“Tim O’Brien’s Works and Related Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography”

by

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My objective in this project is to succeed to Steven Kaplan’s annotated bibliography in his *Understanding Tim O’Brien*, a thorough study on O’Brien’s six novels. Though the Kaplan book is published in 1995, his bibliography deals chiefly with the 1976-89 items; some of the 1990-92 items and most of the 1993-95 items are excluded--the major concern of his work is, of course, not to compile all of O’Brien’s items. This bibliography of mine thus includes 1976-2002 items that Kaplan’s misses.

What follows consists of ten sections: O’Brien’s books (8), essays (3), interviews (14), and speeches (1) in “Primary Sources”; books and parts of books (86), journal articles (22), dissertations (8), reviews (9), bibliographies (3), and dictionaries and encyclopedias (3) in “Secondary Sources.” Those 157 entries are listed author-alphabetically and chronologically.

I collected them partly for the writing of my dissertation so that this bibliography contains some items that are not related specifically to O’Brien. Since my dissertation is an overall, interdisciplinary study of historical, autobiographical, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic facets in
Tim O'Brien's works, references to socio-historical and psychological sources and other Vietnam fiction and nonfiction are entered into this bibliography.

The bibliographical providers for searching items are as follows: *MLA International Bibliography*, *Book Review Digest*, Catherine Calloway’s two valuable bibliographies, Tobey Herzog’s *Tim O'Brien*, Mark Heberle’s *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam*, Amazon (amazon.com), New York Times (nytimes.com), Powell Books (powells.com), and Marilyn Knapp Litt’s “Tim O’Brien Newsletter” (obriennews@yahoogroups.com).
Primary Sources

Books


This memoir shows O’Brien’s earliest fascination with fragmentation between chapters and his signature themes of reality and fantasy, guilt and trauma, agony and compassion, endeavor and survival, and memory and narrative.


His debut novel portrays the relationship between two brothers, one who goes to Viet Nam and the other who stays at home, demonstrating his narrative tension that later earned him appraisal with *Lake* and *July, July*.


This classic of the Vietnam War literature tells the story of a young soldier who narrates about men fleeing in fantasy and fighting the war in reality. National Book Award winner.


His first tragicomedy chronicles the anti-war activist’s life-long crusade of an attempt of rescuing his family and the world from the nuclear annihilation.

This collection of twenty-two episodic stories not only carries emotional burdens experienced by a group of grunts but also challenges the impossibility of telling war stories. Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

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O'Brien links the dark secrets of the human heart with the historical event of the My Lai Massacre in 1968, alluding to America’s abuse of history and memory.

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This second tragicomedy in the war between the sexes has trauma narrative and brings together Vietnam-generational crisis of love, marriage, Vietnam, and survival.

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College classmates in this ensemble novel reassure their old dreams have turned to disappointment at their thirty-first class reunion.

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**Essays**


Criticism against veterans and non-veterans who had lost the energy to recall Vietnam. Originally appeared in *The Washington Post*. 


Sharing his childhood experiences as a hand magician, O'Brien concludes that a fiction writer, like a magician, should extend the boundaries of the mysterious in writing.

Memoir of O'Brien's 1994 return to Quang Ngai Province in which his Alpha Company was once based in 1969-70. His experiences are painfully repeated as he remembers the war and the breakup with his girlfriend.

**Interviews**


This source focuses on his first three books, on the structure of *Cacciato* in particular.

This deals chiefly with his writing of *If I Die* and *Cacciato*. O'Brien says that the fiction writers today are not doing their job—“to let your imagination add to memories.” and to


Valuable source to reveal O'Brien's involvement with a revenge against one VC hostage.


This interview-review successfully points out O'Brien's central task in writing: resurrection of the dead and redemption of a human soul through narrative.


This long interview covers O'Brien's narrative techniques, criticism against the U. S. foreign policies, the Midwest’s ignorance of different cultures and patriotism, and so on.


This contains O'Brien's analysis of human memory and its nature of forgetting, fragmentation, and reordering of the events. The intertwining process of memory and imagination is “the key to finding truth” in fiction.

- - -. Interview with Steven Kaplan. “An Interview with Tim

Material for his 1995 book solely on O'Brien. On differences in two sexes under extreme danger and trauma, O'Brien says, “I think that way too much has been made of gender by both sides. We're not *that* different.”


As revealing his writing techniques displayed in *Things*, he says that what he cares the most is not plot but story and its “aboutness.”


Report of O'Brien’s on-going mental depression as he cerebrates the writer’s latest success with *Lake*.


This deals with O'Brien’s use of memory, imagination, and
chronology in his writing.


Material for his 1997 book solely on O’Brien and the most satisfactory resource for O’Brien’s biographical study.


Another long material to understand O’Brien’s guilt over the war and his views on the current issues: Bush and the Gulf War victory, Americans’ ignorance about world cultures, McNamara’s confession, and his 1994 return to Viet Nam. One of the most valuable interviews ever conducted.


This covers O’Brien’s use of memory and trauma in *Things* and *Lake*. His resurrecting of the dead in writing is “to keep the ghosts with us.”

**Speeches**

War stories are not “always about bombs and bullets and military maneuvers” but “finally about the human heart” to “console and to inspire and to help us heal.” Parts of “On the Rainy River” and “Ambush” were read.
Secondary Sources

Books and Parts of Books

One of few studies focusing on this war as a subject of chaos and fragmentation. Cacciato and Things are discussed.

Collection of essays by seven historians, examining how the six presidents grew into the unpopular war.

One of the first studies on U. S. soldiers’ confusion and alienation in a war without definite objectives.

Critical examination on America’s illusive moral supremacy and idealism, heavy reliance upon high-tech firepower, and arrogance of power within the White House.


First comprehensive statistical study of young men who evaded the service in Viet Nam.


Perfect interdisciplinary study of the Vietnam War, treating this war as a product of American culture in the 1960s. *If I Die, Cacciato, Things, and Lake* are discussed.


Pioneering study of Vietnam authors and their reconstruction of a new Vietnam. *If I Die* and *Cacciato* are discussed.


Beidler resumes his discussion on how the Vietnam authors have projected their memory possible redemptory myth.

Five books from *If I Die* to *Things* are discussed.

Thorough resurvey of the massacre by the two British historians, beating Seymour Hersh’s earlier account.


Memoir of his 1984 return to Viet Nam. Broyles was one of the first American veteran-returnees to Viet Nam.


Acclaimed piece of nonfiction on one draftee’s tragic death in Viet Nam and his parents’ crusade against the U. S. government’s cover up of the truth.


Highly acclaimed memoir by the ex-Marine, one of the first U. S. troops who landed at Da Nang in March 1965.


One of few novels on a destructive marital relationship in the post-Vietnam of the 1980s.


Christopher attacks O’Brien’s limited sense of history and his perpetuating Asian stereotypes in *Cacciato*, which, she says, is typical in American white male combat narratives.


Most powerful Vietnam study ever done by a socio-theologist,
inspecting the hidden causes of the Vietnam veterans' trauma. Cacciato is quoted.


Highly realistic, detailed novel, reminiscent of Webb’s account.


Collection of 208 letters written home by 125 U. S. soldiers during the war.


Jungian’s masterwork on America’s collective shift from war to peace.


Widely cited article and one earliest lament for the socially unfair war.


Unique theory of the writer-reader relationship, stating that readers enter into complicity with writers and they also see themselves as masters over meaning.

4 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.
Outline of his revolutionary theory of unconscious forces in the context of dream analysis.

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*Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part III).* 1917.

Collection of his lectures on terms and theories of the neuroses.

Toughest Vietnam dissenter’s autobiography. This former Arkansas senator’s investigation on the Tonkin Gulf conspiracy made U. S. public furious and ruined Johnson’s liability and his political career.

Collection of letters from the returnees recalling how they were treated by the Vietnam dissenters at the airports.

Nonfiction novel on one platoon’s typical day fighting the war. One earliest account to convey a sense of the war’s complexity and hopelessness.

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Acclaimed as the best journalistic work revealing miscalculations and arrogance of power of America’s top advisors’ in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.


Alert to America’s Reaganized political paralysis.


Another fine report of post-Cold War foreign policy and top advisors’ dilemmas.


Novel on violence, brutality, and surrealism of Vietnam, better known later as Kubrick’s film *Full Metal Jacket*.


Collection of four essays by historians and former generals.


Heberle considers O’Brien as a fabricator of memory and trauma through the prisms of PTSD and post-modernist metafiction. First study to focus on O’Brien’s representation of trauma.


His first novel on brutality and reality of Vietnam.


Haunted life story of a platoon’s sole survivor with guilt,
nightmares, and hell. National Book Award winner.


Freudian’s masterwork on traumatic events and treatments. *Things* is the only account from Vietnam War literature discussed here.


Collection of magazine articles recapturing the chaos of the war. Acclaimed as the best nonfictional work of Vietnam. Herr later co-wrote the scripts for *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*.


Survey of Vietnam narratives within the context of cultural and literary themes. *If I Die*, *Cacciato*, and *Things* are discussed.

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Herzog unravels the function of memory and imagination in six books from *If I Die* to *Lake*. First study on O’Brien as an autobiographical writer.


Chronicle of the Reagan legacy, the “ethical wasteland of the eighties” when America fell from dominant world power
to a debtor nation.


This considers O’Brien as a fiction writer rather than as a Vietnam writer. Six books from *If I Die* to *Lake* are discussed.

Brief annotated bibliography.


Acclaimed as the best work of the Vietnam War history. *If I Die* is quoted.


Critical collection on contemporary novelists and singers.


Former foreign service officer’s attack against “the best and the brightest” with no combat experiences who preferred military to diplomacy.


Widely accepted as the best LBJ biography by his former aide.


This second-most frequently cited work on the war’s history
points out the U. S.'s inability of creating a relationship to all of the Third World countries.


Painful memoir by the ex-Marine who came home paralyzed from the chest down and later joined the anti-Vietnam activities.


One of few accounts on the experience of teaching Vietnam novels and memoirs. Excerpts from students' assignments.


First statistical report of Vietnam theater and era veterans meeting with PTSD criteria of the APA's *DSM-III*.


Introduction of his fundamental concepts--the unconscious, transference, drive, and repetition; notions--the gaze, the Name-of-the-Father, etc.


Critical inquiry into post-traumatic writing and testimonies, focusing on Holocaust literature.
Examination of the debate by contrasting Republican consensus with Democratic division, and the split between intellectuals of the left and the right.

Study of survivors of Hiroshima and Nazi concentration camp. Lifton first discovered “death imprint,” the survivor’s shame and complex attachment for death.

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Most influential study in psychoanalysis of Vietnam veterans, which became the basis for diagnosis and treatment of the Vietnam veterans’ PTSD and a contributor to the APA’s acknowledgment of the term “survivor guilt.”

Lyon’s mixed feelings toward Clinton’s appearance at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1993.

Probably the only comprehensive study of Vietnam’s impact
on the generation, containing interviews of returnees, protesters, deserters, evaders, and draft-dodgers. O'Brien's early Post article is quoted.

Daughter's quest for the understanding of her GI father's death in Viet Nam. Best novel depicting the war's aftermath and veterans' PTSD.

One of few works specializing in the survival guilt suffered by Vietnam veterans and victims of crime, abuse, disasters, and other traumatic events.

Former Defense secretary's admission of his mistakes over "the tragedy." His controversial confession--"We were wrong, terribly wrong"--added more confusion to the issue and did little to rebuild his reputation.

Only valuable piece of information here is former North Vietnamese general Giap's remark on the Tonkin Gulf incidents, in which he says there was no second attack by the North on August 4.

Moïse concludes that there was no North Vietnamese attack and the original report was not a lie but a genuine mistake.


Memoranda, unofficial remarks, and telephone conversations regarding the war.


His proclamation of war in the mid 1980s against world Communist takeover.


Best Vietnam collection of excerpts from fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, film, photos, and song lyrics.


This two-tour Vietnam veteran questions the uncertainty of Vietnam and recalls bitterly the government’s inequality in its draft system.


Outline of the narratological model that consists of three
components of the narrator, the narrated, and the narrating.


Autobiography on his eight years in the White House.


Excellent argument on the relationship between Vietnam’s unconventionality and its unique narrative.


Detailed study of O’Brien’s creativity and symbolism appeared in *If I Die*, *Cacciato*, and *Things*.


Nonfiction on the CBS reporter’s 1989 revisit to Ha Noi, Trung Son Cemetery, and Sai Gon.


Collection of an essay and two *New Yorker* articles on the notorious Ben Suc operation and the major air strikes over Quang Ngai and Quang Tin.


Analysis of the major characteristics of the self-conscious

Fine study of O’Brien’s use of the past, the present, and the imagined in the mind of the narrator Paul Berlin in *Cacciato*.


Study of the sanctions and systems of violence in Viet Nam and veterans’ symptoms of post-combat syndrome.


Transcendent challenge of examining the psychological devastation of war by comparing the soldiers of Homer’s *Iliad* with Vietnam veterans suffering PTSD. *Things* is quoted.


UP correspondent’s biography of Lt. Vann who tried and failed to convince his unique strategy to his superior officers. Pulitzer Prize winner.

Study of how the American film industry has shown images of the Vietnam War.


Former White House spokesperson’s chronicle on the glorious and the shadowy of his five years with Clinton.


Nationally acclaimed statisticians’ bold theory of the American history as a succession of generational biographies.


Unique work of reading narratives of Holocaust, Vietnam, and incest as trauma literatures.


Exploration of the parallels between the healing of Vietnam veterans and America’s collective recovery from the war.


Survey of the fall of traditional, idealistic liberals and the rise of new, violent radicals.

VanDeMark, Brian. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the*
Revelation of Johnson’s lack of strength to overrule the hawkish counsel of Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, and others.

Examination of contemporary novelists’ ways of regaining a wide readership by telling a story and the making of that story at the same time.

Realistic bestseller on a Marine infantry platoon in An Hoa in 1968. Acclaimed as one of the best Vietnam novels.

Only volume of interviews with Americans who fled from fighting in Viet Nam to Canada.

Study of the cultural legacy of the 1960s. “How to Tell a True War Story” is discussed in Michael Herr’s chapter.

Journal Articles

Discussion of O'Brien’s uniquely philosophical treatment of
courage in his first three books.


Analysis of O’Brien’s reconstruction of a creative connection of experience and art without any conclusions or lessons.


First study to place *Things* in the representation of contemporary metafiction. “Spin,” “On the Rainy River,” “How to Tell,” “Speaking of Courage,” and “The Lives of the Dead” are discussed.


Chen asserts that *Things* serves not only as the experience of alienation and displacement but also as metonymic substitutions for the idea of Vietnam as home.


Survey of how Vietnam is remembered and what can be learned from Vietnam novels. *If I Die*, *Cacciato*, and *Things* are quoted with other Vietnam novels.

Fertel finds “the odd heroism” and symbolism hidden in “Rainy River.”


Findings of the suicide rate among 100 Vietnam combat veterans who meet the *DSM-III* criteria for PTSD.


Study of O’Brien’s treatment of courage and masculinity in *If I Die* and *Things.*


First analysis of trauma and recovery in the characters of *Things*: Mary Anne Bell in “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong,” “Tim O’Brien” in “Ghost Soldiers,” and Norman Bowker in “Speaking of Courage.”

Jason, Philip K. “The Noise Is Always in My Head: Auditory

First study of the auditory imagery experienced by traumatized characters in the Vietnam War novels. *Cacciato* and *Things* are discussed.


the two versions of “Speaking of Courage.”


Accusation of O’Brien’s instrumenting the female characters in *Things*, which she finds typical of most American Vietnam War narratives by male writers.


Analysis of O’Brien’s quest for the truth of war in the “Speaking of Courage” trilogy in *Things*.


Comparative study of Paul Berlin in *Cacciato* who tries to escape the reality of war in Viet Nam and Norman Bowker in “Speaking of Courage” who cannot escape the memory of war in America.


Volkmer discusses how presumptions about the nature of truth-telling affect the fictive shaping of those two books.

Comparative study of ballad allusions in the short story and its revised story-chapter in *Cacciato*.

**Dissertations**


Fudge addresses how the depictions of truth by the four writers have changed over the course of the century between the Civil War and the Vietnam War.


Kennedy examines the way those writers employ a narrative strategy of unreliable narrators and fragmentation to fragment their text to recreate the chaos of the atmosphere of the Vietnam War and the veterans’ memories of the war.

Kingstone searches for a path to bridge the gap between trauma survivors and the non-traumatic by examining the soldier dream-narrative depicted by the two authors and by using sociological and psychiatric studies of the combat PTSD.


Neilson criticizes the Vietnam narrative that has failed to reveal the U. S. imperialism and ignored the suffering of the Vietnamese suffering. The Quiet American, The Things They Carried, A Rumor of War, and In Country are discussed.


Radelich analyzes O’Brien’s deliberate fragmentation and arrangement of the chapters that has become the central task to his art. Six books from If I Die to Lake are discussed.

Versaci argues that some writers have successfully recreated the extreme past and their metafictional historical narratives. *The Chaneysville Incident, Maus I* and *Maus II*, and *The Things They Carried* are discussed.


Ward analyzes how Caputo and O’Brien and Herr have invoked and altered myths and myths of the American frontier.


William’s examination of texts by the two writers reveals controlled use of implicitness to suspend meaning between and behind the fixed points of the words on the page.

**Reviews**

One of few unfavorable reviews on Things. Bawer condemns O'Brien’s playing “too many such fact-or-fiction games” in the book, preferring to straightforward story-chapters “Rainy River,” “The Man I Killed,” and “In the Field.”


Kakutani, Michiko. “Slogging Surreally in the Vietnamese Jungle.” Rev. of The Things They Carried, by Tim O'Brien. New York Times 6 Mar. 1990: C21. This acclaim considers the book as “a vital, important book” that “matters not only to the reader interested in Vietnam, but to anyone interested in the craft of writing as well.”

eventually “mocks the wonderfully nuanced delineation of the Vietnam experience set down” in Cacciato and Things.


Lewis, Clayton W. “Chronicles of War.” Rev. of The Things They Carried, by Tim O’Brien. The Sewanee Review 99.3 (1991): 296-302. Savage of O’Brien’s fascination with artifice and metafiction that “does not satisfy one’s appetite to hear what happened rendered as it was experienced and is remembered.”


Bibliographies


The O’Brien items published from August 1972 to July 1989. Entries are 4 books, 21 short stories and published excepts, 7 essays, 3 audiovisual materials, 2 biographies, 4 interviews, 24 reviews on *If I Die*, 15 on *Northern*, 43 on *Cacciato*, and 31 on *Nuclear*, and 44 articles.

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Supplement of her 1991 bibliography, covering the 1972-92 items. Sections of Essays, Nonfiction, Audiovisual Materials, and Interviews are updated; new editions of *Things* and *Things*-related articles are also added.


Valuable compilation of novels (429), short stories (192), poetry (73), drama (19), miscellaneous (35), written in 1964-88. Author/title index.
Dictionaries and Encyclopedias


Widely accepted volume of definitions based primarily upon Freudian theories.


Earliest almanac on militaristic and strategic terms by the highly decorated former colonel of infantry, who believes the U. S. won the battle but lost the war. Photos.


Best of all Vietnam encyclopedias, covering every facet of the war. No photos.