surroundings in the living room, noticing a “messy stack of phonograph records”:

Then he began to hear the music of the unrecoverable years: the little, unhistorical, pretty good years when all the dead boys in the 12th Regiment had been living and cutting in on other dead boys on lost dance floors: the years when no one who could dance worth a damn had ever heard of Cherbourg or Saint-Lô or Hürtgen Forest or Luxembourg. (18)

The Bakewell record rouses Babe's recollection of "the dead boys in the 12th Regiment" and the "good years" before the horrendous, deadly battles following the Normandy landing, including the Battle of Saint-Lô, Hürtgen Forest, and the Bulge—all of which Salinger himself experienced, as Chapter One discusses. Upon hearing this particular record in Mrs. Polk's living room, although the exact song title is not mentioned, Babe is taken back to this time he claims is "unrecoverable," yet it can be recovered somewhat through his memory. In *Transmitted Wounds*, Amit Pinchevski writes, "Media constitute the material conditions for trauma to appear as something that cannot be fully approached and yet somehow must be" (4). The ability of media to duplicate and transmit sounds allows Babe to revisit this memory, thus transforming the gramophone from a simple machine to an object that brings the past into the present via memory. The gramophone, as a simple machine, is the "trigger," so to speak, that leads Babe to recall the times before Cherbourg, Saint- Lô, and so on—the times before he watched his comrades die. Remembering the "unrecoverable years" that occurred before the trauma is important for Babe to begin understanding his trauma and begin mourning his fallen brothers-in-arms, though he is not yet able to fully arrive at recovery. When Mattie belches, Babe is brought back to reality and stops playing the record.

Babe's desire to tell "Vincent's girl" the story of how Vincent was killed demonstrates an attempt to reconnect with society, specifically civilians, by sharing the story of his traumatic loss of a friend and also destroying any illusions civilians may have of war. By telling the truth,

perhaps civilians will understand the brutality and suffering soldiers endured and continue to endure even as they return home; however, Babe seems unsure of why he wants to do this considering the indelible trauma it inflicted on him: “In combat, witnessing the death of a buddy places the soldier at particularly high risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder” (Herman 54). Before he enters the apartment of Mrs. Polk, he seems to regret his decision, thinking that he should have just followed his plan with Mattie “without stopping once to take out his messy emotions, without forcing them on strangers” (“The Stranger” 18). After they begin talking, Babe frequently apologizes for not being able to tell her that Vincent “was happy or anything when he died” and for being “a stranger with hay fever” (77). The implication here is that Babe feels as though his presence is bothersome and that reminding himself and Mrs. Polk of Vincent’s death is unnecessary, yet he feels the need to talk about it with a civilian: “... [H]e wanted to apologize to every girl in the world whose lover had been hit by mortar fragments because the mortars hadn’t whistled. But the thing that was really terrible was the way your mind wanted to tell civilians these things” (77).²⁰ Salinger emphasizes the fact that mortars are silent, meaning there is no warning when they will come and release deadly fragments all around.

Babe’s empathy for both civilians and fellow soldiers suggests the ripple effect of war, how trauma spreads out affecting multiple people. Salinger demonstrates this traumatic ripple effect by revealing Babe’s thoughts and feelings while attempting to mourn the death of his friend and sharing his grief with another, empathetic listener. Babe says, “[Vincent] and four other G.I.s and I were standing around a fire we made. In Hürtgen Forest. Some mortar dropped

²⁰ It is interesting that Salinger chooses the phrase, “every girl in the world,” not every girl in the United States, or every girl in the Allied nations: every girl in the entire world, including Germany, Italy, and Japan. While this phrase does not necessarily perpetuate my analysis, it should be considered as context when discussing the level of empathy of Salinger and his characters.

in suddenly—it doesn't whistle or anything—and it hit Vincent and three of the other men" (77). Not only does Babe have the trauma of watching multiple brothers-in-arms die in front of him, but he is aware of how the friends, families, and lovers respond to and cope with these traumatic deaths, as well. He is left to contend with the guilt of a survivor, who for no reason at all, is spared from death. Concerning mourning, Herman writes, "Finally, the survivor needs help from others to mourn [his or her] losses ... Failure to complete the normal process of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction" (*Trauma and Recovery* 69). In a similar sense, LaCapra notes how "one may never entirely transcend an attachment to a lost other"; however, a sign that one is mourning while working through the loss "is the ability to find a new partner, to marry," etc. (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 151). Regarding LaCapra and Herman's concepts, Mrs. Polk has, and continues to mourn the death of Vincent, while working through and coping. She is able to see a future without Vincent.

Babe and Mrs. Polk share a common loss that allows them to form a sort of traumatic bond; however, Babe's trauma stemming from their shared loss differs from Mrs. Polk's experience of the same loss. In *Trauma*, Caruth claims, "...the fact that, for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*" (9). This concept severs the link between Mrs. Polk and Babe because Babe was physically present during the event, witnessing four of his comrades being hit by mortar fragments while he survives it. He not only survived; he walked away physically unharmed. This specific form of traumatic experience—surviving an attack—is an experience Mrs. Polk cannot share with Babe. Ultimately, the opportunity exists for them to get help from each other to mourn their loss, though Babe feels as though he has a sort of

inexpressible loss as well as survivor's guilt as he shares his story of Vincent's death with his former lover.

The story depicts one trauma, the death of Vincent, that is somewhat shared by Babe and Mrs. Polk; however, Babe does not disclose any of his other traumas—such as his experience narrated in “A Boy in France.” Salinger continues Babe's conviction that “war is hell,” seen in his monologue at the dinner table in “Last Day of the Last Furlough,” and he also enacts the “hero-refused” posture seen in the story as explained in Chapter One. In that monologue, Babe announces, “... [I]t's the moral duty of all men who have fought and will fight in this war to keep our mouths shut, once it's over, never again to mention it in any way” (62). Babe does not keep hold of this specific idea, though, as he breaks his silence to Mrs. Polk about how Vincent died during combat; however, Babe is quite clear that he believes veterans should not speak of war as a heroic, praise-worthy adventure, but it is not necessary that veterans should not speak of the war at all. Babe tells Mrs. Polk, “I can't tell you he was happy or anything when he died. I'm sorry. I can't think of anything good. Yet I want to tell you the whole business” (“The Stranger” 77). Babe breaks his silence, but he does not lie to Mrs. Polk about how Vincent died in order to glorify war and make Vincent a hero. Similar to Philly's disgust toward war movies in “Soft-Boiled Sergeant,” Babe thinks:

Don't let any civilian leave you, when the story's over, with any comfortable lies. Shoot down all the lies. Don't let Vincent's girl think that Vincent asked for a cigarette before he died. Don't let her think he grinned gamely, or said a few choice last words.

These things didn't happen. These things weren't done outside movies and books except by a very, very few guys who were unable to fasten their last thoughts to the depleting joy of being alive. ... Don't let anybody good down. Fire! Fire, buddy! *Now!* (77)

This passage starts to show the consistent idea in Salinger's writing that reinforces the idea of the hero-refused. Philly narrates that war films are not accurate depictions of actual war where handsome men do not get shot in the face and the President attends every soldier's funeral to comfort the grieving family. These are lies about the war. And here, Babe consciously and actively refuses to "let Vincent's girl think" anything that would establish Vincent as a hero because "these things didn't happen." This passage also shows the traumas that Babe keeps to himself, not even considering telling Mrs. Polk about them: "Fire! Fire, buddy! *Now!*" The implication with these last words is that Babe is protecting Mrs. Polk from any illusions about the horrors of war, which triggers his experiences of protecting his brothers-in-arms during combat. He must act quickly to save her from the metaphorical silent mortar fragments.

Traumatized individuals must put their traumatic experience into narrative form in order to start fully experiencing and understanding the trauma they dissociated from when it occurred, according to Caruth and Herman. In "A Boy in France," Babe avoids confronting his traumatic situation by imagining himself at home; however, "The Stranger" demonstrates his coming to terms with the trauma of losing his friend and brother-in-arms, Vincent, by telling an empathetic listener. Both stories accomplish Herman's idea of putting one's traumatic experiences into narrative form: "The narrative includes not only the event itself but also the survivor's response to it and the responses of the important people in [his or her] life" (Herman 177).²¹ Even though Babe disassociates psychologically because of his trauma in "A Boy in France," readers are still exposed to his responses and thoughts on the traumatic experience—disassociating is, after all, a response; however, Babe does not seem to entirely grasp his situation throughout the story and

²¹ Although Babe does not narrate his own story, like some of the other stories I have discussed, the omniscient narrator reveals the thoughts and actions of Babe, which illustrate his traumatic responses and recovery, allowing the story to establish itself as "Babe's narrative," even if the narrative remains incomplete.

he still does not show signs of understanding his trauma at the end of “The Stranger.” Perhaps Babe is more focused on aiding Mrs. Polk’s traumatic recovery than his own by attempting to protect her from the illusions of war. Still, Babe is shown to be struggling toward his own recovery by visiting Mrs. Polk and telling Vincent’s story. This attempt means he is at least trying to reconnect and establish healthy relationships with the civilian community.

Babe’s attempt at connecting, or reconnecting, with the external world proves difficult, as shown in his meeting with Mrs. Polk. Herman’s argument gives a reason for why this connection is so complicated:

The veteran is isolated not only by the images of the horror that he has witnessed and perpetrated but also by his special status as an initiate in the cult of war. He imagines that no civilian, certainly no woman or child, can comprehend his confrontation with evil and death. He views the civilian with a mixture of idealization and contempt: she is at once innocent and ignorant. (66)

Babe, thus, is faced with a paradox concerning his rejoining society. He has experienced horror both as a victim and a perpetrator. He has watched his comrades die and he has killed others in the midst of combat. His personal experiences are not shared with civilians—only fellow soldiers, many of whom have perished in the war. Ultimately, he is unable to fully connect with Mrs. Polk as he needs, in that he cannot share with her the narration of his own traumas. As Babe and Mattie are leaving, he invites Mrs. Polk to lunch with them, but she declines saying, “I can’t. I have to—I can’t. Ring the ‘Up’ bell, Mattie” (“The Stranger” 77). Both Mrs. Polk and Babe repeatedly tell Mattie to ring the elevator bell, as if they are in a hurry to leave each other. Mrs. Polk then says, “Call me sometime, willya [sic]? Please. I’m in the book” (77). She invites Babe to lunch with her and her husband some time, but then Babe declines the invitation: “I’m all

right. Don't be that way. I'm just not used to things yet" (77). The roles in this scene become reversed. Babe sought out a connection with Mrs. Polk and when she refused, he gave up. Herman writes that a traumatized individual wants "both to withdraw from close relationships and to seek them desperately" (56). Babe acts on his desire for a connection after they shared and discussed their traumatic bond; however, when Mrs. Polk invites him to call her, he then declines, severing any future connection with her. Although Babe is unable to connect with Mrs. Polk to progress his recovery, his sister, Mattie, has been there the whole time. As they leave the building, Babe observes his surroundings and notices Mattie jumping back and forth between the curb and the street. He asks himself, "Why was it such a beautiful thing to see?" (77). From Babe's perspective, civilians—especially women and children—are innocent. Mattie is no exception and she loves him unconditionally. Babe may not have reached any sort of recovery in his narratives, but the story ends with only a possibility of hope for him to do so through his connection with Mattie.

While the previous stories only suggest a chance for recovery, one story in particular, "For Esme—With Love and Squalor," demonstrates that recovery is possible. This story differs from others in that it focuses on the individual soldier's pre- and post-traumatic responses, as well as how those responses affect the soldier's interactions with both civilians and comrades. "For Esme—With Love and Squalor" was originally issued in *The New Yorker* April 8, 1950 and later published in a collection titled *Nine Stories* (1953). The story is split into two parts—one about events before the narrator has seen combat during which he meets two young children, and one about his post-traumatic responses to combat. The second part represents a process of confronting trauma and working toward recovery that is not a linear process, similar to LaCapra's understanding of the intersecting processes of "acting out" and "working through." As

with Babe in “A Boy in France” and “The Stranger,” Salinger depicts the narrator in “For Esme—With Love and Squalor” suffering psychologically both during combat and after combat; however, the manner in which the narrator copes with, and responds to, certain events entails a more hopeful, promising recovery, compared to Babe’s. Salinger creates the narrator, who is also the main character, as a veteran reflecting on his experiences during the war as he is based in London, as well as his experiences immediately after the war ends, before he returns home and after he has been released from a hospital for psychiatric treatment.

The unnamed narrator, later named Sergeant X, introduces the story by revealing his regret that he is unable to attend the wedding of Esme, whom he had met in London when she was a child just prior to his shipping out to France.²² In lieu of his attendance, he writes the story of how he met the bride six years prior, including her request that he write her a story about “squalor.” Her father had been killed in the war in North Africa and her mother also recently died, presumably in the bombings of London, so her fascination with squalor reflects the ripple effect and devastation of war. As he starts to narrate the outer framing story of meeting Esme, the narrator, Sergeant X, recalls extremely specific dates, events, and people.²³ Considering this occurred six years ago, his memory is surprisingly accurate for a WWII veteran who underwent extreme physical and mental trauma, as the second, framed, section of the story reveals. The fact that these details remained easily accessible to him all those years later implies the immense effect their meeting had on Sergeant X, as well as the importance he places on narrating this

²² Sergeant X is a sort of code-name the narrator gives himself, attempting to conceal his identity given the personal, potentially confidential information in the story. This specific “name game” Salinger often plays in his other stories is less critical to my argument regarding the narrator’s recovery and more playful as Salinger writes, “...I’ve disguised myself so cunningly that even the cleverest reader will fail to recognize me” (100).

²³ As mentioned, the narrator and Sergeant X is the same person. For my purposes, though, I will refer to the main character as “Sergeant X” throughout the entirety of my analysis.

story accurately. According to LaCapra, "...working through does not mean avoidance. ... It means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 144). The act of Sergeant X writing this story is an example of his "working through," as he begins to recognize the details of his trauma. When Esme finds out that Sergeant X is a writer, she asks him to write a story of squalor for her, prompting him to write this narrative to her as a wedding gift. She asks if he is "acquainted with squalor," to which he responds that he "was getting better acquainted with it, in one form or another, all the time" (99).

The short encounter Sergeant X has with Esme and her little brother, Charles, represents more than a cheerful, wholesome experience; it is a moment that has stayed with him for six years, positively affecting his mental health and encouraging his recovery from war trauma. When he and his comrades arrive in London, Sergeant X decides to leave base and take a walk, exploring the area. While Sergeant X is rereading "a couple of stale letters" in a tearoom, he notices Esme and Charles enter (88). Esme approaches Sergeant X at his table, leaving Charles with the governess, and strikes up a conversation with the stranger. Esme reveals her presumptions and past experiences with American soldiers, as she describes them as "act[ing] like animals": "They're forever punching one another about, and insulting everyone..." (91). Despite her negative experiences with American soldiers, it did not deter her from approaching Sergeant X. Eventually, Charles joins Esme and they continue to be very open and talk a great deal about personal matters, such as their parents' deaths. They also ask Sergeant X personal questions, such as whether or not he is married. The narrator seems happy to be more observant of Esme and Charles' relationship rather than a constant, active participant in the encounter, though Charles does share a joke with Sergeant X.²⁴ Their meeting ultimately ends with Charles

²⁴ Charles asks, "What did one wall say to the other wall," to which the answer is: "meet you at the corner" (95).

kissing him “goodbye” and Esme saying, “I hope you return from the war with all your faculties intact” (99).

The relationship between Sergeant X and the siblings demonstrate a similar idea Salinger explores in “A Boy in France,” that the soldier must cling to any surviving connection with society during war. Although Sergeant X has letters from his wife, mother-in-law, and his older brother, the connection he has with Esme and Charles will prove to be substantially more effective regarding his recovery from future war trauma. In a letter, his mother-in-law calls his base a “camp,” as if it is some sort of vacation, and his brother writes, “Now that the g.d. [sic] war is over and you probably have a lot of time over there, how about sending the kids a couple of bayonets or swastikas...” (102). Illustrated in Chapter One, many soldiers continued to locate and arrest Nazi officials and members after the war. Sergeant X, beginning the second, framed, narration of the “squalor” portion, notes that he was stationed in the home of a family whom he helped arrest because of their status with the Nazi Party. Sergeant X’s brother, like many American civilians, did not understand that the war was still occurring despite the active combat and battles ending. The innocence of Esme and Charles, even their naivete, makes the connection stronger as Sergeant X is able to communicate with them on a human level.

After experiencing war trauma, Sergeant X suffers from post-traumatic symptoms, such as trembling hands, self-harm, agitation, and avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event. Sergeant X had been hospitalized and released between meeting Esme and the story’s present, but he is far from psychologically recovered. Herman says, “The goal of treatment, as in all military medicine, was to return the patient to combat” (*Trauma and Recovery* 22). Returning men to combat was a priority and even after the battles ended, military medicine still returned some soldiers to their base to help locate and arrest Nazi members:

According to one report, 80 percent of the American fighting men who succumbed to acute stress in the Second World War were returned to some kind of duty, usually within a week. Thirty percent were returned to combat units. Little attention was paid to the fate of these men once they returned to active duty, let alone after they returned home from the war. As long as they could function on a minimal level, they were thought to have recovered. (26)

Herman suggests that soldiers, like Sergeant X, were discharged without enough time to comprehend or process their traumas. Salinger emphasizes Sergeant X's post-traumatic symptoms, to suggest that he was not at all recovered or prepared to return to duty, yet he was released anyway. He attempts to read a book, though he is unable to because, as he concludes, "he was a young man who had not come through the war with all his faculties intact" (100). He closes the book and smokes a cigarette instead, experimenting with how quickly his gums will bleed because of the nicotine and chemicals; "then, abruptly, familiarly, and, as usual, with no warning, he thought he felt his mind dislodge itself and teeter, like insecure luggage on an overhead rack" (101). This instance of feeling his "mind dislodge itself" demonstrates the repeated post-traumatic response of intrusive phenomena that derail rational responses. Sergeant X also suffers from psychosomatic responses, such as his hands shaking uncontrollably. Upon finding an inscription left in the book by the previous resident—"Dear God, life is hell"—he attempts to respond by writing, "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love" (102).²⁵ When he begins to write Dostoyevsky's name under his inscription, he discovers that his handwriting is "almost entirely illegible" (102). Unlike other forms of intrusive phenomena suggested by Herman, such as nightmares or

²⁵ This is a quote from Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky's work, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879).

flashbacks, Sergeant X suffers from physically intrusive symptoms caused by his traumatic experience. Additionally, Sergeant X ignores dozens of letters and packages addressed to him and becomes easily agitated, even sick, when talking with his jeep partner, Corporal Z, Clay.

Clay represents the type of American soldier Esme dislikes who embodies toxic masculinity and does not show sensitivity to victims of post-traumatic stress. Sergeant X does not demonstrate any strong connection with him as they talk in his room. In fact, Sergeant X seems to want Clay out of his room as quickly as possible, especially when Clay brings up memories and points out the physical manifestations of Sergeant X's traumatic past. He calls attention to Sergeant X's "shakes" as he struggles to light a cigarette and describes his appearance as "look[ing] like a goddam *corpse*" (104). Unfortunately, Clay's insensitivity and ignorance do not end with those remarks. Sergeant X encourages their conversation to continue on another subject, yet Clay comments on Sergeant X's "shakes" again, asking, "Did you know the goddam side of your face is jumping all over the place?" (105). Sergeant X is blatantly aware of this, as well as his other physical post-traumatic symptoms. Though Clay, despite his ignorance, wants to help Sergeant X, he just does not know how. In attempts to help him, Clay says that he wrote his girlfriend, Loretta, a letter describing Sergeant X's nervous breakdown and hospitalization because she is a psychology major. Clay states her inexperienced diagnosis: "She says nobody gets a nervous breakdown just from the war and all. She says you probably were unstable like, your whole goddam life" (106). Loretta psychoanalyzes Clay, as well when he tells her a story, repeated to Sergeant X:

"Remember that time I and you drove into Valognes, and we got shelled for about two goddam hours, and the goddam cat I shot that jumped on the hood of the jeep when we were layin' in that hole? Remember?"

“Yes – don’t start that business with that cat again, Clay, God damn it. I don’t want to hear about it.”

....

“No, you know the reason I took a pot shot at it, Loretta says? She says I was temporarily insane. No kidding. From the shelling and all.”

“...You weren’t insane. You were simply doing your duty. You killed that pussycat in as manly a way as anybody could’ve, under the circumstances... That cat was a spy. You *had* to take a pot shot at it. It was a very clever German midget dressed up in a cheap fur coat. So there was absolutely nothing brutal, or cruel, or dirty, or even –” (106-7)

This story sheds light on one traumatic experience Sergeant X endured, a two-hour bombardment, though there is an implication that there were other times, as well. Sergeant X is dismissive and is clear that he does not want to revisit this memory of being under attack, hiding, and watching Clay kill a cat. The idea that the cat was “a very clever German midget” is one way to dissociate from the event, creating an absurd justification as to why the cat had to die. The distress of watching the cat get shot by Clay may not have been as severe if they were not getting “shelled for about two goddam hours.” When Clay realizes Sergeant X is not being “*sincere*,” Sergeant X “suddenly felt sick” and vomits in a nearby wastebasket (107). This sickness forces Clay to realize the magnitude of the traumatic effects and he invites Sergeant X to join him and the other soldiers. He attempts to connect with Sergeant X, showing sympathy, though he refuses the request to join the others in order to avoid being triggered even further. Rather than connect with his brothers-in-arms, Sergeant X attempts to write a letter to an old friend in New York, hoping “there might be some quick, however slight, therapy in it for him” (108). His hands were shaking more violently now, causing him to give up writing the letter.

Although Sergeant X was unable to write a letter to his friend, this attempt does lead him to notice a package that had his previous A.P.O. numbers and to open it, though “without any interest” (108). Inside the package is a letter from Esme, representing a return to their initial meeting before Sergeant X suffered from the severe mental and physical trauma that got him hospitalized. She encloses her father’s wristwatch, which was a short topic of conversation in a tearoom when she tells Sergeant X that her father “was s-l-a-i-n in North Africa”; in her letter she describes the wristwatch as “extremely water-proof and shock-proof as well as having many other virtues” (93, 110). She writes that Sergeant X will be able to “use it to greater advantage in these difficult days than I ever can and that you will accept it as a lucky talisman” (110). Charles also adds his unique greeting in the letter, ending the story of Sergeant X’s squalor with love:

HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO

HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO

LOVE AND KISSES CHALES [sic] (110)

Compared to the insensitive conversations with Clay and letters he has received from his mother-in-law and brother, Esme illustrates sympathy while understanding that even though the battles have ended, there is still trauma to endure and trauma to recover from. According to Herman, the final stage of recovery is to create or restore “sustaining bonds between individual and community” (*Trauma and Recovery* 214). Esme and Charles represent a community that is able to restore Sergeant X’s “sense of belonging” and “humanity” (214).

Sergeant X’s recovery begins and is encouraged along by Esme. Herman argues, “Mirrored in the actions of others, the survivor recognizes and reclaims a lost part of [himself or herself]. At that moment, the survivor begins to rejoin the human commonality” (214). Esme’s

intelligence and sophistication stemming from her own trauma of losing her parents provides a bond between the two.

It is not until X reads the letter from Esme that he “suddenly, almost ecstatically, felt sleepy” (Salinger 110). Sleeping is critical for traumatized individuals, especially for soldiers and veterans who have been conditioned for hyperarousal, expecting danger at any moment. Herman writes, “The increase in arousal persists during sleep as well as in the waking states, resulting in numerous types of sleep disturbance. People with post-traumatic stress disorder take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people” (36). As opposed to “battle fatigue,” Sergeant X feels productively, or comfortably, fatigued, finally being able to relax enough to sleep without symptoms of hyperarousal. This is the first time during the second half of the story that the tone mirrors the beginning, before his traumatic symptoms were in full effect, and it was because of his reconnection with Esme: “You take a really sleepy man, Esme, and he *always* stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac—with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact” (110).

Sergeant X is ultimately able to put past trauma into narrative form—unlike Gardner and Babe—making the story he writes for Esme—with love and squalor—his recovery narrative while showing gratitude to Esme for her gift of love. LaCapra writes, “Working through trauma involve[s] the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation” (42). He argues that the traumatized individual will be able to effectively go through both processes by articulating the traumatic experience, as well as the responses and symptoms to the event, although fully transcending some of the lingering effects may never be possible. Herman notes the importance of revisiting the traumatic narrative: “Reconstructing of

the trauma story begins with a review of the patient's life before the trauma and the circumstances that led up to the event. ... The narrative includes not only the event itself but also the survivor's response to it ..." (176-77). Sergeant X follows this process by opening the story with his present life, then delving into his life before the trauma, followed by his describing in great detail his psychological and physical suffering from post-traumatic shock, and finally by narrating his recovery from a dissociated state and reconnection with society through Esme's letter and the writing of his own story in response to her gesture of love.

CONCLUSION

According to Herman and Caruth, the traumatized individual must put his or her traumatic experience into narrative form in order to fully access and understand the trauma endured, as Sergeant X does. The stories from Chapter One did not yet establish this narrative form as a stage of recovery, as it focused primarily on introducing the biographical and historical contexts for the purpose of providing Salinger's unique personal experiences. It is not until the publications of "Last Day of the Last Furlough" and "Soft-Boiled Sergeant"—after he experiences war—that Salinger begins to explore the effects of war trauma and possible traumatic recoveries I discuss by utilizing contemporary trauma theory. Engaging the stories with concepts elaborated by trauma theorists Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, and Dominick LaCapra provided a lens for analyzing Salinger's fictional explorations of war trauma as it affects soldiers and also ripples throughout the society that glorifies the deaths of soldiers. The stories examined in Chapter Two depict Salinger's further exploration and understanding of war trauma and its effects. The use of trauma theory in this chapter uncovers the traumatic experiences, responses, symptoms, and recoveries of the characters. Examining these stories illustrates the disconnection of soldiers from civilian society, as well as the possibility of reconnecting with the society, thus facilitating their recovery from their traumatic experiences.

Throughout both chapters, it is evident how Salinger explores and depicts the traumatic experiences soldiers endured during WWII using his own experiences from the CIC. He portrays the points of view from psychologically and physically traumatized soldiers and veterans who refuse to participate in stories that romanticize the deaths of millions. Salinger's stories are more than simply fiction; the characters represent the lives of real soldiers and veterans who have lived through war trauma and suffered the loss of brothers-in-arms. They have felt isolated, avoided,

and ignored by society. As a veteran, Salinger faced these struggles, as well. His stories, then, are important representations of the suffering veterans may still be experiencing, not just from WWII, but from all wars. Concluding my study with the recovery of Sergeant X demonstrates that recovery is possible for all soldiers and veterans, despite how difficult the process may be.

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