

War, Guilt, and the Shattered American Dream: A Study of Trauma and Disillusionment in *Born on the Fourth of July* and Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the enduring psychological, moral, and cultural consequences of war through a comparative analysis of *Born on the Fourth of July* and three First World War poems: *Futility* by Wilfred Owen, *Suicide in the Trenches* by Siegfried Sassoon, and *Break of Day in the Trenches* by Isaac Rosenberg. Drawing upon trauma theory and memory studies, the paper argues that war does not end with the cessation of armed conflict; rather, it continues to shape individual consciousness and collective memory through trauma, guilt, fractured identity, and social alienation. By analyzing Ron Kovic's transformation from an idealistic soldier to an anti-war activist alongside the poetic representations of physical suffering, psychological devastation, and moral disillusionment, the study demonstrates how both cinematic and literary narratives challenge heroic constructions of warfare. The comparative reading reveals recurring themes of loss, silence, memory, and the failure of nationalist ideals, illustrating that the true legacy of war lies in its enduring emotional and cultural aftermath. Ultimately, the paper contends that *Born on the Fourth of July* and the selected poems collectively present war not as a finite historical event but as an ongoing psychological and ethical condition that continues to influence individuals and societies long after the battlefield has fallen silent.*

Keywords: *Born on the Fourth of July*; War Trauma; Memory; Guilt;

Identity; War Poetry; Trauma Theory; Wilfred Owen; Siegfried

Sassoon; Isaac Rosenberg.

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Introduction

War is a state of mind that never really dies; it simply changes in intensity depending on the number of people who are affected and their memories of it. This concept of war living on is a major theme in Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), a movie about the life of Ron Kovic, a Vietnam veteran. The picture tells the story of Kovic's change from a brave and loyal soldier to a bitter and injured veteran who cannot escape from the war's imprint on society and even the world through his healing process. In this paper, I will demonstrate that *Born on the Fourth of July* illustrates that war is not restricted to the places where it is fought; it spreads through trauma, guilt, memory and loss of identity. Through the juxtaposition of the film and three war poems "Futility" by Wilfred Owen, "Suicide in the Trenches" by Siegfried Sassoon, and "Break of Day in the Trenches" by Isaac Rosenberg. I will show how both literature and film demonstrate that the consequences of war are not so easily eradicated. The argument will stay in the line of how war still exists even after peace is signed, and it drives individuals and countries crazy.

In the early part of the movie, Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) is depicted as a typical American boy who has total rights both patriotism and heroism through his propositions. He is very much a part of the American Dream and faith in military victory (00:05:10–00:06:45) as his opening scenes make up with bright colors, parades, and American flags. But the plot takes a different turn as the dream gradually falls apart. The purest of all Kovic's beliefs led him to the Vietnam War thinking that he was going to serve his country in the noblest way, but soon the war zone reveals the other side of the coin, which is chaos, cruelty, and humanity. The lesson learned by Kovic was through the accidental killing of a fellow soldier (00:46:12–00:47:05), which he later considered as a great turning point. He was an eyewitness to when war brings about guilt that is incarnate in him long after the gun smoke has cleared. His physical disability later becomes synonymous with his emotional and moral disability, which is a metaphor for the way in which soldiers become eternally chained between the remembrance of the past and the hope of living.

The persistent mental awareness of war is directly related to "Futility" by Wilfred Owen. Owen portrays a soldier's corpse in the snow and then questions the purpose of creation when life leads to such a wasteful end. The phrases "Move him into the sun— / Gently its touch awoke him once" (Owen 1–2) reveal that Owen perceives war as a struggle that devastates both the physical and the psychological. The poet contemplates the purpose of life amid such senseless slaughter. In the same way, Kovic, upon returning home, wonders what

his sacrifice has been when the country is not willing to take care of him. At one point, Kovic shouts in frustration, "Is this what we fought for?" (01:35:02–01:35:30). Just like the speaker in Owen's poem, Kovic believes that life and death have lost their meaning. The two pieces of art emphasize that war keeps on taking its toll on the survivors as a nightmarish moral and emotional confusion. Owen's sun that once gave life is now shining on a dead soldier, just like Kovic's patriotic faith, once bright and hopeful, now becomes a painful reminder of his lost glory.

To make the lasting presence of war evident, Oliver Stone implements various cinematographic methods. The traumatizing memories are thereby intensified through the use of flashbacks and slow-motion. Kovic's dreams (01:22:40–01:23:10) are particularly a prime example where first the shooting and later the screams can be heard over and over again, thereby illustrating Kovic's mind as being the battlefield. This is what Cathy Caruth calls "the unclaimed experience" of trauma the psychological injury that can be understood or expressed only partly (Caruth 4). Caruth views trauma not only as a remnant of the past but rather the past is continually transformed into the present. In Kovic's situation, each flashback confirms that the war keeps on tormenting; hence, it slowly becomes his character even after he leaves Vietnam. Remarkably, Oliver Stone effectively employs sound and image to produce a traumatic cinematic version akin to the way poets apply repetition and imagery to convey emotional suffering.

The homefront scenes in *Born on the Fourth of July*, besides the war, bring about another way in which war lives on through society's indifference and hypocrisy. Kovic's homecoming is shrouded in neglect and misinterpretation even though he expects respect and gratitude. While his mother does pray for his soul, she, however, does not wish to hear his suffering. The crowd that once cheered for war now shuns its veterans. Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* has the same view, when he asserts: "The war did not end cleanly; it lingered in language, dreams, and the imagination" (Fussell 178). History may mark the end of the war, but not the end of emotional or cultural impacts. Kovic's damaged body and disappointed spirit are emblematic of America's invisible wounds; it is as if she herself bears the scars of Vietnam. The protests and the anger pouring into the streets indicate that the war has cut through the nation as deeply as it has corrupted Kovic's mind.

Siegfried Sassoon's "Suicide in the Trenches" brings out the very same endangered by war over the years through the story of the young soldier who commits suicide. The phrase "He put a bullet through his brain. / No one spoke of him again" (Sassoon 7–8) is a very clear indication of how society tends to forget so soon the suffering of those that it had to fight for. Sassoon's rage is very

much in evidence in the last lines when he accuses “you smug-faced crowds with kindling eye” (Sassoon 9). This is precisely the situation that Kovic goes through when he opposes the war and is silenced by the very people that he belongs to (01:58:22–01:59:10). The poem and the film both portray war as continuance through silence, guilt, and denial. Both the soldier’s death in Sassoon’s poem and Kovic’s paralysis are caused by a society that does not want to face the human cost of its wars. Sassoon’s soldier “grinned at life in empty joy,” which is the same as Kovic who once smiled with pride in his Marine’s uniform. The two smiles, however, do not give a glimpse of the despair-filled future. Thus, Sassoon and Stone point out that the emotional aftershocks of war can be more lethal than the battle itself.

One more instant that shows the war’s persistence is Kovic’s visit to the hospital with the wounded veterans (00:54:12–00:58:40). The motion of the camera is very slow as it moves through the populous room and displays a variety of sights, amputated soldiers, some of them yelling with pain, and others just looking blankly towards the ceiling. The atmosphere is suffocating, almost as if the time has frozen in that area of the pain. It is like Owen’s “Futility,” and the silence of Sassoon’s “Suicide in the Trenches” both. The decay of the myths of the war as a heroic undertaking is a common feature of the film and the poems. They spotlight instead, on its incessant presence in the guise of psychological scars and mute suffering. The hospital is a literal symbol of the war’s infinity, a site where the fighting rages even after the firing has stopped.

Isaac Rosenberg’s “Break of Day in the Trenches” shall also be the subject of discussion regarding the odd recollection of wars that such poets present. The poet presents a rat that wanders back and forth between the English and German trenches, indicating the existence of the some creatures that are free even during war. The speaker tells, “Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew / Your cosmopolitan sympathies” (Rosenberg 7–8). The rat then starts to signify the flow of life between the adversaries, while the human race remains in the cycle of destruction. The movie *Born on the Fourth of July* portrays a similar scenario in the different moments of Kovic’s homecoming and his perception of people living their everyday lives while he is a prisoner of his wheelchair. Focusing on his face, the camera captures his expression as he observes the activity of the kids (01:12:45–01:13:20), and it could not be clearer how time flows for others but not for him. Like the soldiers in Rosenberg’s poem, Kovic experiences his disconnection from a world that continues as if nothing happened. Both the poem and the film imply that while war might look distant, its shadow still covers the lives of the people it has touched.

The memory of war prevails in the mental lives of the survivors even when the physical fighting has ceased. The movie *Born on the Fourth of July* depicts how Ron Kovic harbors the Vietnam War inside him like a wound that never gets healed. This inwardness of war is also pointed out in the poems “Futility,” “Suicide in the Trenches,” and “Break of Day in the Trenches.” All these literary works deeply engage in the process of how memory and trauma send the soldiers back and forth between life and death. They present the argument that war remains alive in the form of memory and identity, and that peace is just an illusion.

One striking hospital scene shows Kovic screaming at the doctor for his wrong treatment, yelling, “I fought for my country!” (00:56:10–00:56:40). His rage is not just due to the pain he suffers but to the fact that the country he defended has forgotten him. Academic Paul Fussell argues that the modern war creates a situation where the individual and the patriotic ideals are always distantly apart (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 35). Kovic’s case shows this paradox—he was convinced of glory, but now sees that his agony is unperceived by the people in comfort. In the same manner, in Sassoon’s “Suicide in the Trenches,” the line that accompanies the soldier’s death “You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye” (Sassoon 9) holds the non-combatants who are silently cheering for the war without realizing its brutality responsible. Both Stone and Sassoon assert that the major conflict is not at the borders, but in the way societies hold the memory of or forget those who fought for them. The guilt of forgetting becomes a new form of violence that burns long after the war is over.

The concept of futile warfare is further connoted in Wilfred Owen’s “Futility,” whose protagonist (an already dead soldier) poses the question of life’s meaning when there is no hope. It is the poet who then, in the sunlight’s warmth, gradually slides from a very desperate situation to the feeling of despair: “Was it for this the clay grew tall?” (Owen 12). The poem gives a view of the battlefield in terms of a grave one that not only consumed mankind but also obliterated the human spirit which believed in creation and progress. In the case of Kovic according to his autobiography, “*Born on the Fourth of July*,” his spiritual collapse parallels the loss of faith. After killing a fellow soldier and being crippled, Kovic starts questioning everything that he once held true, he goes as far as doubting his religion, his country, and his very essence. The point is very well made when the boy prays out of guilt saying, “Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned” (01:14:30–01:15:10); however, no forgiveness seems to come. To put it differently, the trauma according to a leading trauma scholar Cathy Caruth is that it “is experienced too soon, too suddenly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again” (*Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4). Kovic’s dreams and flashbacks visibly depict this, the war goes

on in his mind, resurfacing through his memories. Owen's dead soldier and Kovic's living paralysis are two sides of the same truth "war never really ends;" it changes its form and moves inside the human soul.

One more unseen reason for the war continuation is silence the refusal or inability to communicate. In the movie, Kovic attempts to share his feelings of guilt about the killing of a fellow soldier with his mother, but she cuts him off, saying, "You must never say such things" (01:32:12–01:32:40). This silence is like Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches" where unexpressed pain dominates. The poem's narrator sees a rat living a carefree life and at the same time, humans are in fear: "Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew / Your cosmopolitan sympathies" (Rosenberg 7–8). The rat's life is the opposite of human suffering; it goes through the two factions, while men stay in the trenches of silence and distrust. Likewise, Kovic can't leave his house; he cannot voice his suffering as the community wants the war to be forgotten. Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, states that "physical pain destroys language, thus creating a condition that is even prior to language" (Scarry 4). Kovic and the soldiers portrayed in the poems suffer the same fate of losing their voices, their torment remains unutterable. The muteness of the war stricken is not the same as being at peace; rather, it is war carried on in a different way.

Guilt is a large part of war and that is why during his life one always feels responsible for taking lives. In the movie, Kovic makes a confession to the family of the soldier he shot (01:47:22–01:49:10). This very hard moment shows that the feeling of blame stays on even after the war has ended. The parents' silent acceptance does not liberate him; rather, it intensifies his grief. This moment brings to mind the passage in Owen's "Futility," "Think how it wakes the seeds— / Woke, once, the clays of a cold star" (Owen 3–4). Both authors are concerned with the impossibility of resuscitating life after death has seized it. Kovic's guilt indicates that the real warfront is his inner self. He is a soldier as well as a victim, a murderer as well as a mourner. The war still rages through this moral conflict, thereby revealing the fact that the past cannot be completely erased.

The movie shows the war's inextricability from the socio-political sphere of America, and Protest, broken families, and society's disillusionment with the government are all manifestations of the Vietnamese War that led to the re-definition of American identity. Theoretical academic Susan Jeffords affirms this by stating that "Vietnam films do not end the war; they reproduce it as a cultural memory that defines American masculinity and nationhood" (*The Remasculinization of America*, p. 14). The metamorphosis of Kovic from a patriotic Marine to an antiwar activist is an example of the whole scenario. When

he goes to a silent march in Washington, and he screams, “We are here to tell the truth!” (02:01:50–02:02:15), the lens exposes him amidst tumult and brutality of police. This scene conveys that the war's brutality has taken over - it has spilled into streets and invaded the minds of people. The very same idea is illustrated in Sassoon's last words where he directly addresses the “smug-faced crowds” (Sassoon 9), indicating that war persists in the double standards of people who applaud the military while being indifferent to the latter's hardships. The two pieces advocate that wars are with the societies in their politics, memories, and moral contradictions.

Through these comparisons, we can see that *Born on the Fourth of July* and the selected war poems create a shared emotional landscape. They all reject glorified images of war and focus instead on its afterlives the guilt, silence, and broken faith that continue to shape individuals and nations. Each work reveals that war is not just a historical event but a living condition that passes through generations. In this way, war becomes timeless, not because of battles, but because of memory. The soldiers' wounds, both physical and emotional, become monuments of how deeply war lives on in human history.

In a similar way, Isaac Rosenberg's “Break of Day in the Trenches” tells us that even nature is affected by war. The rat travels from one trench to another, showing us the unbroken chain of life in the midst of destruction. The tone of the poet is both ironic and sympathetic; he finds beauty in the fact that life continues but at the same time he feels sad about the endlessness of war. The speaker says: “It seems you inwardly grin as you pass / Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes” (Rosenberg 9–10). This irony is very much in line with Stone's portrayal of Kovic who watches healthy men walk while he is confined to a wheelchair (01:12:45–01:13:20). Both pictures remind us that life continues, but for the soldier that life is not completely. The world's indifference is turned into another battlefield, where the memory of war will still be fighting for its significance.

Kovic in the movie's last scene is shown speaking at the 1976 Democratic National Convention (02:12:22–02:13:10). His speech that is very painful and honest transforms his personal sufferings into the truth of the public. This conclusion is in line with Owen's writing war poetry purpose speaking for the dead who have not been heard. Kovic while looking at the crowd that is cheering, has a face that is peaceful yet withdrawn. He is not able to have his suffering removed by the roaring. The camera's gradual fading creates a feeling in the audience that the war is still not over. This is what trauma theorists like Dominick LaCapra describe as “acting out”—a continual and reliving of pain that keeps one from coming to terms with it (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 41). Kovic's speech is not a finality; rather, it is a new beginning to one more of his

unending war dialogues. Just as Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg, Stone does not conclude with triumph but with survival an uneasy peace that is lurking with memories.

War persists beyond the battlefield in a very powerful way since the physical and mental aspects of the victims become the living archives of violence. In the movie *Born on the Fourth of July*, the approach of war leaving its traces forever is depicted through Ron Kovic; the paralyzed body of the protagonist who turns into a visual and emotional symbol of this fact. He is a living memory of Vietnam who, albeit as a scar, keeps history alive; hence, his impaired body. During one of the hospital scenes when Kovic gazes at his motionless legs and sobs "I can't feel anything below my waist!" (00:54:20-00:54:35), it becomes obvious that the war is not over it has moved in and settled down inside him. Scholar Susan Sontag says, "the body of the wounded soldier becomes an image of the nation's own pain" (Regarding the Pain of Others, p. 58). Kovic's paralysis is a personal tragedy but at the same time, it stands for America's shattered pride and moral ambiguity over Vietnam. His pain reflects the country's doggedness in not being able to progress.

In this manner, Stone's picture continues a very old tradition of literature that portrays war as a disease, gradually contaminating the individual and the whole society. Through "Suicide in the Trenches," Sassoon talks about an adolescent soldier who "put a bullet through his brain" (Sassoon 3). The death of the soldier by his own hand shows that mental wounds are more lasting than the physical ones. Sassoon's outrage at the public who applauds wars and at the same time turns a blind eye on their consequences, closely resembles Kovic's revelation of being rejected by his society. When Kovic seeks solace in his household, his mom prefers silence and prayer to understanding (01:30:14–01:31:00). This emotional rejection is like Sassoon's bitterness toward the "smug-faced crowds." The soldier's body is a battlefield for guilt and rejection in both narratives. Thus, war goes on, not by having bombs, but by the ever-present gap between the reality of soldiers and the indifference of the public.

This constant warfare through remembrance is also reflected in the film's flashbacks, which often revert to Kovic's childhood and battlefield trauma. One of Kovic's dreams (01:13:45–01:14:15) where he accidentally kills a fellow soldier serves to illustrate the deep guilt that he is suffering by the cycle of memory which is shown through his repetitive dreaming and thus the recollection of his past. The trauma is a painful experience that persists in people and thus is referred to by Cathy Caruth as "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Unclaimed Experience 4). Kovic's nightmares and flashbacks are such that they

signify the main issue that is beyond reason. Inability to remember at times turns veterans into custodians of what is not said and so in this manner war becomes one of the survivors not the dead. Similarly, Wilfred Owen's "Futility" reflects upon the question of life after annihilation: "Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides / Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?" (Owen 9-10). Poet's desperation is generalized rather than limited to one death as it encompasses the entire life live less and without the purpose of war. Kovic as well as Owen's speaker confirms that to be alive is not necessarily to be at peace; rather, it is a gradual process of suffering.

Isaac Rosenberg, with the help of his poem "Break of Day in the Trenches," portrays how war, although over, continues to haunt those who experienced it. The rat, which moves constantly between the enemies, becomes a very powerful and haunting image representing life's persistence amid death: "Poppies whose roots are in men's veins / Drop, and are ever dropping" (Rosenberg 12-13). The flowers are the dead and nature is the one that remembers the war. This image is comparable to the slow rebirth of Kovic as an anti-war activist. His transformation is a clear testimony that memory can change pain into protest. When he is at a rally, he shouts, "I'm not ashamed anymore!" (01:59:45-02:00:10), which is a clear indication of a transition from silent suffering to active remembrance. However, this new identity does not wipe out the past—it rather adds to it. The war remains in his activism and the very act of remembrance is the battlefield of conflict.

Scholar Dominick LaCapra refers to this very same process as "working through" (Writing History, Writing Trauma, p. 65). He further explains that through "working through," victims engage rather than repress trauma. Vietnam War veteran, Kovic, during his active life becomes a very Edvard Munch-type victim, i.e., no matter how painful it is, he keeps the memory alive and, at the same time, draws some sort of meaning from it. This idea very much resonates with Rosenberg's view of survival. The rat's ability to move back and forth between the two sides is symbol of a struggle that is both tragic and animal-like. Kovic and Rosenberg present the same picture of the post-war experience that it is a constant process of remembering and not of forgetting. The memory of war is what keeps it alive in people's minds, in art, and in the community's shared emotions.

War also remains a fact of life as it changes the moral and national identities of the nations involved. The Vietnam War as depicted in Stone's film, has the effect of making America question its values. Kovic from a proud Marine to a broken veteran is a cultural disillusionment, in fact, however. When he yells at a recruiter "We fought for nothing!" (01:44:50-01:45:10), he represents a whole generation that feels deceived. Michael Herr, in *Dispatches*, states that the

Vietnam conflict “was not only a war but also a mirror revealing Americans their real selves” (Herr 214). The feeling of moral decline here leads on to the bitterness of Owen's “Futility” tone. The deity and the nation's faith are both under attack when a poet doubts the sun's energy “Was it for this the clay grew tall?” (Owen 12). The suffering and the loss are not the only things that war brings; it also brings the destruction of people's belief systems, so to speak, in Kovic's and Owen's case. The war continues to live on through doubts and moral confusion.

Simultaneously, the trauma expressed through the direction of Oliver Stone with the aid of visual metaphors is one of the major parts of the film. The slow-motion scenes on the battlefield (00:46:22–00:47:15) give a good idea of what war and being a soldier are like, including the echoing gunfire in Kovic's dreams (01:10:30–01:11:00), which are all part of the audience's experience of trauma. According to the academic Susan Jeffords, the Vietnam pictures “do not finish war but rather produce it over and over again and reinterpret it” (*The Remasculinization of America* 22). The viewer is made to suffer along with Kovic, and thus cultural memory is kept alive through the war. The same holds true for war poetry; reading Owen, Sassoon, or Rosenberg transforms us into rememberers of the war. The process of remembering is a battleground where war keeps on going in minds and hearts.

The second aspect of war that keeps breathing life into it is the passing down of memories through generations. Kovic's father and particularly his mother symbolize the older Age's uncritical devotion to the country. The mother's prayer, “Pray for your country, Ronnie” (00:15:22–00:15:30), which she repeats, is in stark contrast to his later loss of faith. The clash between Kovic and his mom is not between two different generations but between two different perceptions of American history, one informed by trauma. Marianne Hirsch's notion of “post-memory” identifies the next generation as the one carrying the emotional burden of the predecessors' events (*Family Frames* 22). Hirsch's writing is focused on the Holocaust but the connection can be made with Vietnam as well. Kovic's narrative is not only impacting the generation that comes after but the one that is already there, that is, the questioning of authority and the meaning of warfare has already begun among them. In this manner, the war does persist in the form of an idea an emotional inheritance that shapes the identities of the coming generations.

The war still seems to be a part of nature and time in the film. Kovic, in a moment of silence, is sitting on his porch and enjoying the fireworks on the Fourth of July celebration (02:11:45–02:12:10). The festival of liberty turns out to be ironic in the case of his mute visage. The lights in the sky and the bombs

going off are both reminders of the conflict that robbed him of his mobility and killed his innocence. This similarity in visuals demonstrates how the national rituals, that were supposed to celebrate peace, indirectly mirrored the slaughter of the past. The same irony is present in Owen's "Futility" where the sun, a symbol of warmth, becomes a witness to the killing. In both film and poetry, everyday symbols get transformed into tragic ones because the memory of war forever distorts them.

Conclusion

In the case of both Oliver Stone's film *Born on the Fourth of July* and the war poems of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg, the fighting does stop but war doesn't. It goes on through suffering, remembrance, and the associated guilt and cultural identity. The hardships of one man, the paralyzed Kovic, symbolize, through the film, America's moral and psychological paralysis after the Vietnam War. The film constantly revisits progressively memory, battlefield pasts, hospital trauma, and Kovic's unsuccessful homecoming indicates how the war keeps on living again and again in the human mind. This recurrence closely corresponds to the dying and destruction in the poets' imagination of World War I where poets like Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg also disclosed that death and devastation continued to inhabit the minds of their survivors. They all conjointly depict the war is on among not only the living of the soldiers but also in the moral of nations.

Kovic's existence is an unending fight between the two sides of his memory, the one that wants him to recall the past and the one that wishes he would forget it. His injury and conscience are continually bringing up the issue of the price of patriotism that is not given any consideration. When he yells, "We fought for nothing!" (01:44:50–01:45:10) the agony in his tone is like the one in Owen's "Futility" when he mourns, "Was it for this the clay grew tall?" (Owen 12). The two scenes share the very same utter disappointment that battle, death and sacrifice combined bring nothing but darkness. The suicide of Sassoon's soldier in "Suicide in the Trenches" (Sassoon 3) and Rosenberg's depiction of a rat scavenging among dead bodies (Rosenberg 10–13) only add to this reality. These poets and the film agree that remembering is a way to relive the war, and thus, the soldiers keep on fighting, living, and dying in memory even after they have come back to their places.

The cinematic approach of Oliver Stone magnifies this sensation. To flashbacks, distorted sounds, and slow motion, he adds the spectral presence of Kovic's memories, thus making them an actual waking nightmare. His ordeal is made clear through the imagery of bloodshed, remorse, and sin that is always coming back. This kind of visual rhetoric is comparable to the one employed by

Owen and Sassoon who, through rhythm and imagery, constantly bring forth the agonies of war. According to the critic Cathy Caruth, “trauma is not simply remembered but experienced belatedly, in repeated flashbacks” Kovic’s downfalls and oratory acts illustrate this cycle; he endeavors to change sufferings into demonstrations but cannot break free from the past. As a result, his anti-war activism is simultaneously a healing process and a sign that the war is still in him.

Connecting *Born on the Fourth of July* with the war poetry tradition, we realize that wars always create emotional ruins that are more lasting than the battlefield itself. The ruins manifest in the forms of silence, guilt, nightmares, and loss of faith. In the case of Sassoon, society attempts to wipe the memory of its soldiers, whereas in the case of Stone, America attempts to shut out its war veterans. However, both of them declare that it is impossible to forget. Wars continue to express themselves through the people who have experienced them. They become the medium of war’s silence and memory. In Rosenberg’s “Break of Day in the Trenches,” death and life coincide soldiers’ blood nourishes the poppy and helps it to grow, thus signifying the intermingling of memory and history. The “poppy” here is a very poignant symbol of remembrance as well as the vitality of history. Kovic’s activism is similar to the above, as he turns his trauma into a kind of testimony. He speaks for those who cannot. This shift from silence to speech indicates that remembrance itself is the living aspect of war.

Thus, the film and the poems carry a strong emotional and ethical truth in common: war alters everything, and nothing goes back to what it was. The scars from physical injuries may heal but the emotional and psychological ones remain. Kovic who is paralyzed, Owen’s dead soldier, Sassoon’s suicide, and Rosenberg’s trench rat all function as reminders to us that the war’s brutality is still alive within the survivors, people and the cultures that produced them. The writing of poems or the making of films becomes a means of memory persistence. Through them, war turns into an everlasting story, a segment of human history that cannot be forgotten.

Ultimately, *Born on the Fourth of July* and the selected war poems remain as instruments of resistance to oblivion. They argue that the actual cost of war is not measured by victories and defeats but by its continued presence in human memory, determining the identity of the people and the fate of the new-born ones. The movement of Ron Kovic from a soldier to an activist, along with the poets' ghostly expressions, reveals the same message: war might lose its physicality with the passing of time, but it forever persists in the human spire.

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