

“ALL HELL LET LOOSE” ON THE POST-WAR HOMEFRONT:

POSTMEMORIAL ENGAGEMENT OF RETURNING COMBATANTS OF WORLD WAR II¹

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Marianne Hirsch was the pioneering voice behind the now widely acclaimed notion of postmemory, illuminating the artistic expression of those who, born after the Holocaust, bear the indelible imprint of their parents' harrowing experiences. However, since its inception in the early 1990s, this concept has undergone development and expansion². It now encompasses a diverse range of artistic areas, including inherited colonial trauma, queer experience as described by Natasha Alden³ and even landscapes⁴, including those in virtual environments⁵. Yet, despite this multiplicity of postmemorial work, these writers have in common their use of the imagination not only to recreate events that they did not themselves witness, and to imagine what it would have been like to 'be there', but often to reshape a mythologized historical narrative. This article contributes to this ongoing body of work similarly broadening postmemory beyond postgenerational Holocaust discourse by examining some representative texts within a body of work that Lesley Morris terms 'postmemoirs'. Morris describes these

¹ 'All hell let loose' (or all hell breaks loose) "describes what happens when violent, destructive, and confused activity suddenly begins" (Merriam-Webster.com) and is commonly used in the context of war.

² M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge MA and London, 1997.

³ N. Alden, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory in Contemporary British War Fiction*, Manchester, 2014.

⁴ B.A. Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*, New York and London, 2013.

⁵ P.I. Jones and T. Osborne, *Analysing Virtual Landscapes Using Postmemory*, "Social and Cultural Geography", 21, 2 (2018), pp. 186–206.

texts as hybrid works, oscillating between family memoir, autobiography, historiography, and fiction⁶. The postmemoirs I draw attention to here are written by children and grandchildren of World War II veterans who fought for the Allied forces, specifically British, North American, and Australian. The driving force behind these writers is a desire to delve into and share their family's past, unearthing buried secrets and little-known personal and collective histories of World War II, while simultaneously forging a deeper connection with their emotionally distant fathers. In other words, they are attempting to not only learn about 'dad's war', but also to 'get to know dad' on a deeper level. At the same time, some of these writers also undergo a process of self-discovery. This process involves working through unresolved feelings stemming from their fathers' moody behaviour which, in Sean Field's words, "flooded the home,"⁷ putting strain on their parents' marriage. In doing so, they reconceptualise the mythologised collective memory of the heroic return from the 'Good War'.

However, I would like to point out that these "unsettled feelings," as described by Field, resulting from having a traumatised war veteran in the home, should not be confused with transmitted trauma. And, neither do these works project this trauma onto society, as Samuel O' Donoghue pointed out in his critique of Spanish postmemory scholarship⁸. Instead, it is, as Hirsch observed, 'received' memory in which the post-generation inherits "the resonant aftereffects of trauma [induced by] stories, images and behaviours" during childhood⁹. I contend that the postmemoirs described in this article are not just personal accounts or even reconstructions of past events, but rather a type of social activism, as Hirsch originally viewed Holocaust postmemorial acts. In essence, these 'father postmemoirs' offer readers a two-fold insight: first, a glimpse into what it was like to be raised in the household of a World War II veteran, whose traumatic experiences of war continued to haunt him long after the conflict ended, and second, a fresh perspective on the often-suppressed, overlooked, or forgotten narratives of the veteran and his family in the aftermath of the war, prompting a re-examination of the dominant historical memory. In what follows I broadly wish to demonstrate how these texts function as social activism through some characteristic parameters of postmemory, such as the presence of photography and memorabilia, creative reconstruction of the unknowable past, and urgency to know the 'truth' behind the myths constructed through silenced family trauma.

As Natasha Alden notes in her work on British writers such as Pat Barker, Ian McEwan, and Graham Swift, who remember the war in contemporary historical novels, World War II continues to dominate literary creations of the post-generations of Allied ex-service men¹⁰. These writers were born after the end of World War II and grew up between the 1950s and 1970s. As they were raised, their parents' stories and experiences, as well as the film and media they consumed, constantly reminded them of the war. They often had idealized and exaggerated versions of the war partly, because of the heroic representation of World War II

⁶ L. Morris, "Postmemory, Postmemoir", in: *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945–2000*, ed. L. & J. Zipes Morris, New York, 2002, p. 291–306

⁷ S. Field, *Loose Bits of Shrapnel: War Stories, Photographs, and the Peculiarities of Postmemory*, "The Oral History Review", 41, 1, (2014), p. 109.

⁸ S. O'Donoghue, *Postmemory as Trauma? Some Theoretical Problems and Their Consequences for Contemporary Literary Criticism*, "Politika", 7 October (2018), <https://www.politika.io/en/notice/postmemory-as-trauma-some-theoretical-problems-and-their-consequences-for-contemporary> [access: 01.09.2023].

⁹ M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, New York, 2008, p. 3–4.

¹⁰ Alden, *op.cit.*

soldiers on the television screen and in the literature of the time. As third generation writer and journalist Cole Moreton puts it in his postmemoir “[they] were the last generation to be brought up on the folklore of the war, the last to know the names of battles from three decades before. [And their] fathers encouraged it”¹¹. Moreton ironically recalls that the “conflicts on the carpet always looked just right”¹². But, as these veterans began to pass away and their fathers aged, these writers were prompted to reconsider historical reality. Perhaps the real conflicts had not been quite as bloodless and heroic as those on screen, nor like those recreated on living room carpets. In his postmemoir, Tom Matthews fittingly describes this as a process of “rewinding the tape”¹³. The texts being examined here explore how the writers try to reconcile their personal experiences with the historical realities of the war.

However, there is another motivation behind these writers’ desire to revisit the past. It stems from the silence of their fathers and grandfathers about their participation in the war. Moreton recalls that the suppression of war experiences only added to their myth and glamour. As a result, when he was a child, he assumed that his grandfather must have been a hero¹⁴. It is not uncommon for combat veterans, including those from wars like Vietnam or, more recently, The Middle East, to refrain from discussing their experiences with family members upon returning home. There may be many reasons for this. Perhaps they wish to forget the horrifying experiences of war and move on with their lives. They also believe that only fellow ex-combatants can fully understand what they went through. After all, it may be difficult to find words to describe the horrific violence of war to anyone who has not witnessed it. After witnessing the horrors of warfare and crimes against humanity, the many thousands of servicemen who returned from World War II faced the additional challenge of being expected to settle down to domesticity and get on with rebuilding their lives and their countries. Also, the public was not always sympathetic to returning veterans’ psychological problems, and neither did they want to know, because as Leila Levinson writes,

when they returned home just a couple of months afterwards, where support and compassion could have made a significant difference to integrating the memories, the veterans encountered a public only interested in looking to the rosy future.¹⁵

The advice generally given to these veterans went, as Levinson notes, something like this: “That’s all behind you. Forget about it, don’t even talk about it”¹⁶.

Furthermore, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was still not fully understood at that time and veterans who suffered from this debilitating condition that can endure through a lifetime, did not receive much in the way of either medical or psychological support. And since there was still a great deal of prejudice, they generally preferred to silence their traumas. Treatment sometimes consisted of electroconvulsive therapy, being locked in a dark room and fed on bread and water¹⁷, or even lobotomy. The practice of lobotomies on veterans had largely disappeared from public memory until recently when Michael Phillips, writing for

¹¹ C. Moreton, *My Father Was a Hero: The True Story of a Man, a Boy and the Silence between Them*, London and New York, 2004, p. 4.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ T. Matthews, *Our Father’s War: Growing up in the Shadow of The Greatest Generation*, Broadway Books, 2005, p. 29.

¹⁴ Moreton, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ L. Levinson, *Gated Grief*, Cable Publishing, 2011, p. 249.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ W. Holden, *Shell Shock: The Psychological Impact of War*, Channel Four Books, 1998, p. 124.

"The Wall Street Journal" (WSJ), published a series of investigations into lobotomies carried out "on nearly 2,000 veterans between April 1, 1947, and Sept. 30, 1950, at various Veteran's Association (VA) hospitals across the U.S."¹⁸. Phillips' research leads him to recount the stories of how an ex-bomber pilot, Mr Tritz and of one man's 94-year-old mother Dorothy, a Navy nurse during the war, were lobotomized¹⁹. He describes how some of these veterans were able to carry on with their lives, but their mental scars affected them and their families thereafter. As a result, many chose not to talk about their mental health struggles. All these postmemoirists testify to this silence. Tom Matthews in his book *Our Father's War* portrays ten World War II veterans and their sons, and wonders whether the mental toll of the oft-called Good War is "the last best kept secret"²⁰. Similarly, Australian writer and feminist activist Germaine Greer notes in her post-memoir *Daddy, I Hardly Knew You* that veterans' families were often unaware of their loved ones' experiences and struggles with PTSD. She writes:

Thousands of them came home to live out their lives as walking wounded, carrying out their masculine duties in a sort of dream, trying not to hear the children who asked, 'Mummy why does that man have to sleep in your bed?' (...). There was no way these damaged men could explain their incapacity for normal emotional experience except by complaining and they would not complain. But their children must.²¹

And indeed, the children have. Postmemoirs like Greer's or Matthew's sit alongside others such as Julia Collin's *My Father's War* (2002), Lucinda Frank's *My Father's Secret War* (2007), Jan Elvin's *The Box from Branau* (2009), Thomas Childers' *Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (2009), Leila Levinson's *Gated Grief*, and Carol Shultz Vento's *The Hidden Legacy of World War Two* (2011) amongst others. The stories include those of codebreakers, soldiers who landed on the front lines during the D-Day Normandy landings, those who retreated from Dunkirk, individuals who suffered through the bombings during the London Blitz, and those who were among the first allied witnesses to enter Nazi concentration camps and were faced with scenes so horrific that they could only be confronted with silence. The veterans' experiences would inevitably impact not only their own post-war lives, but also those of their families, leaving an enduring imprint on their collective psyche that, as Levinson astutely observes, could only be sustained through a code of silence²². Their children and grandchildren would attempt to understand only when it was almost too late to find out what lay beneath this silence.

These men were encouraged to suppress their memories and adapt to the post-war societal expectation of starting a happy family life after the war. While many managed to cope with these expectations, for some, the impact on their families remained unresolved and unspoken, despite being welcomed as heroes for their wartime service. Indeed, the terms 'hero' and 'heroic' figure largely in these narratives. Yet, as Matthews instinctively felt "there was something darker going on below the heroic surface of the Greatest Generation," leading

¹⁸ 'VA performed lobotomies on World War II veterans', "Armed Forces Benefit Association (AFBA) website", December 11th, 2013, <https://newsroom.afba.com/military-life/va-performed-lobotomies-on-world-war-ii-veterans/> [access: 01.09.2023].

¹⁹ M.M. Phillips, *The Lobotomy Files, Forgotten Soldiers: When America Lobotomized Its Vets*, "Wall Street Journal", December (2013), <https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/LobotomyFilesPart1.pdf> [access: 01.09.2023].

²⁰ Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²¹ G. Greer, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*, London, 1990, p. 14.

²² Levinson, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

him to “poke up an antenna to find out” what this was²³. Thomas Childers in his foreword to Carol Schulz Vento’s postmemoir, for example, highlights the heroism of her father Arthur ‘Dutch’ Schulz “a much decorated, much revered” paratrooper who “jumped into Normandy on D-Day,” fought in many other battles, was memorialized in Daryl F. Zanuck’s 1960 film *The Longest Day*, featured in the work of Stephen Ambrose, and inspired Christen Harty Schaefer, the writer and producer of Stephen Spielberg’s award-winning film, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)²⁴. Schulz Vento’s text effectively uncovers the generational impact of having a World War II hero father and exposes the long-lasting effects of PTSD on not only the father but the family, challenging the notion of the Good War myth. While war heroes like Audie Murphy, “America’s most decorated combat soldier of World War II and a famous movie star,”²⁵ and those who raised the flag on Iwo Jima, immortalized in Clint Eastwood’s film *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), were initially celebrated as American heroes in widespread publicity campaigns, some of them were later accused of having flawed characters. However, it’s important to understand that their alleged character flaws may have been a result of trauma they experienced during their service, and not due to any inherent weakness or fault on their part. Schultz Vento remarks that “[f]or some combat veterans, all the parades, tickertape and marching bands could not drown out the cries of their lost brothers in arms”²⁶. However, like other postmemoirists, Schulz Vento’s account does not devalue the accomplishments of the wartime generation but rather highlights the significant toll they paid, the impact on their families, and the struggles that lasted much longer than the popular “Greatest Generation” narrative suggests²⁷.

Schulz Vento’s text mediates a form of social activism, drawing attention to the lasting impact of living with a traumatized war veteran across generations, through characteristic tropes of postmemorial literature. Shultz Vento has lent further support to this postmemorial activism through the creation of a Facebook page, ‘The Daughters of D-Day’ in which many more people contribute their own commemoration of family members’ participation in the war. In her text, ‘received memory’ is passed down through household quarrels leading to her parents’ divorce, the unstable psychological state of her father with his problems of alcohol abuse, acts associated with heightened masculinity which may be put down to his military training and soldierly duties – he threatened his wife with a gun in a moment of jealousy – angry outbursts and lack of emotional connection to his family. Witnessing family strife and their fathers’ outbursts of anger, common to those who suffer from war-induced PTSD, would lead these children not necessarily to forgiveness or reconciliation but at least to understand their fathers. And, as Schultz Vento puts it, the “common thread” of all the Daughters of D-Day is to realise what they “didn’t know about the hidden legacy of World War II”²⁸.

A recurrent trope in these postmemoirs is the incorporation of photography and other artifacts of memory which act as “points of memory [that] pierce through the temporal and experiential layers separating us from the past”²⁹. They transmit history, acting as social acti-

²³ Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 28–29.

²⁴ T. Childers, “Foreword”, in: C. Shultz, *The Hidden Legacy of World War Two: A Daughter’s Journey of Discovery*, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, 2011, p. 4.

²⁵ Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website, <https://www.audiemurphy.com/> [access: 01.09.2023].

²⁶ C. Shultz Vento, *The Hidden Legacy of World War Two: A Daughter’s Journey of Discovery*, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, 2011, p. 131.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

²⁹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 197.

vism in themselves, at the same time as triggering personal memories and evoking poignant emotions. For instance, besides Shultz Vento, in their respective texts, *Breaking the Code* and *Gated Grief*, Karen Fisher-Alaniz and Leila Levinson³⁰ overtly include photographs within the narrative, as well as descriptions of moments where they sift through boxes of family memorabilia that are typically found tucked away in an attic after their fathers' death. Unbeknownst to Levinson, her father had played a role in liberating concentration camps. It wasn't until after his passing that she stumbled upon a shoebox filled with photographs that revealed the horrors he and his fellow soldiers had witnessed. These haunting images had left an indelible mark on her father, and upon discovering them, Levinson too was deeply affected. In her writing, Levinson includes some of these photographs to convey the traumatic experiences that her father and other soldiers had gone through, prompting affect in the reader and enabling them to grasp the enduring effects that such events can have on those who experienced them first-hand. Simultaneously, she sheds light on the unimaginable atrocities of the Holocaust, especially at a time when many first-hand witnesses are no longer alive, and Holocaust deniers are gaining more attention.

Indeed, photographs and objects remain pivotal in shaping and forming an act of postmemory, and Hirsch dedicated much of her work to describing their function on generational memory³¹. She writes that "the work of postmemory, in fact, is to uncover the pits again, to unearth the layers of forgetting, to go beneath the screen surfaces (...) to see what these images (...) both expose and foreclose"³². As in Levinson's work, where she includes her father's images of the concentration camps, photographs and other artifacts not only serve as evidence of historical events, but also act as a conduit for transmitting memories across generations. The inclusion of these photographs in the texts, thereby making them available to the wider public, also contributes to social activism. Some of them depict the Allied soldiers looking at the emaciated bodies of the dead and the barely surviving victims. A reader gazing into the photo today may well wonder what was on the minds of these young soldiers and attempt to understand if these images could ever have been erased from their memory.

The portrayal of the return-home period in popular films and literature creates a false impression of an unchallenged domestic peace that swiftly permeated the national consciousness. Anne Shofield calls this a "fantasy of paradise" and a "romanticized home front" that neglects crucial elements of the period³³. Sifting through papers in the family home, Cole Moreton begins to suspect that there is another truth behind his grand-father's demobilization, from the fairy-tale illusion surrounding the collective memory of home-coming veterans after the war³⁴. This triggered a curiosity to investigate the reality of demobilization in the United Kingdom through library and archival research. Susan Keen calls this kind of narrative, in which the protagonist ventures forth to investigate hidden truths in libraries or other sources, 'Romances of the Archive'. Such archival research forms an inseparable part of

³⁰ K. Fisher-Alaniz, *Breaking the Code: A Father's Secret, a Daughter's Journey, and the Question That Changed Everything*, Naperville, Illinois, 2011; Levinson, op. cit.

³¹ For analysis of the role of photography in postmemory, see: Hirsch, *Family Frames...*

³² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 119.

³³ M.A. Shofield, "Battle Dress to Sports Suit: Overalls to Frocks: American and British Veterans Confront Demobilization, 1945–51", in: *Back to Peace: Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period*, ed. A. Monnickendam, A. Usandizaga, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2007, p. 81.

³⁴ The military term 'demobilization' refers to the act of being released from the armed services, usually after a war.

the postmemorial act³⁵. Illustrative of this genre is Graham Swift's fictional novel *Shuttlecock*, whose protagonist, Prentis, sets about uncovering the hidden story of his father's war. Indeed, Swift's text appears to parody the 'father postmemoirs' described here. Like the postmemoirists, Prentis' estranged relationship with his father improves after discovering that he was not quite the hero he had previously thought, but just an ordinary fearful soldier facing mortal danger. And just like many of these writers, Swift's protagonist Prentis finds documents that reveal another reality, at odds with the post-war myth³⁶. In his postmemoir, Moreton reveals the folklore of demobilization which overlooks the difficulties and challenges those veterans and their families actually confronted. The experiences of prolonged family separation, loss of loved ones, changes in women's roles, post-war economic depression, food rationing, and inadequate support for those with PTSD were not adequately portrayed or discussed. After World War II, the challenges that veterans faced when transitioning from military to family life were not taken into consideration, unlike today's professional soldiers who, despite continuing difficulties, receive more support in the post-deployment period. Furthermore, like Levinson's use of photography, Moreton's narrative exemplifies the way photographs and memorabilia "charge the need to know, shape the necessarily fictional stories of postmemory, and mirror the transition from familial to affiliative cultural memory, from personal to public"³⁷. His grandfather has a book that he was given in Operation Overlord, that operates as a testimonial object that will fill the silenced gaps, replacing the need for words between the generations. It transmits history, yet also provokes his grandfather's personal memory. The generational shift to third generation, means the book no longer functions so much as a commemorative souvenir but a record and a point of generational affiliative memory, inciting the grandson, and the reader, to wonder what it was really like to be there.

Hirsch points out that it may not be the photograph itself that instils the horrors of the Holocaust but also in the "story that the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted"³⁸. In Moreton's text, for example, he describes a photo of a German bomber which he finds "sinister" because it represents something beyond the picture: a plane that dropped bombs on the people of London during the Blitz. He goes on to imaginatively recreate his grandparents walking by the canal, unaware of the menacing bomber flying overhead.³⁹ Through imagining what might be outside the frame, Moreton provides an emotional connection to the traumatic events of the bombings by offering a seemingly simple image of a German bomber. This allows the reader to learn about the personal yet public histories of ordinary people. He imagines his grandparents as young lovers strolling along the canal, two innocent people about to become the bombers' unseen victims. These do not just represent his grandparents, but the 'everyman' and 'everywoman' who were victims of the Blitz, highlighted by substituting personal pronouns for articles: "The soldier and his shy lover, a boy with war eyes and a girl carrying a child"⁴⁰. The photo reminds us of a life before these traumatic events interrupted, and the impossibility of return, lending the narrative a poignant reminder of the personal cost of war to innocent civilians.

³⁵ S. Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*, Toronto, 2001.

³⁶ For an in-depth study of the reality of demobilization see A. Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War*, Yale, 2009.

³⁷ C. Howes, *Third Generation Engagement with World War Two. Postmemory in Cole Moreton's 'My Father Was a Hero'*, Master's thesis, Grin, 2019. <https://www.grin.com/document/468165> [access: 01.09.2023]., p. 58.

³⁸ Hirsch, *Family Frames...*, p. 21.

³⁹ Moreton, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

In a similar vein, Shultz Vento gazes at her parents' wedding photograph, also provided in the text, which she had found in the wardrobe long after their marriage had dissolved. She restored it from its old and battered condition to give herself evidence "of their love for each other at one time. (...) a glimpse of what once was and could have been, if the horror of war had not intruded"⁴¹. In the text, she includes a picture of a happy couple dressed in wedding attire. Like the writer, the reader is left wondering what their lives would have been like if the war hadn't intervened. These are not photos of Holocaust victims and neither do they produce a sensation of horror and aversion, like in Levinson's text, but nonetheless, as Hirsch notes, they can produce affect in the viewer and the reader and "facilitate the affiliative acts of the post-generation"⁴², since the truth is indeed outside of the frame, prompting the writer to wonder what had been sacrificed in the way of familial happiness. These postmemoirs demonstrate how testimonial objects and family photos "pierce through the temporal and experiential layers separating us from the past"⁴³ transmitting not only historical but personal memory. Objects and photos can also trigger an urgency to 'know'.

Indeed, the urgency to 'know' the truth behind their family's stories remains a common trait in postmemorial literature. And these memoirs often consciously explain theories of belatedness, illness, the passing of eye-witness accounts, post 9/11 culture, or other psychological causes as partial reasons for the urgency to publish their narratives. Sometimes the narratives are driven finding unexpected objects or photographs. Moreton's desire to uncover his family's secrets, for example, is motivated by his wish to reconcile with his father and the realization that if his aging father died, he would never know more about him. Based on the dates when these postmemoirs were published, it is apparent that the reason for the urgent need to know the truth is that many of the veterans who experienced the events described in these memoirs were nearing the end of their lives or had already passed away. After her father's death, Levinson began her postmemorial work upon clearing out her father's office. And as mentioned earlier, objects and memorabilia often trigger the need to fill in the gaps. Levinson stumbled upon a trunk filled with photographs of concentration camps, motivating her to learn more about her father's wartime experiences. But significantly, she felt the need to tell the world about the traumatic legacies of concentration camp liberators using her father's story as a vehicle. Jan Elvin's postmemoir of her father, who survived landing on Omaha Beach in Normandy only to witness something "that was worse than combat"⁴⁴ when he walked into a concentration camp, clearly presents another such example, she writes:

Dad was eighty years old when I accidentally discovered an object from the past, a box that had been given to me by a POW in a prison camp in Braunau, Austria, in 1945. The discovery led me to question how he'd come to receive it, and those questions helped me to forge a closer emotional connection with him. The answers provided me with a point of entry into his history. Regrettably, this occurred only a few years before his death.⁴⁵

Sometimes becoming a parent can also trigger this investigation. Moreton also becomes a father himself and looks to understand the struggles his father went through. Certainly, parenthood has urged other writers, like Levinson or Lucinda Frank to investigate the ori-

⁴¹ Schultz Vento, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁴² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 39.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

⁴⁴ J. Elvin, *The Box from Braunau: In Search of My Father's War*, New York, 2009, p. 168.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. xi-xii.

gins of their fathers' strange behaviour. Also, the aging process of parents makes the children contemplate their own fleeting existence. Moreton writes: "[w]hen I looked at him on the sofa and on the casualty trolley I saw my future self. That was frightening"⁴⁶. In addition, the War on Terror, events of 9/11, and soldiers' interviews in the media around the time of this war, remind Moreton of his grandfather's war experiences, making him wonder if he would be capable of becoming a heroic father figure. And, certainly, the release of Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998, not only triggered the post-generations to investigate their family history, but even for many remaining veterans to relive traumatic memory. Finally, Moreton's postmemorial narrative, which belongs to the third generation, shows a characteristic pattern of reflecting on the past with increasing temporal distance from the war. He contemplates what it might have been like to be in combat, whether it was hard "to kill someone"⁴⁷. And he also wonders if he would be capable of enduring what his grandfather's generation did.

Many postmemoirs reveal another unspoken concern about the post-war period: the father's persistent perception of rigid masculinity, which he acquired during his time in the military. These postmemoirs reveal the issues this raises. The films of the time and boys' comic books reflected a heroic masculinity, but it was often a reality in the home as well. Jo Mary Stafford remembering her father's return states, "[t]he only people he could still order around were his unfortunate wife and children, and they would have to do"⁴⁸. The effect of this strict masculinity on the family is perhaps best portrayed by Tom Matthews, who through imaginative recreation, recalls his father persuading his four-year-old self to be manly and brave by jumping off a garage roof. Portraying the soldierly masculinity embodied in his father, he writes:

The tanned face flushes. Then the soldier wheels abruptly and storms across the yard, plunging into the basement. For the rest of my life, I will hear the screen door's sharp bang and the last thing he said before he turned his back and walked away. 'No son of mine is a coward'.⁴⁹

Seemingly haunted by this event, Matthews candidly confesses that he thought his "life would be off to a better start if only the Germans had killed him"⁵⁰. Childers similarly focuses on the post-war father-son relationships and the issue of heightened masculinities, and like other postmemorists, also attests to characteristics such as stoicism, courage, and resilience of their fathers. Despite resentment at her father "never having left the battlefield," Shultz Vento observes on a more positive note, how her "paratrooper dad's fighting spirit and bravery" shaped her character and formed her fighting spirit⁵¹. Indeed, the first generation's repudiation of their fathers is not confined to men, however, as evidenced not only by Schulz Vento, but by Greer's unresolved issues with her father. Greer, Levinson, and Shultz Vento all bear witness to how daughters were not exempt from the often-harsh treatment the sons received, and they too struggled to comprehend or forgive them until it was too late to grasp the full extent of their family's suffering. Nevertheless, these postmemoirs show not only how the transmission of memory, history, and myth is constructed through the generations, but how

⁴⁶ Moreton, *op. cit.*, p. 22–23.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ J. M. Stafford, *Light in the Dust: An Autobiography 1939–1960*, Trustline, 1990, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Shultz Vento, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

character traits can be transmitted as well. The post-memoirists frequently describe how the stoicism, composure, resilience, and discipline required to survive in a war zone resonate with the baby boomer generation who were born after the war. These characteristics were instilled not just through the "stories, images, and behaviours"⁵² prevalent during their childhood but also through the fatherly pressure to adopt these traits.

To conclude, these hybrid literary works encompass self-discovery and personal journeys approximating what Ben Yagoda termed 'Misery Lit' or memoirs of victimhood, rather like "lying on the couch in public"⁵³. Moreton's text, for instance, chronicles his family's poverty, childhood nightmares, and his difficult relationship with his parents. Greer's post-memoir also typifies the genre in that it involves a quest for the truth about her father alongside an exploration of her own identity as "her father's daughter"⁵⁴. But significantly, these writers reveal the personal within the broader historical context, akin to Spielberg's cinematography in *Saving Private Ryan*, by uncovering the small family history against the backdrop of a grander historical narrative. More than confessional memoirs, then, these writers reveal the impact of their father's war experiences on their families and, as Matthews puts it and cited earlier, "rewind the tape" to show how war affects soldiers and their families, and to uncover the forgotten narratives behind the myth of demobilization. These postmemoirs are not limited to Allied soldiers, however, as works by French and German writers demonstrate⁵⁵. They also align with the German 'Väterliteratur' or father literature, and a wider European trend, reflecting a generational change from second generation resentment of the father figure to a more forgiving third generation such as Cole Moreton. Contemporary understanding of how combat affects the psyche may have favoured this atonement. Ultimately, no matter what side these fathers fought on, these narratives serve as a necessary form of social activism through postmemorial artistic recreation. They serve as a cautionary tale, raising awareness about the potential long-term effects of PTSD on families. They remind us, as Childers fittingly points out, that war has "colossal human costs and that even in the most brilliant triumphs, there is heartbreak, and that the suffering does not stop when the shooting does"⁵⁶.

⁵² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 5.

⁵³ B. Yagoda, *Memoir: A History*, London, 2007, p. 238.

⁵⁴ Greer, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁵ See, for example: A. Jardin, *Des Gens Très Bien*, Paris, 2010; G. Grass, *Crabwalk*, trans. K. Winston, London, 2002.

⁵⁶ T. Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II*, Boston, New York, 2009, p. 13.

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SUMMARY:

This article examines a sub-genre of postmemoirs which have been published since the mid-1980s, written by children and grandchildren of veteran combatants of the Allied Forces. These British and American generational texts both preserve and unveil hidden historical memory of these men's participation in what is often referred to as the deadliest war in human history. The silent suffering of these veterans and their families had not been widely disclosed until Stephen Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* opened a Pandora's box. And yet, it remains an enigmatic memory in the collective consciousness of the post-war period. These writers recount the experiences not only of their fathers' wars, but of homecoming and the subsequent psychological impact of the war on family life, whilst also attempting to understand and come to terms with their own traumatic resonances rooted in these veterans' Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I discuss some examples of these texts, which include writers such as Germaine Greer, Lucinda Franks, Leila Levinson, Cole Moreton, or Carol Schultz Vento, who have written within this postmemoir sub-genre. I discuss some common approaches to these postmemorial narratives, which interweave tropes of archival romance, confessional literature, and historiographic metafiction. These family postmemoirs challenge the oft mythologized cultural memory of the 'Good War', question the meaning of heroism, and reveal the unspoken traumas of post-war familial life, and ultimately contribute not only to disclosing an unknown history but to broadening the thematic horizons of postmemory to the post-generations of Allied ex-servicemen.

KEYWORDS:

postmemory, postmemoir, World War Two, veterans, homecoming