"During a period of total despair, I picked up a pen": Exploring Trauma, Writing and Healing in *A Soldier's Song*, Ken Lukowiak's Falklands War Recollections

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the connections between textual expression and traumatic recollection in Ken Lukowiak's Falklands War memoirs, *A Soldier's Song* (1993). Private Ken Lukowiak was a member of the Second *Battalion* Parachute *Regiment of the British Army* deployed to the Falkland Islands for the 1982 British-Argentine conflict. After suffering a long depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the veteran's creative drive motivated him into writing down his memories, to help him overcome his war traumas. He needed an organized, written account of his daily experiences during that time to make sense of the war, to understand what he had been through, to heal and move forward.

Keywords: Ken Lukowiak, *A Soldier's Song*, Falklands War, military memoirs, war literature, PTSD, autobiographical writing, scriptotherapy.

Introduction

A Soldier's Song is a war memoir written by a former member of the British Army, Ken Lukowiak, first published in 1993. The book describes the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the young private as part of the Second Battalion Parachute Regiment (2 PARA), sent with the Task Force to recover British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands following the Argentine invasion in April 1982. After disembarking in San Carlos Bay, the regiment made its way towards the settlement of Goose Green, winning an important victory to then move towards the capital, Port Stanley. Other decisive battles followed until the eventual surrender of Argentina.

A Soldier's Song is one of the three best known personal accounts of the Falklands War written by veterans, together with Vincent Bramley's *Excursion to Hell* (1992), *Forward into Hell* (2006) and John and Robert Lawrence's *When the Fighting is Over: Tumbledown* (1988). These memoirs shift from the traditional war stories of military officers, historians, and politicians to those of the people who actually fought and suffered on the battlefield. Personal narratives like these, Begley argues, "deliberately undermine sanitized abstractions of the war by reinscribing the terrifying immediacy and absurd singularity of combat experience […] into disordered narratives of combat fatigue and brute survival" (*The Literature of the Falklands/Malvinas War*: 235).

This paper is an attempt to explore Lukowiak's memoir as a work of traumatic recovery and personal "scriptotherapy", a term coined by Suzzette Henke in *Shattered Subjects* (1998). Scriptotherapy refers to the therapeutic treatment in which writing is used as an instrument in the process of healing – the re-enactment of the traumatic memories on paper provides a valuable discursive space for overcoming psychological wounds.

War memoir writing and trauma

In *On Military Memoirs* (2014), Esmeralda Kleinreesink studied war memoirs from soldiers deployed to Afghanistan during the 2001-2010 period in order to analyse whether there has been an evolution in the characteristics of such memoirs over time. Her main findings are that war narrations bear a primary component of disenchantment in twentieth-century memoirs, including those from the two world wars and the conflict in the Falklands, while memoirs from the nineteenth century contain more accounts of personal growth (272). Soldiers adopted the role of relating the crude reality of war from former kings and noblemen, shifting the point of view from a mere description of facts to the expression of emotions. War used to be interpreted according to the concept of honour, which was linked to the interactions with other citizens. This perception of war declined sharply, and memories then tended to focus on the personal being and inner reactions and experiences (Harari, *Military Memoirs*). Negative narratives regarding war recollections structured around personal degeneration, shattered ideals, and disillusionment, became a common feature in traumatised veterans. As Shay reveals, these damaging memories show the consequences of "betrayal of what is right" on the part of the soldier, which seem to attain a moral category of psychological injury (*Achilles in Vietnam*: 11).

In the context of a progressive decrease in tolerance about the acceptance of violence, the personal experiences of the soldiers shifted towards a progressive disillusionment, which was revealed in their narratives. A classic example, despite it being a novel rather than a memoir, is found in Remarque's work – *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), which illustrates the onset of disenchantment, as opposed to the romantic idea of war, with the difficulty of returning to normal life. Another text, Guy Sajer's *The Forgotten Soldier* (1971), recounts the devastating experience of the Eastern Front in the WW2 and provides an example of the incommunicability with the author's father while on a short leave in Berlin in 1943. Remarque's text is recurrently referred to in *A Soldier's Song*, as a basic work of reference for Lukowiak: "We were taking turns to read aloud from a book called *All Quiet on the Western Front*" (*A Soldier's Song*:

3).

Kleinreesink grouped war memoirs into three general classes according to topics: pure "action" memoirs, "growth" memoirs, and "disenchantment" memoirs from a model previously created by Norman Friedman in his *Forms of the Plot*. As transformative experiences, the personal journeys of the soldiers may also have a positive, growth-like outcome, and texts from the period studied suggest that, especially in historically war-involved nations like Britain (Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*), positive outcomes, in terms of personal maturation or lessons learnt, definitely carry important weight in the published accounts of the professional soldiers of our times.[1] Even personal disappointment is often channelled into positive debate and action, rather than a loss of control (Kleinreesink, *On Military Memoirs*: 268-269).

War is an utterly transformative and life-changing experience, and in Samuel Hynes's words: "No man goes through a war without being changed by it, and in fundamental ways" (*The Soldier's Tale*: 3). This totally transformative and traumatic experience produces deep affectations in the combatants' mental well-being. As Raghu Raman puts it, "there is no switch in the human mind which can periodically convert a kind soldier, who rescues victims from natural disasters, and then back again [to the battlefield], without affecting his mental state" (*The Psychological Toll of Being a Soldier*, para. 12). The profound changes a combatant frequently undergoes when returning from the battlefield are not always openly disclosed. Some veterans struggle to find the courage to share their war traumas. Many are confronted to a diversity of factors that contribute to the development of painful emotions, such as guilt and shame, which prevent them to openly disclose their true feelings in the framework of a group culture that prizes self-reliance and stigmatizes help-seeking, as most societies do (Farnsworth and others, *The role of moral emotions in military trauma*; Nazarov and others, *Role of morality in the experience of guilt and shame within the armed forces*).

One way of releasing the pain is through writing. Writing as a form of cathartic expression and self-help has been practiced for years. Personal narratives are full of disturbing elements that reflect the authors' traumas. According to Yuval Harari, modern war memoirs aim to re-connect authors to their lives after having been disrupted by war (*Martial Illusions*: 68). As Jenkings and Woodward illustrate, the focus of the war memoirs written by soldiers is "on the individual's experience rather than on broader reflection on the rationale for a conflict and its progress through time" (*Practices of Authorial Collaboration*: 339), and this also relates to the primary function of such

reflections. It has been suggested that war memoir-writing and publishing are equivalent to, or similar to, a recovery by clinical means (Baines, *Memoir Writing as Narrative Therapy*). A model of narrative analysis has been proposed to address how the form and content of the stories serve the purpose of reconciliation with general life stories, that is, achieving "harmony between past, present and future" (Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*: 117). The existence of a fragmented, disrupted life narrative and threatening flashbacks forms a fundamental part of the clinical definition of PTSD. The same negative self-conscious emotions mentioned above, such as emotions of guilt and shame when it comes to admitting the war traumas, also seem to trigger the development of PTSD symptoms (Brett and others, *Proneness to Painful Self-Conscious Emotions*). Therefore, reconstruction, harmonization, and the creation of coherent memories are considered by psychologists to be essential for recovery.

The benefits of writing to overcome traumatic experiences have been described as a process of "active coping" with trauma (Harber and Pennebaker, *Overcoming Traumatic Memories*: 372). Writing, by concentrating on the structural rules of grammar, both restricts and channels the emotional flow, thereby transforming the victim of the narrative into the author whose task is to render the events in a comprehensible manner. Moreover, sharing or publishing memoirs may come into its own as an important factor for alleviating personal suffering, as the recovery process may then be considered within the context of rebuilding social and political relationships. As suggested by Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*), this is a process that joins the victim and the witness into a common alliance. Sharing personal experiences with a community instead of one-to-one treatment between a single patient and therapist has also been proposed as critical in alternative approaches to PTSD healing. The relationship with the community results in broader benefits to the group as well as relief of collective pain (Tick, *Warrior's Return*).

For Lukowiak, writing was not previously part of a medical procedure that he had been advised to follow by therapists or counsellors to find a cure for his PTSD. In the foreword to his 1999 edition, Lukowiak explains his creative process regarding the creation of his book. For him, writing was more of an impulse and not something that he had considered doing previously with a specific purpose in mind; he became a writer by accident: "One day, during a period of total despair, I picked up a pen and began to write down my memories of Goose Green" (*A Soldier's Song*: xiv).[2] Writing was not then conceived as a treatment but was a way of expressing himself and of sharing his inner emotions, his artistic drive, and personal creation. Moreover, it was a

salvation from the unpleasant, chaotic, and painful life he was leading: "And that despair, which I now look back on as emotionally the blackest period of my life […]. I was a fine description of broke in every sense of the word" (xiv-xv).[3] In fact, when he began writing, little did he imagine that writing would come to signify so much in his future life. Writing became his only way of making sense of the world and of understanding the war; writing saved him from a life of misery. Not only did writing help him recover from PTSD – it actually saved his life. He explains, in the book's introduction, how his life was a complete disaster and how he was unemployed and living back with his father in Cornwall after having been through several broken relationships; he could not cope with the madness inside. At that time, he had been working intermittently as a painter. A painter's job is to repair, redecorate, and cover ugly, old, and rundown buildings with layers of fresh, new paint. This can be interpreted as a metaphor of what he needed to do with his life: to heal the inside wounds caused by the war and to cover them with something to mend the pain. That "something" became writing his war recollections. He felt a need to write to overcome his trauma: "The shelling had stopped, we got to our feet and continued moving forward" (xvii). Writing became a refuge, a source of happiness, and soon he became addicted to it, and he needed to do it to keep sane; it was like a drug:

> I couldn't stop writing. The only description I've been able to come up with to explain the feeling, the absolute click of the fingers change in me, is that it was like a drug had been injected into my veins. I wrote and wrote and wrote. Couldn't stop. If I was sleeping, I was writing […]. As my war poured out, I relived memories that had torn me apart. One time I even remembered the fear […]. Once I finished putting down a particular memory, I always felt some sense of achievement, pride in myself. (xvii-xviii)

Lucy Robinson (*Soldiers Stories of The Falklands War*) points out that the origins of Lukowiak's text are precisely related to, or are to be found in, the therapeutic actions mentioned above to address his PTSD. By the time of the Falklands War, an important amount of knowledge had been gained. The development of this distress, as well as the procedures of diagnosis and consequent treatment, had begun to be established, resulting in the official inclusion of PTSD on the list of recognized mental disorders by The American Psychiatric Association (1980). The Falklands War was, therefore, a well-suited example for the early application of the model to explain post-war experiences and behaviours in terms of this disorder. This present case has been presented as especially meaningful because the Falklands War is regarded as having been highly

traumatic for the troops involved.[4]

Several Falklands veterans have incorporated the writing of memoirs as a valuable part of their recovery process, although not without setbacks, since the generation of written content, often controversial, also induced a less than desirable permanent attachment and identification with the past. In the cases when writings came to be published, the authors were at risk of being easily identified as Falklands veterans, and thus, some of these veterans would become involved in undesired arguments and perhaps would be obliged to make political statements or confront accusations that they possibly had no intention of getting entangled with. One example of the author in question illustrates this phenomenon when, in 2014, during a reconciliation and remembrance trip to Argentina, Lukowiak describes a confusing and perturbing incident, involving a group of veterans and family members of dead combatants, where he faced demonstrations and accusations of war crimes[5] in relation to the shooting of Argentinian soldiers, allegedly when the cease-fire was already in force. One of these events, in the aftermath of the Battle of Wireless Ridge, was precisely explained in one of the chapters titled "One less to feed." The controversial effects of this crude account of the on-the-field facts gave rise to public debates and even legal action, as well as creating suspicions that some British soldiers could be liable for war crimes.[6] This even prompted an official investigation in 1993. The author did not manage to avoid the controversy and, referring to his Argentinian experience, explained:

> Over the noise the translator tried to explain that I am a murderer, a war criminal. That I executed an Argentinean soldier after the cease-fire [...] I had just been accused on national television of committing war crimes and the first thing I was asked was whether I believed the sinking of the Belgrano had been a crime against humanity. (*A Soldier's Song*, xxix)

Narrating the memories of a mythologised war

A Soldier's Song is divided into 53 short sections, each introduced with a title and a loose geographical position. The titles are not strictly descriptive, but rather evocative of some idea, or an association, or a resemblance particular to the author. The account follows a chronological order mostly, though there are some time digressions, such as flash-forwards and flashbacks. There is, generally, a noticeable distinction between simply descriptive or anecdotal information versus personal considerations, dreams, and thoughts, although

the two are interspersed within the same section. The author marks the beginning of these digressions from the main chronological events with the phrases "*I time flashed…*" or "*I time flashed again…*" (italics in the original), which helps the reader situate and distinguish action from thoughts or memories. Language is central both for expressing and healing trauma, and communication is a key factor in PTSD treatment. In this sense, the overall organisation of the book seems to recall the therapeutic work on dreams carried out by therapists with traumatised veterans.

The book is, on the one hand, strongly emotive since it includes deep personal feelings and thoughts, and on the other, full of military-style anecdotic or trivial facts, which give readers a glimpse of military life during combat. The writing style is sometimes harsh and direct, while at times it shows a remarkable literary and aesthetic density, with clear transitions from one style to the other via divisions of thematic chapters though often also intertwined within the same section. The use of dark irony is another distinctive mark of the text. The register is far from being the formal speech of military history texts; as a personal account, it intends to reflect the direct slang of the soldiers. The language of the actual actions is harsh, direct, and mostly colloquial.

The use of military slang shows the key role that language plays in constructing and maintaining the cohesion and identity of the group. The use of martial jargon is another element of deliberate military training, aimed to separate the soldier from their former life and language, and make them focus on this new universe (Parr, *Our Boys*). The "group" represents a major psychological reference for any combatant, and even after the war, the "group" often remains the only admittable community with which the veteran feels free to share their memories. Language is therefore specific to the group but also critical to the process of re-elaboration of traumatic memories, and also to the ability of veterans to express them outside their own restricted "group" of fellow veterans.

The outbursts of the so-called para-speak constitute a mixing of syntax and "f-words" for everything, which confirms the role of language use as an identity marker. The following quote provides one of the many examples of the harsh language used in the book. On being asked by a general whether he liked the Falkland Islands and if he was enjoying it there, this is what Lukowiak thought but did not dare to utter aloud:

> "Well, sir, I'm 8,000 miles from home, in a place that has already proved itself to be the *arsehole* of the earth. Four of my friends are dead, I'm up to my neck in *shit*, mud and

> water, the killing is still going on and just to top it off really nicely it's started to snow. How the *fuck* do you think I feel, *shit for brains*?" (*A Soldier's Song*, 128-129, emphasis added)

Swearing and profanities, additionally, serve as a mechanism for group identification, since loyalties and references, under combat situations, rapidly reduce to the immediate comrades. The use of offensive language and swearing can also be interpreted as a strategy to cope with anger and helplessness, and as a way of releasing frustration.

Its rich composition has led *A Soldier's Song* to be considered to have literary merits beyond the simple, crude veterans' accounts. McGuirk regards the book as "by far the most literary of combatants' memoirs" (*Falklands-Malvinas*: 101) and worthy of attention in the field of literary analysis along with novels, plays, and poetry. In fact, the book has been taken onto the stage. In 1998, Guy Masterson adapted, directed, and solo-performed the theatrical piece, and, in 2012, the show was revived but this time with Lukowiak on stage, performing his own memories. The story captures the reader from the very first moment with the initial shock of war and its prominent reality – the dead. The book opens with a description of the sensation of unreality that is represented by the sight of the first corpses. Along with the unreal vision of some "department store dummies" (*A Soldier's Song*, 1), the way in which Lukowiak refers to the dead combatants, the reality is brought to life through the names of the first known deceased. In this part, the reader can feel here how combat situations deviate from standard situations in a desirable "normal" life, and the author chooses the most dramatic icon for this purpose. This incongruity is announced and described to us, readers, in a way that asks for our understanding and forgiveness. This suggests that the soldiers, no matter how well-trained they are, feel lost and react at critical moments through estranged and alienated identities, which are not too different from how a civilian would behave if faced with an extreme situation. This may be seen as an attempt to establish an empathic connection with the reader. However, it appears that the next step is to immediately downgrade or undermine the experience and move on, thus avoiding a paralyzing shock, which becomes a survival technique or trained skill, rather than a kind of narrative strategy. From this point on, the story carries the reader into a world of fear.

Fear is perceived as a frequent and recurrent feeling in the entire work. Some form of fear or panic is mentioned in almost every chapter, although mostly where combat action is supposed or implicit, from the moment of the

disembarkation until the Argentinian surrender. The Royal Navy was heavily bombed by the Argentine Air Force in San Carlos, and the ground forces experienced frequent shelling and mortar fire. The author dives, hides, and suffers panic attacks, mostly during artillery barrages and air attacks, but we have no account of him coming under close range fire (e.g., machine guns or direct fights with the enemy). The closest thing to a man-to-man fight is depicted in the section sardonically titled, "One less to feed thanks to me (Wireless Ridge)" (150) when Lukowiak explains how he killed an Argentinian soldier unexpectedly found in a trench but how this happened once the combat operations were already over.

A particularly representative point in terms of degeneration and despair appears when the author realizes that nothing valuable was learnt, that no maturation process occurred, that his only ambition was to get out alive, and that "we behaved in the way that we had been conditioned to behave" (88). The frustration is eventually replaced by a necessary indifference and disillusionment, well reflected during the killing of a badly wounded enemy: "I felt nothing, we moved on" (36). This may be interpreted as not really being true; there were feelings, emotions, and visions, but they were often presented in the form of "time-flashes" and post-event reflections, sometimes developed during the actual writing, years later, but we can assume undoubtedly that they came into being at that time. As Shay points out, the blocking-out of further thinking is a survival strategy, as it is also the destruction of time. In combat, past, future and one's own values collapse, in a contraction of the temporal and moral horizon: "only getting through *now* [Sic!] has any existence" (*Achilles in Vietnam*: 176). Lukowiak's apparent lack of feelings relates to the above-mentioned contraction of time, values and references, a phenomenon experienced by soldiers in the battlefield during the most dramatic moments.[7]

The nature and tone of Lukowiak's disillusionment pattern transcend his personal experience in the battlefield to reflect broader cultural and psychological circumstances of the Falklands War, such as the patriotic militarism that coloured the whole conflict and the public mythologisation of this "small" and unpredicted war. The Falklands War was, when compared to others, a brief and straightforward conflict, but it was also a war fought by improbable enemies, and this reveals what was a failure of politics, diplomacy, and military deterrence (Beattie, *Conventional Deterrence and the Falkland Islands Conflict*).[8] Although it took place in a remote location, largely unknown until the day of the Argentinian invasion, the Falklands War was strongly supported and popular in Britain, after a brief period of disorientation (Robinson, *Soldiers Stories of The Falklands War*). Crowds gathered at the ports to say farewell to the

expeditionary forces and warmly welcomed their heroes who returned home. For many, the war represented the opportunity to show the world that Britain was still a major world power, able to project military force thousands of miles away, like the United States. Moreover, it provided a chance to overcome years of perceived decline and retreat, economically, politically, and militarily, marked by the economic crisis. It signalled sovereignty sharing in terms of its accession to the European Common Market, and the withdrawal of military forces "east of Suez" due to budget cuts, to the point that, by the end of the 1970s, it was believed that the role of Britain as a global military power was over (Parr, *Our Boys*: 24). It is widely acknowledged that the Falklands victory boosted the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's popularity and helped her win the general election of 1983: from being considered by many as the most unpopular of British prime ministers, she managed to become one of the most popular. She was re-elected in 1983, successfully channelling the strong public support from this reawakened nationalist mood into the polls.[9] As Pearce and Stewart argue: "The dark days of the Falklands War were over and the country could rejoice in its recent victory, and feel that Britain's prestige had risen under the stern and unyielding leadership of Mrs. Thatcher" (*British Political History*: 525).

Kevin Foster argues that Thatcherism was embodied in a narrative framework of an epic account of a heroic vision of the nation and a return to Victorian values. Foster terms these dominant narratives about the Falklands war as "fictions", or "myths" that were appropriated by the British government and the media to instil the belief that the campaign to retake the islands has been a moral and political crusade and that the war was fought in the name of the public good (*Fighting Fictions*: 156). When the Prime Minister came into power in 1979, she was determined to halt Britain's decline and to restore the nation's pride. According to Foster, Thatcher believed that the role of the Task Force in the defeat of Argentina was a direct consequence of the application of Victorian values and national greatness: "She identified the primary cause of Britain's victory in the South Atlantic with the same rigid hierarchies of rank, class, race and gender that has provided the functional and ideological focus of the empire" (*To Serve and Protect*: 236). In a similar vein, David Monaghan observes how these "official myths" were put forward by the Thatcher Government to promote a national rebirth in British identity, one by which the Falkland Islanders were considered "British in stock and tradition", an "island race" that deserves to be protected (*The Falklands War*: 25-26). These claims of "authentic Britishness" implicitly exclude minority groups living in Britain, while at the same time justify the use of violence by dignifying the war and

making it look like an honourable crusade. Military myths were also invoked. The nation has found itself again in battle and its strength has been reborn. Thatcher announced that the "spirit" of the South Atlantic should be applied at home. According to Barnett, "the example of the task force was its professional leadership and its clear hierarchy of rank" (*Iron Britannia*: 63), and this good example set by the Task Force and by all those who contributed in the battle should be followed – the "commanders in the field" should be imitated at home.

A gendered war

War has traditionally been constructed as a masculine domain, promoting references to masculinity with a glorification of violence in the name and honour of the country. The discourse of war is gendered, marking a sharp division in the different roles sexes play: men go to battle while women stay at home caring for the home and the family.[10] Genevieve Lloyd explores in *Selfhood, War and Masculinity* the connection between war and gender in Western society. She argues that sacrificing one's life in battle is a sign of masculinity. Women, in turn, stay at home to prove that they are good caring mothers or spouses, ready to provide support to the returning soldiers, the healers who stay at home taking care of the family, producing more offspring for the nation, and mourning the dead.

The Falklands War and its media representation have been studied as an example of the maintenance of gendered categories. In *Empire's Fetish*, Zoe Anderson argues that the media perpetuated the nationalist sentiment during the Falklands War by placing sexuality as central to the nationalist project in which British women were positioned as symbols of national pride. Anderson notices that women occupied three main representations in the tabloid media during the conflict – they were national boundary markers, good girlfriends/wives/mothers, and participants in the war effort through sexualised patriotism. This conventional narrative of the suffering women denotes a nuclear heterosexual unit which is a traditional way to perceive nations. Lucy Noakes also highlights the gendered representation of the war:

> The Falklands War was a war in which gender divisions were seen in very sharp relief. Men went away to battle whilst women waited at home. The male soldiers seen in the media and spoken of in Parliament were active, fighting for their country; the women at home were seen as relatively passive, able to do little except wait for news of their men. (*Mass-Observation, Gender and Nationhood*: 1)

Patricia Holland's research on the representation of gender in tabloids during this war suggests that women's femininity existed as complementation of men's masculinity and at the service of it (*In these Times when Men Walk Tall*: 22). Holland points out that the images of women appearing half-naked in the papers could be taken as a way of offering their support to men and as a way of showing their commitment to the national campaign. The tabloids were eager to report those girlfriends or wives who proudly showed their breasts to greet the returning troops. In opposition to this, the prime minister successfully epitomized this battle over gender differences with her assertive masculine leadership.

Male soldiers have widely regarded women either as comforting, psychological anchors or as sexual commodities or rape targets. Far away in the battlefields, the memory of loved women, as a key part of strong family bonds, present or past, represents a link with a previous, safe life. In Lukowiak's book, women are idealized and placed within surreal contexts. One example of this is the dream about his Aunt Lettie, where the author describes, as if it were a real event, a warning given by his old aunt as if she were on the battlefield. Women have traditionally played the role of nurturing and caring for soldiers, while also improving their morale by means of admiration and support. The presence of female companions performs a crucial assisting role in the recovery of injured combatants (Goldstein, *War and Gender*). For younger men, like the author at that time, the mothers embody the caring aspects that allow them to distance themselves from the realities of war. It has been noted that dying soldiers often call for their mothers on the battlefield: "Wounded man kept crying, Mother, Mother! Help me!" (Goldman and Fuller, *Charlie Company*: 237; Parr, *Our Boys*: 140). Even though subalterns have traditionally been associated with performing paternal caring attitudes towards their privates, Loughran points out that in fact the roles and responsibilities that officers take in the battlefield,[11] such as "ensuring the physical comfort of men, keeping order and maintaining a balance between discipline and sympathy" (*A Crisis of Masculinity?*: 729), mimic those of a mother.[12]

There is no account in *A Soldier's Song* of such an extreme situation as the one described above of combatants on the verge of dying, crying out for their mothers. There are, however, several scenes about "time-flashes", "dreams" and "visions" involving women which frequently appear when Lukowiak and his fellow comrades are under attack and stress; for instance, a time-flash during an air attack triggers a story of his partner moving a mattress intermixed with the

description of the attack (23). After a church service in Port Stanley, Lukowiak admits that he would have thought of his mother if he had been closer to death. From the information the writer provides in the foreword to the 1999 edition, he had a tight bond with his father after the war. During many of his crises – the separation from his girlfriends, unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction –, it was his father's house in Cornwall where he sought shelter. This narrative technique often appears in the text, with the author matching or reproducing the actual confused flow of thoughts and events. An example of the caring mother role can be found linked to the onset of another episode of fear, using the same time-flash method, in a scene with mother-and-baby photographs (86), which triggers a more complex chain of conclusions, and once again starts with a caring female figure, which prompts an immediate feeling of attachment and compassion among all the soldiers present. Partners, wives, mothers, and sisters appear again in dreams, when the soldiers are coping with mortar and artillery fire, in one of the most poetic episodes that appears and disappears like a dream inside a dream (135-139).

In connection with gender stereotypes but as an example of the deconstruction of masculinity, a figure of high relevance to the whole battalion of 2 Para is that of "Wendy", a homosexual who worked as a steward aboard the MV *Norland*, whom Lukowiak depicts as "one of our war's leading characters" (170). Wendy was an affectionate and talented "gay civvy" (172) who played the piano and sang to raise the morale of the troops. Lukowiak's first encounter with this character is narrated in the following way: "The corridor broke out into various calls of 'Hello, darling' followed by wolf whistles and offers of unmentionable sexual favours" (172). After an initial rejection and aggressive attitude from the soldiers, everyone grew fond of Wendy and he became to be considered as part of the gang, "our fucking queer" (173). The writer explains how nowadays, years after the war, whenever he speaks with soldiers of the battalion about the Falklands War, "Wendy always gets a mention […] and no longer is Wendy referred to as an arse bandit, or a turd burglar or a dirty fucking queer. Gay boy's about the worst you will hear and it's always said with a smile, it's always said with affection" (173-174). Wendy plays a key role in asserting the masculinity of these soldiers.

Enlisting has always been, for many young men, one way to prove their masculinity, as argued by Phillips: **"**Placed in a constantly renewed insecurity about their status, men must scramble to amass "proofs" of masculinity. If a society also convinces its citizens that men love to fight and women hate to fight (or cannot fight), then that society can manipulate men to go to war, simply to verify that they are not women" (*Manipulating Masculinity*: 2). Becoming a

soldier has long been entwined with notions of youth-male behaviour in a rite of passage to attain complete manhood. After the war, a boy came home a man, ready to assume full responsibilities. It was, therefore, the best way to be tested as a man; to see how to measure up in difficult circumstances, since "combat often validated masculine identity" (Parr, *Our Boys*: 268). Rachel Woodward places gender at the centre of the construction of soldiering: becoming a soldier involves the creation, negotiation, and reproduction of gender identities. She uses the example of Ken Lukowiak to prove her point: "the identification of a certain type of masculinity with the soldier was a prime motivator to his [Lukowiak's] joining in [the Army] to become a 'real man'" (*Locating Military Masculinities*: 43). In Woodward's view, military masculinities encompass features such as physical skill, aggressive heterosexuality and homophobia.[13]

Conclusion

War poses several representational challenges. Such a complex phenomenon is difficult to describe and explain using language, which may prove insufficient due to the nature of the traumatic experience. When one reads of "heavy casualties," "fierce fighting," or "intense shelling," it is not easy to understand or imagine how these experiences, in an immediate or delayed way, impact human beings. Other forms of expression, such as literature and art, can attempt to reflect the true human side of the war ordeal, at the risk of being too subjective, somehow incomplete, inadequate, or futile; yet, this emotional dimension is a fundamental part of the story, which cannot be fully addressed by historical, fact-based texts.[14] War memoir authors often claim that their accounts are true, but when their purpose is to present facts, they can often be debated and contested.

A Soldier's Song provides a poignant reminder that the horrors of war are the same and equally devastating even if the action was relatively limited geographically and temporarily. Only feelings of someone who has actually been on the battlefield are indisputable because they belong to the individual and their own suffering. This is the best contribution that works like Lukowiak's can deliver. The readers discover that war has been for him, for a long time, a "job to be done" through thorough training that creates automatic killing routines, erases questioning, and focuses on the "hows" and prohibits the "whys." But eventually, at that moment or later on, the human side always reappears in the form of compassion, but also as madness and a lack of self-control.

The overall style, tone and themes in Lukowiak's work suggest

disenchantment, with scarce room for learning or personal maturation. However, writing his war recollections was, for Lukowiak, a vital way to cope with the traumatic memories of war. After a long period of depression and instability, this Falklands war veteran seems to have been able to redirect his life course through writing, journalism and collaborative experiences in war-affected countries, as he explains in the foreword of his book.

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1 For a theoretical approximation about archetypes as structures that provide patterns and *topoi* on which war-memoirs often build symbolically, please see Cinelli (*"Viandante, giungessia Sparta…*).

2 All the references to Ken Lukowiak's *A Soldier's Song* were taken from the 1999 paperback edition by Phoenix (Orion Books Limited).

3 One example of a similar urge to practice storytelling as a means to ease the pain of traumatic memory can be found in Holocaust survivor Primo Levi. In the Author's Preface to *If This Is a Man*, Levi writes: "the origins [of this book] are […] the need to tell our story to 'the rest,' to make 'the rest' participate in it […]. An immediate and violent impulse […]. The book has been written to satisfy this need: first and foremost, therefore, as an interior liberation" (15).

4 It has been claimed that more veterans have killed themselves since 1982 than were actually killed in action (Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*: 731-732). Concerning the British side, this has been downplayed by recent studies, such as that of the, Editorial in the British Medical Journal (*Suicide among Falkland War Veterans*: 346). The same claim is also sustained in Argentinian media sources (Galak, *No cesan los suicidios de ex combatientes de Malvinas*).

5 Blog *Warrior to Worrier*: https://kenlukowiak.wordpress.com/2014/05/17/ambush-in-argentina-a-falkland-veterans-trial-by-television-pt-3-of-3/ (accessed 16/12/2020).

6 One of these controversial cases is the well-known episode related to the Argentinian soldier, Oscar Carrizo, which is often cited as a British war crime that occurred following the

Battle of Mount Longdon. In Carrizo's account of the incident, he was "executed" by two British soldiers as he tried to surrender after the battle (Macintyre, *Falklands "War Crimes" Claim*; Tuohy, *Britons Divided by Probe into Alleged Falklands Atrocities*).

7 There are several examples during which the writer seems not to experience deep feelings in the face of tragedy: "Death, polystyrene and me" (*A Soldier's Song*, 36); "Who's dead? He's dead" (50) (about Colonel Jones's death); "Cigarette smokers in black plastic bags" (99); and "Headless, legless, lifeless smokers" (147) (vision of a dead Argentine), to mention but a few.

8 Excellent accounts of the military, political, and mediatic aspects of the conflict have been produced, and they often highlight that the British victory came as a consequence of the superior quality of its troops but that it was also achieved by a narrow margin (see, for example, Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*; and Bicheno, *The Razor's Edge*). It has been reported that success was due largely to section commander and private initiative and determination (Parr, *Our Boys*). Perhaps if Argentina had attacked a few months later, when Britain's already decided on defence budget cuts had been made effective and had depleted its forces' projection capability, it would not have had the capacity to deploy troops to such a remote location (Jenkins, *The Luck of the War*).

9 The Conservatives were 188 seats ahead of Labour and had an overall majority of 144 constituencies. The Labour Party recorded its worst performance since 1918, obtaining only 27.6% of the popular vote (Pearce and Stewart, *British Political History*: 526).

10 There are, however, notable exceptions to this patriarchal nationalist discourse such as world wars, when women took over men's jobs in the factories, agriculture and running the industries.

11 The WW2 movie *The Thin Red Line* (1998) offers a good example of a sharply gendered way of talking about the way military life reshapes sociability and roles. In one of the last scenes (from 2:37:46 to 2:38:13), Captain Bosche (George Clooney) speaks of his company as a "family": he is the "father" while Sergeant Welsh (Sean Penn) is the "mother" (soldiers are of course the "children"). He eventually adds that "father's the head, mother runs it". In the same film, Captain Staros takes care of his soldiers in battle, saving them from being slaughtered in a frontal assault, and he later on calls them "my sons" (2:05:00 to 2:05:12).

12 In *A Crisis of Masculinity?*, Tracey Loughran's main contention is that throughout history but especially in WW1, several cases of post-war trauma in women and non-combatant males had been overlooked. This has happened because shell-shock was regarded as a masculine disorder, a condition solely suffered by those who had been in the battleground: "By accepting contemporary evaluations of shell-shock as a masculine disorder, historians have colluded in the exclusion of other groups from the claim to trauma" (734).

13 The transformation of civilians into soldiers is expressed through body and clothes for it is the uniformed body that is trained to become a soldier. The "squaddie" or "squaddy" (military slang for ordinary soldier) is the British cultural stereotype that embodies military masculinity (Woodward, *Locating Military Masculinities*).

14 Nevertheless, we can find good war histories that have been written that focus on people's experiences while maintaining factual accuracy. See, for example, the history of WW2 in Hastings's *All Hell Let Loose*.