



## A Thematic Interpretation of the Selected Novels of Tim O'Brien

Ahmed Saadoon Azeez<sup>1</sup> & N. Solomon Benny<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*Department of English, College of Arts & Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam-India.*

**Corresponding Author:** Ahmed Saadoon Azeez, **Email:** sadoun88@gmail.com

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### Abstract

Author from the United States who enlisted in the military during the Vietnam War. “The majority of his works are about Vietnam during the conflict, and his latter works often investigate the life of Vietnam soldiers after the war. O'Brien is perhaps most known for his book, which was published in 1990 and titled *The Things They Carried*. This book is a compilation of connected semi-autobiographical tales that were inspired by O'Brien's experiences during the war. The latter was referred to be " a masterpiece of modern war fiction" by *The New York Times* in the year 2010. *Going For Cacciato*, O'Brien's book about the conflict that was published in 1978 and won the National Book Prize, is another reason for the author's widespread reputation. In spite of the fact that O'Brien is most known for his writings on the Vietnam War, he is also highly regarded as a teacher and instructor of creative writing. From 2003 to 2012, he was the holder of an endowed chair in the Master of Fine Arts programme at Texas State University–San Marcos. The purpose of this article is to provide thematic interpretations on a selection of Tim O'Brien's works.”

**Keywords-:** English literature, themes, Novels

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tim O'Brien is one of the most prominent figures in modern American writing, and his reputation precedes him. As a veteran of the Vietnam War, he is most recognized for the manner in which he has described his experiences throughout the war, paying particular attention to the literary intricacies. According to the opinions of a number of reviewers, he is the most well-known author working within the genre of Vietnam War authors. In 1973 he wrote in his memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me up and Ship Me Home*, is hailed as a masterful chronicle of the experience of serving in the Vietnam War, as well as in 1978 in his novel *Going after Cacciato*, is hailed as one of the best novels dealing with the conflict. Both of these works were written by him. In his writing, O'Brien often explores the personal guilt he feels as a result of having taken part in a conflict that he did not morally approve of. He examined several other options before eventually deciding to fight in Vietnam. "In the end, though, I was unable to withstand the possibility of being rejected by my family, my nation, my friends, or my community. I behaved like a coward. I vacationed in Vietnam" (O'Brien, 1976).

O'Brien's work is characterized by a persistent blurring of the barriers between fact and fiction. He does this to emphasize the contrasts between story-telling and truth-telling, but he does so in a way that leaves the distinction up to interpretation. Although later books by O'Brien, such as *Tomcat in Love* (1998) and *July, July* (2002), do not directly address the Vietnam War, echoes of the author's experiences may be found throughout these works. In 1946, O'Brien was reared in the town of Worthington, Minnesota, by his parents, William T. O'Brien and Ava Schulz O'Brien. O'Brien was born in Austin, Minnesota. After receiving his degree in political science from Macalester College in St. Paul in 1968, he was immediately enlisted in the military. His speciality was in international relations. Alpha Company of the 198th Infantry was where O'Brien served throughout his time in the military. O'Brien received his training at Fort Lewis in Washington. O'Brien devoted his most successful novel, "The Things They Carried" which was published in 1990, to the soldiers of Alpha Company. He served as a foot soldier in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970, at which time he was sent to the Quang Ngai province close to My Lai one year after the tragic slaughter that took place there. He sustained wounds and was later presented with the Purple Heart (O'Brien & Cranston, 1990, P.24).

Once O'Brien was discharged from the army, he enrolled in graduate school at Harvard University, but he did not stay long enough to finish the Ph.D. program and departed in 1976. After gaining experience there as an intern, he was hired full-time as a correspondent covering national affairs at The Washington Post. When he had established himself in the publishing industry, he decided to devote all of his time to writing. *If I Die in a War Zone, Box Me Up, and Ship Me Home*, a book of memoirs that also exhibits substantial attention on fictional style, was a popular as well as a critical success. O'Brien's experience as a foot soldier is reflected in this collection of vignettes, which struck a chord with a large audience due to the personal character of the stories and the vivid language used in them. With the publication of *Northern Lights* in 1975, he went on to write *Going for Cacciato*, a book that cemented his place as an important figure in the canon of American fiction and earned him the 1979 National Book Award in Fiction (Kakutani, 2012). Second, *Northern Lights* was released in 1975.

In his subsequent book, which was published in 1985 and titled *The Nuclear Age*, he discusses the Cold War and the possibility of a nuclear assault on the United States at the time. After that, O'Brien published *The Things They Carried*, a collection of short stories that many literary critics regard to be a novel due to the interconnected nature of the different tales within the book. *The Things They Carried* is a novel that was written about the soldiers of Alpha Company and a character named Tim O'Brien. It was awarded the prestigious Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in France, as well as the Heartland Prize by the Chicago Tribune, and it was also considered for the Pulitzer Prize. After the end of the Vietnam War, the events of *In the Lake of the Woods* 1994 take place. It was chosen as the greatest piece of fiction published in 1994 by Time magazine and was awarded the James Fenimore Cooper Award by the Society of American Historians. O'Brien is the current holder of the Roy F. at Texas State University, he holds the Joann Cole Mitte Chair in Creative Writing on alternate years, and he has been a part of the graduate programme with the Creative Writing faculty since 1999 (Perry, 2006). In addition, he teaches in the creative writing program at Texas State University.

The message of *If I Die in a War Zone, Box Me up and Send Me Home* resonates with those who are connected to the conflict as well as those who are not connected to the war. The unconventional tone of the author, which can be heard throughout the collection of short tales that make up the book, surprised both readers and reviewers. The book delves into topics such as the blurring of

fact and fiction, as well as the goal behind the act of writing, all of which have been recurring themes in O'Brien's subsequent works as well as topics that are investigated throughout the book.

The events of *Northern Lights* do not take place in Vietnam; rather, the story focuses on the aftermath of the war in the home of two brothers: one of whom has returned from the war wounded, and the other of whom stayed at their father's house and opposed the war. Under the context of a story about the connection between two brothers and the family heritage that torments them, the book discusses the ideas of home, responsibility, and the capacity to perform beyond what is expected of oneself. It is interesting to note that the hero of the story is not the returning war veteran but rather the smart married brother who is forced to make a tough choice (Herzog, 2004).

A platoon of soldiers, headed by Paul Berlin, go on a surrealistic mission in the film *Going after Cacciato* to track down and capture one of their own who has abandoned the army and is now making his way to Paris on foot. The events of this journey, as well as the pursuit itself, take place entirely within Berlin's mind. Berlin plays out the fantastical story in his head over the course of a short period of time, with reality and fantasy blending together in an innovative and ambitious attempt to explore both the horrors of war and the possibility of escaping from it. The comments of critics to this novel included comparisons to early modernist writing, in particular the works of Ernest Hemingway. Reviewers also noted the influence of the genre of magic realism. The nation of Vietnam plays no significant role in the plot of the book; rather, it is just mentioned as setting backdrop. O'Brien's effort to examine bigger concerns of family, identity, and paranoia within the culture of the United States was welcomed by several reviewers, despite the fact that *The Nuclear Age* did not meet with universal critical favor (Rosenfeld, 2004).

It has been said that *The Things They Carried* is a wonderful collection of short tales since each one can be read on its own or as part of a larger narrative that runs throughout the book. The main character, Tim O'Brien, is a foot soldier during the war and a writer who is striving to explain his views about those events twenty years later. The tales that he narrates take place both during the war and twenty years afterward. In the novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, there is a character named John Wade who has just had his political career ruined by the public revelation that he was present at the My Lai massacre, a fact that he laboured hard to hide from the public. In the novel, John Wade has just lost his political career. Several of the critics were uneasy about the fact that O'Brien did not provide conclusive answers to the many storyline problems that were raised. Details on

how Wade and his wife deal with the discovery and the cover-up, which show to the difficulty to fully know another person, are left unsolved. This highlights the fact that it is impossible to know another person.

It is generally agreed that *Tomcat in Love* is a humorous book. At the centre of the story is a stereotyped protagonist who exemplifies characteristics such as vanity, selfishness, and a desire for revenge. A reunion for a group of friends who have known each other for thirty years takes place every year in July. The disillusionment they feel as middle-aged people trying to come to terms with a loss is the primary emphasis of this story (Bruckner, 1990).

O'Brien's ambition to break out into bigger issues within his work, such as conflict between family members, treachery, gender conflict, loss of religion, and societal philosophy, has been observed by critics. Grace Paley expressed her dissatisfaction with O'Brien's effort to explore topics like insanity and the struggle of an individual to find meaning in the face of a meaningless universe in her review of *Tomcat in Love*.

O'Brien's exploration of the baby boomer generation and the topic of disillusionment was praised by a number of reviewers, despite the fact that *July, July* did not get widespread praise. O'Brien has been praised throughout his career for his work as a postmodern writer, which is a logical development of what some people view to be a postmodern battle. His overt allusions to his tales as both artefact and truth are what led to the labelling of him as a metafictional writer; this designation continues to engage detractors. His works have been referred to as both artefact and truth. Researchers have observed that O'Brien investigates the difficult nature of reality, knowledge, and the curative power of literature via the vehicles of truth, artefact, illusion, and imagination. Commenting on this aspect of O'Brien's writing as it is displayed in the short story *Spin*, Robin Blyn wrote: "[the story] offers the ambiguous, the unfinished, and the wound that will not succumb to the narrative cure. Keeping the wound open, O'Brien's text prevents the neat closure and false redemption of the traditional war story" (as cited in Ciocia, 2012, p. 227).

### **Problem Statement**

The challenge of this research is to just observe. Storytelling's connection to the truth is said to be the novel's overarching concern, according to reviewers of *The Things They Carried*. In the same spirit, they often cite Tim O'Brien's interest in transcending reality in order to reflect the facts of

his painful experiences he had during his time in Vietnam as a distinguishing aspect of the work. Commentators have pointed out that for O'Brien, the issue of authenticity and verisimilitude while describing combat memories is murky; rather, the validity of a tale is often determined by how it affects the reader. According to O'Brien, the truthfulness of a tale may be determined by whether or not it "makes the stomach believe. The impacts of battle trauma, as well as the quest for atonement and healing, are said to be addressed in the tales, according to the reviewers. The significance of memory serves as a central focus throughout the tales included in this anthology. Cowardice is another important worry that is explored throughout *The Things They Carried*. This is shown not only in the context of warfare, but also in the narrator's decision to fight in what he considers to be an unjust war. Many commentators have dissected the book's portrayals of masculinity and femininity to draw their conclusions. Both exile and alienation play a significant role in the novels, since many of the protagonists are American military veterans who, upon their return home, find that they are estranged from their former lives and tormented by their experiences during the war (Smith, 1994, p17-18).

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

1. To present the analysis of O'Brien selected novels
2. To present the fact of novel *The Things They Carried*
3. To present the fact of n the *Lake of the Woods*
4. To present an interpretation of selected novels of Tim O'Brien's
5. To present the literature review on selected novels
6. To analyse the other Novels of O'Brien's and present plot summery of this books.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1. *The Things They Carried***

Tim O'Brien, an American writer, is the author of *The Things They Carried* (1990), which is a collection of connected short tales about a platoon of American troops fighting on the ground in the Vietnam War. This is the author's third book pertaining to the war, and it is based on his experiences while serving in the 23rd Infantry Division (O'Brien, 2009).

O'Brien, in general, avoids engaging in political discussion and speech in connection with the Vietnam War. He was shocked to find that the people in his hometown seemed to have such a

limited comprehension of the conflict and the globe it included. The book *The Things They Carried* was written in part as a reaction against what the author regarded to be ignorance in the world. The year 1990 was the publication year for it by Houghton Mifflin (Herzog, 1997, p.79-104).

The author's autobiography, *If I Die in a War Zone, Pack Me Up and Send Me Home* (1973/paperback 1999), has a number of characters that are semi-autobiographical and have parallels with characters in the novel. *The Things They Carried* is an example of O'Brien's experimentation with the metafiction genre, in which the author employs verisimilitude in his writing. The line between fiction and non-fiction is blurred because to his use of genuine geographical names and the fact that he is the protagonist. In order to achieve this impact, O'Brien gives *The Things They Carried* "the shape of a war memoir" and dedicates it to the troops of the fictitious "Alpha Company." (O'Brien, 1994, p. 56) O'Brien explains that this decision was made as part of *The Things They Carried*.

### **Themes Genre**

*The Things They Carried* is a book that is set during the war. O'Brien's book is said to be comparable to the works of other authors, such as Wilfred Owen, Stephen Crane, George Orwell, and Ernest Hemingway, according to David Wyatt, a critic of literature. O'Brien's writing style is characterised by the incorporation of both fictional and factual elements into a single piece of work. When asked to describe how he blurs this line between the two genres, O'Brien says "I set out to write a book with the feel of utter and absolute reality, a work of fiction that would read like nonfiction and adhere to the conventions of a memoir: dedicating the book to the characters, using my name, drawing on my own life. This was a technical challenge. My goal was to compose a fiction with the texture, sound and authentic-seeming weight of nonfiction (Van de Voorde, 2007, p.4)."

### **Truth as Opposed to Reality**

O'Brien talks about truth and reality in relation to the story by describing, "I can say that the book's form is intimately connected to how I, as a human being, tend to view the world unfolding itself around me. It's sometimes difficult to separate external 'reality' from the internal processing of that reality." (Chen , 1998, p.81). One of the other themes that is highlighted in the short story "Good Form" is when the narrator makes a distinction between "story truth" and "happening truth."

## **Imagination/Comedy**

Another significant idea that O'Brien brings up is the significance of using one's imagination and playing pretend. O'Brien goes on to say, "And that is, I think, key to why I'm a fiction writer. If that element were not present, I'd be doing nonfiction. Or I wouldn't be a writer at all." (Schroeder et al., 1988, p.116). Tim O'Brien also alludes to the difficulty in using dark comedy as a theme by saying, "My guess is that I'll be remembering this for a long time" (Heberle, 2001, p.257) He says this because he believes that the power of the imagination in ordinary human lives.

## **Morality**

In addition, O'Brien demonstrates the ongoing conflict of morality throughout the drama that takes place during the Vietnam War. In a recent study conducted at Brigham Young University, researchers examined the moral conundrums that might arise for service members when they make the transition from civilian to military life. In O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* mentioned that "the concept of morality is complicated by the treatment of violence and a connection between violence and pleasure; as a result, morality must be defined on a speculative level." (as cited in Khatchadourian, 2, p. 136).

## **Belief**

Also, the character Tim makes a reference to creating the book *Going After Cacciato*, which the author Tim had previously written and published. The fact that the historical period is filled with individuals who are opposed to the action of war serves as the inspiration for the story's central message, which is to have faith in the people around you and to have trustworthy allies by your side. Because of this, the individuals who are forced to participate in the mutual hatred join together in order to survive (Hughes, 1998).

## **3.2. Lake of the Woods**

The primary narrative thread often deviates into flashbacks of important events in John Wade's life before the present. "His youth is almost often brought up as the time when he first began to assume the role of Sorcerer. John's alcoholic father often subjected him to verbal and emotional abuse when he was a youngster, despite the fact that other children looked up to him because of his public character. John was a frequent customer at Karra's Studio of Magic, and it was there that



he acquired the Guillotine of Death, which had previously been purchased by his father. At the passing of his father, John's world came crashing down, and he found solace in the practise of magic (Peacock, 2013).

Despite Wade's reclusive demeanour, he was able to develop a close relationship with his future wife Kathy when they were both students at the same university. John had an affair with Kathy, and he was aware of her affair with a dentist. John also spied on Kathy, and she was aware of it. Throughout the time that John was serving in Vietnam, he and Kathy kept in touch via letters; some of John's messages made Kathy feel uneasy. John allowed himself to get completely engrossed in his role as Sorcerer. He is represented as a member of Charlie Company, which was one of the companies who participated in the massacre at My Lai. John severed his ties to the Business while he was employed in a position that required him to maintain documents (Herzog & O'Brien, 1997).

After the war, John joined the political arena. His campaign was coordinated by Tony Carbo, who is focused on the business world, and he was elected as lieutenant governor of Minnesota. Later, he competed for a seat in the United States Senate. In spite of the fact that she really desired to become a mother, Kathy ultimately decided to get an abortion at one point (Israel, 1997) because John was of the opinion that their having a child would be detrimental to his political career.

John and Kathy decide to spend a holiday at a cabin in Lake of the Woods after John's defeat in the senate election, which was a landslide and during which it was revealed that John was involved in the My Lai massacre. They are upset by the disclosure of John's Vietnam secrets, but they put on a good front for the sake of appearances. John wakes up in the middle of the night and makes the decision to put some water on to boil for tea. In doing so, he recites the phrase "*Kill Jesus*" while pouring boiling water over a few houseplants. He recalls sliding back into bed with Kathy, but when he woke up the next morning, she was gone (O'Brien, 2006).

After spending the day going about the neighbourhood and determining that the boat is missing, John has a conversation with the Rasmussens, who are his nearest neighbours. After waiting for a while, they decided to contact the sheriff and arrange a search team. The authorities are wary of John because of his unruffled manner and his refusal to assist in the hunt for the missing person. The hunt is continued with the participation of John and Kathy's sister. After a period of eighteen

days, the search party is terminated, and the inquiry into John's activities is stepped up. John paddles north on the lake after renting a boat from Claude and stocking up on provisions at the Mini-Mart. O'Brien (2006) Claude was the last person to converse to John over the boat's radio, and she thinks that he seems confused.

During the course of the book, O'Brien presents a variety of other options. It's possible that Kathy went too fast across the lake, encountered a rough spot of water, and was subsequently thrown into the water, where she eventually drowned. It's possible that she became disoriented when she was out in the forest and ran out of food and water. It is also possible that John went back to the bedroom with the boiling water and poured it over her face, causing her to suffer severe burns that ultimately proved fatal. Following that, he had the option of sinking the boat and the corpse in the lake by adding pebbles to make it heavier. Alternatively, the occurrence might have been John's last spectacular magic performance, which was a vanishing act (Herzog, 2018).

It's possible that John and Kathy conspired to make her vanish, with the goal of John following her and the two of them beginning anew together. O'Brien provides specific examples and evidence to back up each of the hypotheses, but he does not draw any conclusions for the reader. O'Brien maintained that this is the most authentic method to tell a tale, despite the fact that the narrative's finale left many readers feeling frustrated and confused. That reminds me of his book, *The Things They Carried*, which is a collection of interconnected short tales with a variety of people and, at times, contrasting perspectives on the same events (O'Brien & Cranston, 1990).

The struggle that is taking place at this time in the narrative takes place in late 1986 in the Northwest Angle in northern Minnesota. John and Kathy have made a conscious decision to be here in this desolate location because they want to distance themselves from the anxiety and disappointment of the election's outcome. The current state of politics in the United States is a factor in both the primary conflict of the novel and the dynamic that develops between Kathy and John. Throughout the course of the election, the pair put their romance on the back burner in order to focus on finding solutions to the political problems.

### **3.3. Other writings**

Early reactions to *Northern Lights* were varied; nonetheless, numerous reviewers pointed out that Ernest Hemingway was a significant inspiration for the novel's writing style, atmosphere, and

overall tone. "According to the observations of one reviewer, the authoring style of this work by O'Brien is a "deliberate parody" of Hemingway's ( as cited in Berman,1988, p.2).

At the time of its release, *Northern Lights* was widely regarded as a first work by a young author that had a great deal of potential. During a 50-year writing career (as of the year 2023), it is now considered to be O'Brien's book that has the most errors (Goh, 2017).

*Going After Cacciato*, like many other tales that deal with issues of psychological trauma, features a number of significant uncertainties about the nature of the events that take place and the sequence in which they take place. The majority of the events in the novel take place in a nonlinear order.

According to O'Brien's interpretation, the central theme of the story is that serving as a soldier in Vietnam for the duration of a standard tour of duty requires a great deal of walking. If one were to put all of the walking they did in a straight line, they would arrive in Paris, which is where Cacciato is going (Bonney, 2016).

The main character, Paul Berlin, is a soldier who is unhappy with his job. Paul Berlin ruminates on things that happened in the past and the chain of circumstances that brought him to the point where he fantasises about travelling to Paris while he is on watch duty one night. The determination and bravery required to pursue one's goals and ambitions is a recurrent topic that is often brought to life via Paul Berlin's reveries.

Cacciato, who is always shown as content and capable of taking care of himself, is the target of Berlin and his fellow combatants. Cacciato's actions are frequently presented as those of a guy who is not especially intelligent or talented, but who is untroubled by the broader concerns of the war itself (Bonney, 2016). This portrayal is inaccurate. Cacciato was not disturbed by the larger questions of the war itself.

This reference to *Alice in Wonderland* serves to expose the novel as surrealistic fiction. It occurs in the chapter titled *Tunneling Toward Paris*, and it describes how the protagonists leave the unending tunnels by "falling out" exactly as they fell in. This surrealism also makes an appearance earlier in the text, on page 27, when Cacciato is seen flying off of a mountain.

Thomas Chippering travels back to his (fictitious) hometown of Owego, Minnesota, as part of his illogical response to the dissolution of his marriage. After exhausting all of his emotional

resources, he sneaks into the backyard of the home where he spent his childhood. Mrs. Robert (Donna) Kooshof, who is now living there, discovers him and, to her surprise, finds herself drawn to him. Unthinkingly, Donna gives Tom her consent to carry out his ludicrous plan of retribution against his former wife, Lorna Sue, her brother, Herbie, and Lorna Sue's new spouse (known to the reader only as "the tycoon"). When they were young, Tom, Lorna Sue, and Herbie have had a strong friendship or, at the very least, have been pals. The fact that Herbie told Lorna Sue that Tom had been maintaining a lifetime record of his affairs and dalliances was the immediate precipitating factor in her decision to end her relationship with Tom (Harvey, 1998).

Tom doesn't let his job as a professor at the University of Minnesota get in the way of his plans to get vengeance on his former colleagues. Tom is always ready to help his female students with their writing assignments, as he has done in previous years. Nevertheless, at this point, one of these students has decided to accuse Tom of engaging in sexual harassment. After being let off from his work, Tom moves back in with Donna in Owego. Tom gets a position as a teacher at the Owego Community Day Care Center, where he begins teaching Shakespeare to children who are four years old (IMDb, 1998).

Innuendo will play a role in Tom's attempt to get retribution by sabotaging Lorna Sue's newlywed bliss. If things don't go Tom's way here, he has every intention of torching the Zylstras' home in Owego. Tom does this by collecting items such as mason jars, gasoline, and firecrackers. But the problem is solved when Lorna Sue takes Tom's explosives and threatens to blow up her own home. This is the moment when the story is resolved. Tom is able to conquer his reliance on Lorna Sue and go on with his life. At the conclusion of the story, Tom and Donna go to an island in the Caribbean, where they have a happy and fulfilling life together. While Tom has not completely overcome his flirting inclination, it is under control (Kersnowski, 2013).

There is still another layer of intrigue hidden inside the novel. There are times when the narrator speaks to the reader directly, alluding to a failed marriage that apparently throws "you" (the reader) for a loop since "your" spouse fled off to Fiji with a brunette. There is going to be no explanation provided for this side story.

July takes place in the year 2000, and the alumni of the Darton Hall College class of 1969 are finally getting together for their 30th reunion, although one year later than planned. O'Brien

follows the ensemble cast which includes a Vietnam vet, a draught dodger, a minister, a bigamous housewife, and a manufacturer of mops as they drink, flirt, and reminisce about life's defining moments. Rather than concentrating on a linear plot, O'Brien focuses on a dozen characters and the defining moments in their lives. There are also stories of previous times in each character's life when they went through something that altered them permanently interspersed throughout. O'Brien reveals past loves and old betrayals that still haunt his readers by jumping across decades. Dorothy was unable to follow Billy to Canada; Spook arranged a double marriage; Ellie watched her lover drown; and Paulette, in a moment of desperation, disgraced herself and ruined her career (Kersnowski, 2013).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The interpretation of a selection of team's books is presented in this study. Tim O'Brien is an author of several works; for the sake of our study, we choose to focus on a few of his novels, including *Things They Carried* and *Lake of the Woods*, among others. In the short story *Good Form*, which is a part of O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*, the author makes a distinction between "story-truth," which he defines as the truth of fiction, and "happening-truth," which he defines as the truth of fact or occurrence, and he writes that "story-truth is sometimes truer than happening-truth." O'Brien makes the argument that the reality of a tale is its emotional truth. In contrast, the feelings that are evoked by a fictitious tale are sometimes more authentic than those that are a direct consequence of reading merely the facts. This exemplifies one characteristic of O'Brien's writing style, which is a blurring of the traditional boundary between fiction and reality that most of us make. O'Brien will take aspects from his personal life, but he will frame them in a narrative style that is either self-conscious or metafictional. In the same vein, there are specific groups of tales in *The Things They Carried* that seem to contradict one another, and there are other stories that are intended to "undo" the suspension of disbelief that was built by the stories that came before them. For instance, the section titled "Speaking of Courage" is followed by the section titled "Notes," which outlines the ways in which "Speaking of Courage" is fictitious." Another illustration of how O'Brien will blur the usual divisions between reality and fiction that we construct in our minds is provided here.

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