

TRAUMA AND THE FANTASTIC
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY WAR FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between trauma and the literary mode of the fantastic. While the fantastic has historically been understood as an escapist mode or a literature of wish fulfillment, it may also play an important role in how victims of trauma construct their narratives. The fantastic does not simply leave trauma behind or provide pleasant alternatives to actual experiences; rather, it can constitute the acting out of trauma, facilitate working through, and even enable victims to bear witness to the traumatic past.

After a brief overview of both trauma theory and the effects of combat trauma, this study offers readings of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, John A. Williams' *Captain Blackman*, and Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* to show that fantastic elements in trauma narratives can be read as responses to and manifestations of trauma. The second chapter returns to O'Brien's novel to examine the fantastic mode as a means of healing. The study concludes with an analysis of the fantastic as bearing witness to real historical events in addition to those that make up the experience of trauma itself.