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Trauma Narratives of the English Civil War

ERIN PETERS

ABSTRACT

This article explores the psychological impact and aftereffects of the English Civil War. Its main points of focus are the expressions of personal as well as collective trauma caused by this intestine conflict and the intersections between these two areas of experience. In this context, the discussion places the ways in which war experiences were narrated in relation to wider conceptualizations of traumatic damage to the mind. The essay identifies and analyses evidence of (what modern psychology has called) shell shock and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in accounts of English Civil War battles and subsequently, and contends that the period saw an emerging awareness of the palliative effects of trauma narration as well as of limits to the expressibility of traumatic events. In addition, this essay argues that individual battle trauma as described in popular print was transposed onto the canvas that represented the national psyche and thereby integrated into broader narratives of collective cultural trauma. More generally, this essay contributes to our understanding of early modern war-related trauma in the context of seventeenth-century medical and cultural ideas of war-induced mental impairment and disability, as well as to our understanding of the war's wider cultural impact.

In 1660 a pamphlet was published that described, in verse, a remarkable event that occurred during one of the English Civil War battles:

> A Cornish Foot man slipt and got a fall,
> As hee was running nigh a Garden wall,
> Even at that time, that a thick flight of shot,
> Came whistleing ore his head, hee swore by Got,
> That hee was Slain; and panting there hee laid,
> For Saints and Souls, Desiring his Comrade
> Him there to Bury: but to search his wound,

A Surgeon came; behold! None could be found.
They bid him rise, and fight, for nought him ail'd,
But all their words with him nothing prevail'd. . . . (Cooper 87)

The extraordinary nature of the incident lies, of course, in the absence of a physical wound to the footman, even though the scene clearly suggested otherwise: much to the astonishment of his fellow soldiers and the attending physician, this soldier's corporeal integrity had not, in fact, been compromised, and yet he appeared to be physically incapacitated. Of great enough import to be recorded in this history of the Civil War, the footman's fall defied immediate comprehension. With the benefit of modern medical knowledge concerning the psychological impact of war, we are able to offer an explanation for a scene that puzzled its seventeenth-century witnesses: the symptoms of the physically unharmed but nevertheless paralyzed soldier correspond clearly to what became recognized and popularly known as "shell shock" during the First World War, or, to use the medical term later assigned to the condition, combat stress reaction.[1]

The level of psychological terror and trauma experienced by the footman was without doubt a widespread, national experience. As Ronald Hutton has asserted, the Civil War "was arguably the most traumatic experience that the English, Welsh and Cornish people had ever had," adding that "In many ways the nation never recovered from it" (32–33). Mark Stoyle has similarly noted that "few conflicts can have made as deep an impression on the collective psyche of the English people as the Great Civil War" and that "few, if any, ever managed to put the experiences of that extraordinary time entirely behind them" (204–05). While statistics allow us to say little about the actual experience of war, in the English Civil War's case the figures illustrate the enormity of the conflict's impact.[2]

The immediate combat experiences of men like the Cornish footman were one aspect of the conflict, while the damage inflicted on the civilian population was another. With large groups of soldiers (many of whom had been press-ganged and were therefore undisciplined) on the move around the country, arbitrarily billeted in towns and wandering the roads, the hardships of the Civil War even reached seemingly remote areas and communities. In spite of the Civil War's generally benign reputation, particularly when compared to continental European wars, "England [during the war] knew atrocities, as well as marginally permissible cruelties" (Donagan 1137).[3] Accounts of the ritual humiliation, impromptu execution, and rape of civilians may be found without

great difficulty among Restoration narratives of the conflict (Donagan 1146). In addition to nationwide distress from acts of violence and the high death toll, other residual consequences of civil war arose: around 11,000 houses were destroyed and 55,000 people made homeless, roughly 100,000 people died as a result of war-related disease.[4] Trade and harvests were affected, legal processes foundered, and many towns and villages were destroyed. The experience of prolonged and sustained violence during the mid-seventeenth century resulted in the displacement of a significant number of people, the destruction of families and entire communities, the unravelling of pre-existing traditional ways of life and social structures, and massive disruptions to human relationships and connections. Charles Carlton is undoubtedly right in claiming that "Many—even most—of the men, women and children who lived in the British Isles in the middle of the seventeenth century went in some way or another to the wars" (350).

The present essay seeks to make a contribution to the "huge amount of work [that] remains to be done" with regard to the "mental scars which the conflict left behind" (Stoyle 205). While the English Civil War and its political, religious, and martial aspects have been scrutinized extensively, the traumatic experiences caused by the conflict and how these were integrated into a wider cultural narrative have received relatively scant attention. Endorsing Stoyle's premise from his essay "Memories of the Maimed" that individual experience and popular or collective memory are directly linked, I will begin by exploring accounts of disabling individual psychological war trauma, arguing that the English Civil War period saw increased awareness of non-physical war wounds and early attempts to address what modern psychology has labelled post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The second half of this essay will concern itself with narratives of cultural trauma and how the authors of these more general narratives addressed "a traumatic collective experience with which it was necessary to come to terms" at a national level (Scott 162). I will suggest that the effects of psychological combat trauma on the individual were transposed, more or less directly, onto the national psyche and that there was a high level of fluidity between the manners in which individual and collective trauma were conceptualized as disabling forces. In addition, I argue that contemporary responses to the disabling nature of psychological trauma demonstrate an inadvertent recognition of the therapeutic value of attempting to construct a publicly available trauma narrative. Indeed, while the understanding and knowledge necessary to address the desire to overcome psychological trauma

did not exist in the seventeenth-century, certainly not in a modern sense, one delayed—but key—reaction to the Civil War was, arguably, early attempts to recognize and conceptualize disabling mental trauma. It is not my intention to establish whether the authors of the documents truly experienced psychological trauma or succeeded in coping with mental and emotional distress. Indeed, this is not an exercise in retrospective diagnosis but rather an analysis of the developing conceptualization of psychological trauma as it emerged during the seventeenth century.

While statistics allow us to gain a sense of the enormously damaging impact of the Civil War generally, it is in contemporary accounts that we find important insights into the psychological dimension of seventeenth-century warfare—into the fear, hunger, exhaustion, and cold commonly experienced by soldiers waiting for battle as well as the horrors of the battlefield itself. Sergeant Henry Foster's account of the 1643 Battle of Newbury is a case in point. Foster not only details the conditions and horrors faced by the fighting men, even before fighting began, but also the psychological impact of the experience. Foster recalls, "Our Regiment stood in the open field all night, having neither bread nor water to refresh ourselves, having also marched the day before without any sustenance, neither durst we kindle any fire though it was a very cold night" (3). Later in the document he recalls another night in the open air:

> Constrained to lye all night upon the top of this mountaine, it being a most terrible tempestuous night of winde and raine, as ever men lay out in, we having neither hedge nor tree for shelter, nor any sustenance of food or fire, we had by this time marched sixe daies with very little provision. (5)

The psychological stress caused by these conditions, explains Foster, resulted in "a great distraction amongst our Souldiers, everyone standing upon his guard and fearing his fellow Souldier to bee his enemy" (6). Persecutory delusions resulting from an anomalous experience and the associated intense anxiety were common among the soldiery. Stress-related paranoia, as described by Foster, necessarily involves a certain aspect of unreality, or at least a failure to perceive reality accurately, causing significant pre-battle mental instability. Furthermore, the sense of disorientation and paranoia faced by the soldiers came not only from the darkness and lack of visibility but also from the internecine nature of the fighting, which lacked both geographic and linguistic boundaries (Murphy 87).

Actual combat raised the level of psychological stress experienced by the individual to new, often previously unexperienced heights. With the soldiers

already physically and psychologically weakened by the pre-battle experience, Foster recalls with dread how "men's bowels and brains flew in our faces" amid the smoke of battle (11). Indeed, as another eyewitness of a Civil War battlefield suggests, the experience of combat was all-consuming, both physically and psychologically:

> By this, that spacious Valley was bespread,
> With heaps of Men, and Horses, that lay dead;
> From several wounds, the several streams of blood,
> Increased to an overspreading Flood
> . . .
> Here might you hear the sad laments and moans
> In doleful accents, of their dying groans. (Cooper 44)

The battlefield soundscape and the harrowing visions of mutilation and disembowelment in which human and animal become one did not conclude with the end of fighting, however. Foster goes on to describe the sight of the battlefield after the fighting:

> The next day I viewed the dead bodies: there lay about 100 stript naked in that field where our 2 regiments stood in battlia. This night the enemy conveyed away about 30 cartload of maimed and dead men, as the townpeople credibly reported to us, and I think they might have carried away 20 cart load more of their dead the next morning; they buried 30 in one pit, 14 lay dead in one ditch. (13)

With these images in mind, the fate of the severely traumatized Cornish footman, who suffered from delusions of injury so strong that he "desir[ed] his Comrade / Him there to Bury" (Cooper 87), was unlikely to be unique or even rare.

Other contemporary accounts strongly reinforce the notion that the violence of the Civil War caused significant psychological trauma. The parliamentarian Major George Wither recorded his "field musings" during the early 1640s and there is a clear focus on the effects of combat on the soldier's mind:

> What Ghosts are they that haunt,
> The Chambers of my breast!
> And, when I sleep, or comfort Want,
> Will give my heart no rest?
> Me thinks the sound of grones,

Are ever in mine eare:
Deep-graves, Deaths-heads, and Charnell-bones
Before me, still appeare.
And, when asleep I fall,
In hope to finde some ease,
My dreames, to me, are worst of all,
And fright me more than these. (18)

Wither's verses offer one of the clearest accounts of a common psychological aftereffect of combat, namely what modern medicine has recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder.[5] It is useful to offer a brief definition of this debilitating condition here. The American Psychiatric Association defines PTSD according to its symptoms, their duration, and the nature of the traumatising event. Symptoms fall into three categories: re-experiencing (e.g., relentless nightmares, intrusive imaginings and hallucinations, and flashbacks), hyper-arousal (e.g., sleeplessness, anxiety, enhanced startle), and phobias (e.g., fear of fire after experiencing burns). These must be persistent and impair the individual's function to some degree—thus, the symptoms must be mentally and/or physically disabling (Satel 42). Wither's post-combat condition presents several readily recognisable PTSD symptoms: this soldier suffers from intrusive imaginings, flashbacks, anxiety, and nightmares.

In a period of resettlement and readjustment, these accounts of personal trauma published in the Restoration reflect a growing interest in and awareness of the damages done to the mind by war. They illustrate the range of either direct sufferers of psychological war trauma or those who could relate to the experience, as well as the general public's interest in the topic—Wither's 1643 account was republished in 1644 and 1661. However, while the examples presented above signal attempts at the emplotment of war trauma, the near inexpressible nature of traumatic experiences was not lost on seventeenth-century writers; clear references are made to what we would now describe as an awareness of the limitations of trauma narration. For example, the diarist John Evelyn recognised clear boundaries for what might be expressed: "I will not go too far in repeating the sorrowes which are vanish't, or uncover the buried memory of the evils past" (4). Evelyn is evidently conscious, in 1661, of the continued power of traumatic war memories and the potential danger of confronting them through explicit articulation. Another commentator describes the inherent boundaries and struggles of trauma narration: "Yea the greatest sins, Rebellion, murther, Rapine, usurpation, and what not unheard of inhumanities

till these late times, which to demonstrate fully, would require an indefatigable pen, and large volume, the subject so large; however, I will say what I can" (T. B. 5). While the primary meaning here may plausibly be related to the great quantity of inhumanities, the author's words are haunted by the understanding that trauma narration involves re-traumatization and represents an act that will inevitably reach a breaking point for the traumatized narrating self. It is once again Wither who illustrates this point most clearly:

> My Pen I re-assum'd; and (full of matter)
> Sate down to write: but ere I ought exprest,
> The trumpet sounding, all my thoughts did scatter,
> And gave me, since that houre, but little rest.
> Destructive times, distractive muzings yeeld,
> Expect not therefore method now of me,
> But such as fits Minerva in the Field,
> Where Interruptions and Confusions be. . . . (2–3)

These extracts reflect upon the difficulty of articulating a traumatic experience in any meaningful and extended way. They highlight an awareness of the incapacitating nature of psychological damage, while also making clear their authors' desires to attempt a narration or remembrance of the troubled past as a method of working through the trauma. Frequently, authors of English Civil War memories underline the difficulty of recalling and adequately describing their distressing experiences in the wars. They simultaneously express a desire to remain silent but paradoxically are moved to attempt to describe their experiences. Indeed, not only do chroniclers express the difficulty in describing their troubled memories, but they also stress the inadequacies of the available mediums with which to make their descriptions. No sheet of paper is large enough, no pen can endure a subject so large. Evidently, the authors are not trying to forget, but rather to encourage remembering and actively narrate their sufferings.[6] Wither's reflections are particularly helpful in demonstrating that writers recognised how mental trauma could impede and impact recall. The imagined sounding of the trumpet in the above verse provides the link between the commencement of battle, or the trauma event, and the beginning of the process of trauma transcription. The chaos of battle is transferred by Wither to the unavoidable chaos of trauma recall and narration. In this context, Evelyn's description of traumatic memories as "buried" assumes importance, indi-

cating that the psychological trauma has not been forgotten but rather, to use a Freudian term, repressed.

In fighting against traumatic memory repression the mid-seventeenth century authors seem to attempt to construct what modern traumatology terms a process of trauma creation, but are disabled by the nature of the trauma and so they cannot "demonstrate fully" (Alexander 307); they can only "say what [they] can" (T. B. 5). Similarly, in a deliberate effort to depict the troubled past in his lines of verse discussed above, Wither must excuse himself: "Expect not therefore method now of me," he pleads, as his "re-assum'd pen" is insufficient in the face of the inexpressible. Even while these passages acknowledge the insufficiencies of pen and ink in adequately describing trauma, they reveal a recognition of the existence of several traumatization and PTSD traits. Examples include mentions of scattered thoughts, intrusive dreams, distractive musings, interruptions, and confusion. As trauma theorist Cathy Caruth explains, the response to the "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" frequently "occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). These occurrences are frequently mentioned in the print sources of the early Restoration years when reflecting back on the violent past.[7]

More than the attempts to describe the traumatic event itself, the very existence of descriptions of traumatization symptoms, of trauma's manifestations, also serves to highlight the interplay between the individual's struggle to come to terms with war trauma and the national collective psyche's struggle to do so. There are no clear lines of demarcation between individual and collective trauma; indeed, there is significant overlap. Public print is the arena in which personal trauma and cultural traumatisation intersect and where the former feeds or even generates the latter. Print creates distance between the author and reader in a way that face-to-face conversation does not, and consequently the written trauma account becomes depersonalized and more broadly internalized by its readership. In other words, the individual voice morphs into a communal voice through the medium of print and, in this instance, the individual accounts of trauma are transposed onto the national psyche. There is no generally accepted name for the category of mass traumatization, but the term "collective trauma" captures most aspects.[8]

Collective trauma occurs "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their fu-

ture identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 1). Thus, traumatic events and experiences, such as civil wars, become incorporated on a collective scale into narratives and memories of the nation's past, influencing the manner in which they are represented in the present, and consequently the effect they have on the collective's conceptions of their present identities. Sir Edmund Pierce illustrates this shift in self-identification: "Was there ever upon earth any state and society of men, who in so few years have endured such, and so many bitter pangs, . . . and we, poor hackney'd, spurr'd and galled people, . . . be we in a dream all this while?" (*Anglorum Singultus* 4–6). While personal trauma, as discussed above, is often represented in disjointed and fragmentary ways, collective trauma representation requires a more coherent processing of the traumatic past for the purposes of the collective's present circumstances. The following pamphlet extract serves to illustrate this further:

> But thou, Oh England! Cans't not hear the Voice in thy own inventions; The trampling of Horses, the noise of the Drums, the Clashing of Swords, the noise of the Hammers . . . and the many projects in your heads, your great gains, and sometimes great losses, the distractions in your families and amongst your friends. (Covel 3–4)

This quotation as well as Pierce's words not only demonstrate the restrictive and disabling nature of PTSD, but also signal how the employment of trauma language to explain the past can create a sense of group solidarity. The authors and their readers share in the same trauma narrative, thereby fabricating and contributing to the propagation of collective cultural memories of the troubled past. As Lisa Starks-Estes explains, the symptoms of early modern trauma exist individually as "internalizations in the brain" and then extend to "the world beyond" (40). The pamphlet passages discussed earlier use inclusive language and direct forms of speech, addressing their readers directly ("ye"), generally ("we"), or collectively ("England"), and in doing so they "expand the circle of the we [the general collective]" sharing the trauma and its residual disabling nature, thereby making it cultural (Alexander 1). Pierce comments on the way traumatic experiences of many individuals are thus projected onto the nation as a whole: "these vast frights, terrors, wasting divisions, and confusions which we dayly feel and suffer" (*Vox Vere Anglorum* 11).

Although trauma is inherently difficult to narrate, the construction of a national trauma narrative can be therapeutic on those occasions when the hor-

rors of the catastrophe do not overwhelm the human capacity to describe what happened.[9] Modern psychotraumatology has conceptualised this process as "narrative exposure therapy" or "testimony therapy" (McPherson 30). The examples cited above illustrate an instinctive grasp of the therapeutic value of a publicly available trauma narrative, and attempt to invest disabling trauma memories with meanings that allowed for palliative communal engagement with the recent past.[10] That something of a rush of cultural memory production occurred during the early Restoration years is not surprising: the return of the monarchy, and its overt intention to restore society to pre-trauma conditions meant that the obligatory temporal remove, or the necessary post-ness of PTSD, had been reached.

The narration of traumatic experience, always a highly selective process, is essential for dealing with trauma: as Nigel Hunt asserts, "storytelling is not optional—it is something we have to do. We are compelled by our nature to create narratives" (115). In our efforts to tell stories of the past, we "make meaningful sense of experiences through the use of language and stories. This relationship between narrative, self and identity is central to our understanding of the response to trauma" (Hunt 115). The early Restoration years were characterized by an extensive effort in text to respond to the divisive and disabling trauma of the Civil War, with frequent occurrences of words such as *accord*, *reconciliation*, *healing*, and *settling*. In fact, these terms may plausibly be considered substitutes for those often still found within modern day trauma theory, such as *overcome*, *deal with*, or *work through*.[11] In making use of the means of dissemination that were available (for example, relatively affordable pamphlets and broadsheets), English Civil War trauma narratives, such as those referred to in this study, could be embedded on a collective level. An example of this can be found in Wither's description of a non-combat situation during the war:

> If we remember, that the mazed Father,
> And trembling Mother, in the winter-night,
> Were forc'd, in haste, without their cloathes, to gather
> Their children up, and, with them take flight,
> Through fields, and boggs, and woods, with naked feet,
> Lesse fearing thirst, and hunger, frost and snow. (53)

Narrating a past event through the use of a concrete example but placing it within the context of a generic family allows the trauma to be grasped, even to be imaginatively (re)experienced, by a wide readership of the scene depicted,

thus allowing for a collective memory of the traumatic past to be generated. Other commentators focused on harmful psychological trauma by framing the collective experience in terms of a general benightedness, recalling "dismall actions, which the atrocity of the war had enveloped us as in a thick darknesse" (Coniers 2). In another example, the royalist Peter Hausted writes:

> And good Night Land-lord, when will it be Day?
> ('Tis hard to give, easier to take away)
> So faint our hopes be that the sprightly Morne
> Should evermore make her Desir'd Return.
> That they have hardly left a Cock to say
> To our sad Hearts, Cheare up, it will be Day. (16)

While Hausted retains an oppositional stance in his expression of regret, his emphasis on collective experience and the harmful and disabling effect of the war on the nation is an overarching feature of early Restoration accounts of the Civil War. More often than not, the reading nation is included and embodied in nonpartisan trauma narratives, as "ourselves, against ourselves" become "slaught'rers of each other" (Wither 13–15).

In addition to visions of darkness, the language of illness or disease and descriptions of the disabled body are frequently utilized in representations of the war's effects, demonstrating an effort to make sense of, define, and describe evidence of psychological trauma's existence. Describing the collective residual trauma of the recent past, or "the Soars which lye raw before every mans eyes" (*Salmasius His Buckler* 7), one pamphleteer understands the effect of trauma on the nation as a cancer-ridden, disabled body: "Lean, Blind, and Lame that thou doest groane beneath Thy cares, . . . And much good do'it ye with your Misery, . . . The Cancer is almost Epidemical" (Hausted 4). Other comparisons of psychological trauma with the physical disease of cancer may be readily found in contemporary accounts:

> Without Head or Tail; all in Obscurity
> Are involved, none knowing where to stay,
> Nor what way to move, some Retrograde
> Like Cancer. . . . (J. G. B. 5)

It is useful to dwell on the primary evidence here, especially to demonstrate the pervasive nature of the discourse of national illness and disability during the early Restoration. The Civil War and its consequences were, in the popular

imagination, a debilitating disease suffered on a national level: "a Civil Warre a Land infects" was a common chorus (Cooper 5). In a clear parallel with the physical and psychological trauma suffered by the individual soldier, the body politic exhibits symptoms of seemingly incurable decay. Wither writes,

> How great is our distresse!
> How grievious is our sin!
> That ev'ry thing doth more increase,
> The Plague, that we are in! (19)

Similarly, in *A Relation*, the author writes,

> For the grand disease that bred,
> Nature could not weane it.
> From the foot unto the head,
> Was putrifacted treason in it:
> Doctors could no cure give. . . . (1)

Both authors identify an immobilizing, or disabling, effect of psychological trauma in the nation's apparent distress. This traumatic recall is not solely based on a physical wounding, in this case the "disease" in the body represented by the foot, but it is also based on a mental wounding, or a "disease" in the head (the passage undoubtedly has political overtones, too). Indeed, this type of mental disease has no physical "cure" as there is no physical wound—one is strongly reminded of the example of the Cornish footman discussed above. Occasionally commentators took the analogy of physical and mental wounds to the extreme, reaching a point of almost complete bodily disintegration and a concurrent loss of identity: one writer relates that "the War hath fought it self out of doors, and remains like a Skeleton" (Coniers 2).

The discourse of individual psychological trauma and physical disability, in particular language and scenarios that may plausibly be linked to PTSD, such as mental reenactments (e.g., hallucinations, intrusive imaginings) and flashbacks, is also visible in collective trauma narratives. Usually referring to combat trauma, reenactment is "less a story than a fragment of a story, representing a larger and longer disaster, but without beginning, middle, or end" (Talbott 438). In this sense, reenactments extend beyond their contexts. Reenactments are strikingly visual, and sufferers of this type of traumatisation often describe scenes of horror from the position of a current observer of the event, such as in the following lines of verse:

> In Meadowes, where our sports were wont to be,
> (and, where we playing wantonly have laine)
> Men sprawling in their blood, we now do see;
> Grim postures of the dying and the slaine.
> And where sweet musique hath refreshed the eare,
> Sad groans, of ghosts departing, now we heare.
> In ev'ry Field, in ev'ry Lane, and Street,
> In ev'ry House (almost in ev'ry Place)
> With Cries, and Teare, and Loud-Complaints we meet,
> And, each one thinks his own, the saddest case. (Wither 16)

The present-tense frame of this trauma flashback as well as the collective "we" de-individualizes and de-temporalizes the harrowing experience, reflecting an ongoing traumatization of the collective that is usually associated with individual cases of PTSD. Usually for this type of debilitating psychological damage, "the re-enactments of combat trauma exist outside time; they abide in an eternal present; they fail to distinguish now from then" (Talbott 440). Because of the collapsed temporal distance between the events described and the act of reading, readers of the 1661 republication of Wither's popular pamphlet were re-living, rather than recalling, the traumatic event. In addition, the pamphlet's republication may signal a rise in the collective working through of the national trauma of the previous two decades and, significantly, how this process blurred the lines between individual and collective trauma.

What becomes apparent in the trauma narratives published during the early years of the Restoration, in particular those associated with the psychological damage caused by the Civil War, is that the psychological impairment of the whole nation emerges from that of the individual. In a country suffering from the repercussions of significant intestine upheaval and destruction, the collective is imagined as suffering the same injuries and debilitating wounds as the traumatized individual. If the puzzling psychological impairment of others had the power to render them unintelligible to observers during the war, as in the case of the Cornish footman with whom we began this essay, trauma narratives make no distinction between the individual and the collective. The otherness of the traumatized individual becomes comprehensible in the shared pain of the collective experience.

Hunt rightly warns us that "the terminology used to describe trauma is very recent, so we have to be cautious about interpreting what authors from the past were saying. People in previous eras did not only describe things

differently—they *were* different, . . . they were used to death in a way that few people in the West are now used to it" (14). Similarly, Deborah Willis warns us against the ahistorical and universal tendency of trauma theory and reminds us that an awareness of the specific culture will define what it experiences as trauma in the first place (29). These warnings are prudent—we should remember that the experience of death in the early modern period was different from that of our modern age. Death was more familiar, not least through disease, and more visible. However, it is important to distinguish between quotidian, natural deaths and deliberately inflicted, violent deaths experienced on a large scale. Significantly, instances of brutal state executions diminished throughout the seventeenth century, and by mid-century it was becoming rare for people to be mutilated and disemboweled as part of public punishments.[12] There is no evidence that the horror of battlefield carnage would have been more palatable to and more easily processed by a Civil War soldier than a modern soldier. One war scholar notes, "While the pace of battle has quickened and its technical complexity advanced, at root combat still involves soldiers risking their lives. In its fundamentals, the stress of battle has not changed as troops in the teeth arms are still required to kill or be killed" (Jones 541).[13] The seventeenth-century voices cited in this essay suggest that a soldier's psychological response to witnessing severe physical trauma to the human body and extraordinarily violent scenes has not significantly changed over the last four hundred years, even if an aspect of relativism must be maintained in this respect.[14] In fact, the available sources suggest that the violence of the English Civil War caused significant psychological trauma, to both individuals and the collective, and that the period saw an increase in awareness of the palliative effects of narrating trauma and of a need to give psychological trauma a physical existence in the form of print.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of "shell shock," see Hunt 17–24.

2. It is estimated that one in every four English males was enlisted to fight between 1642 and 1646, and that approximately 190,000 (or 3.7 percent) of the English population died in the conflict (Carlton 340). To put this into perspective, the population loss as a result of the First World War in Britain as a whole was 2.61 percent (Carlton 214).

3. Donagan explains, "The reputation of the English Civil War is unusually benign. Its literature of atrocity is minor and low key compared with the horrifying accounts and repellent illustrations of events of the Thirty Years' War and the Irish Rebellion of 1641" (1137).

4. See Worden 3.

5. PTSD was formally recognized in 1980 with the disorder's inclusion by the American Psychological Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

6. For example, Murphy's recent article on the Civil War writings of Lucy Hutchinson explains that Hutchinson's response to the crisis was to employ her writing to "perform a series of improvisations in order to make sense of contemporary events" (88). Moreover, Murphy suggests that Hutchinson's experience of the Civil Wars allowed her to make use of a formal strategy of dissociating herself in order to assume the voice of narrator, and that this narrative strategy is also detectible in the Earl of Clarendon's civil war writings (91). In making this suggestion, Murphy refers to Keeble's "The Colonel Shadow" (237).

7. These occurrences are also mentioned in other forms of documentation from the early Restoration years. In his analysis of the testimonies and petitions put forth by royalist veterans after the Restoration, Stoyle has noted with regard to the old soldiers' memories of the Civil Wars that "the testimony of the royalist veterans shows that the horror of that experience never faded from their minds" (214).

8. For a discussion of what "collective trauma" may encompass, see Ehrenreich 19. In using the term, Ehrenreich refers to events that are categorized by the more or less simultaneous displacement of vast numbers of people and aspects such as the destruction of families, entire villages, and traditional ways of life; the unravelling of pre-existing social structures; the terrorization of victims and bystanders; and massive upheavals in human relationships, activities, trusting connections, and culture itself.

9. See Gray and Oliver 3.

10. Exploring early modern military culture and its translation into Elizabethan drama, Cahill analyses the theater's special role in providing "a public space for the collective re-enacting of the incomprehensible and, with that, the possibility of a cultural 'working through' of what might otherwise resist psychic assimilation" (139). Similarly, Willis's analyses the narration of trauma in *Titus Andronicus* and suggests that Shakespeare's play "might shed an interesting light on current debates about the importance of retelling the trauma story through narrative" (51). Although these examples refer to an earlier period and focus on the literary form and dramatic portrayal of trauma, they serve to reinforce the argument that the early modern period saw a growing interest in and awareness of psychological trauma and its narration.

11. See Kabir 73.

12. Ruff explains that "western Europeans were becoming less violent, as a society increasingly governed by manners and customs close to our own evolved in the early modern period" (5).

13. It should be noted that, while he refers to some pre-1900 examples, most of Jones's discussion is focused on twentieth- and twenty-first century wars.

14 See Nidiffer and Leach for more detail on the history of human response to mental trauma derived from combat.

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