

***ON THE PERFORMATIVE LURE OF WAR MEMORIES:
TIM O'BRIEN'S HOW TO TELL A TRUE WAR STORY****

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Abstract: My paper focuses on the input of the performative side of Vietnam War memory in Tim O'Brien's *How to Tell a True War Story*. I contend that the performance of war memory might represent an essential part of human life trying to work through traumas and of the literary creative process. More precisely, I address the following core questions raised by O'Brien's story: in point of literary creative writing, how can a writer use war memories not as just tools of recollection but of re-actualization? How can one achieve the suspense of detachment, and why is it important for an author to do that in a literary war-related work? I argue that O'Brien's story shows that this can happen by using the performative side of war memory, via three main episodes from the Vietnam conflict: Rat Kiley's letter to the sister of Lemon, his war buddy, after the latter's death, the narrator's retelling of Lemon's death and Mitchell Sander's recounting some soldiers' version of the war experience. These characters' discarding of mere facticity and favouring of emotions and failure of war memories echo Nietzsche's point that what is needed in post-war life is a mixture of facts and feelings to avoid "the malady of history." Given this, performance of war memory in a literary work manages to restore the pulse of life during war conditions for both participants and non-participants which finally sanctions and transmits the indefinite, elusive character of traumatic existence and commits history to commemoration.

* University of Bucharest, Romania; dmihai@ yahoo.com

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