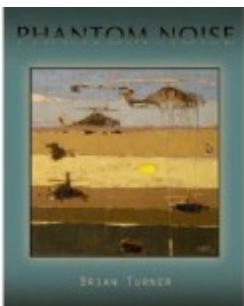


Iraq War vet brings life to conflict through poetry

By Stephen Ward

During his 2003 tour in Iraq, Brian Turner's humanity was confined within the white-and-blue lines of his college-ruled notebooks. His journal entries served as an intermediary; they were all that separated surges of poetry from diagrams for ambush.



"The poems were more for capturing the moment," he said, taking long pauses as he recounted the environment in which the works were produced. "They were mostly internal to start. ... It's hard to think of freedom and democracy when you're worried about walking across the street."

Turner, who served in the U.S. Army for seven years, has won numerous awards writing about his experience as an infantry team leader in the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team in the Iraq War. He received the 2007 Poets' Prize for his work "Here, Bullet," a collection of poetry that surveys the tensions of an American soldier – from the boredom of service to the frailty of human life.

The 43-year-old author described a bittersweet relationship with the accolades he has received.

"For the poems I've written, people have had to die," he explained.

This notion comes as no surprise to those who have read his work. In perhaps one of the most abrasive poems in his assortment "Here, Bullet," Turner describes the suicide of a fellow soldier in the poem "Eulogy":

*The sound reverberates down concertina coils
the way piano wire thrums when given slack.
And it happens like this, on a blue day of sun,
when Private Miller pulls the trigger
to take brass and fire into his mouth:
the sound lifts the birds up off the water,
a mongoose pauses under the orange trees,
and nothing can stop it now, no matter what.*

Life after war

In his new ensemble, "Phantom Noise," Turner's impressions of war remain a starring role in the work, despite inclinations to stop writing about the topic.

"To be honest, I tried not to write it," he said. "There are so many other things to deal with in life ... but I had to."

The new catalog is more politically driven than its predecessor, Turner said.

"The morale of the soldiers, at least while I was there, mirrored the debate in America," he added.

Turner strives to allow people access back into the war through his art. He referred to the lack of overarching war lines and the vagaries that succeed war as points missed when looking at war stories, citing "Platoon" and "Saving Private Ryan."

One postwar hardship he faced was finding a job.

"In a lot of academic circles, it looks like there's a seven-year gap in my resume," he said, referring to his time served in the military.

Despite the supposed gap, the poet has an extensive history of teaching. After receiving his master's in fine arts from the University of Oregon, Turner taught English in South Korea and trained soldiers while serving in the Iraq War. This fall, Turner began teaching English classes in general writing and poetry at Sierra Nevada College.

Since he accepted the job and moved to Incline Village, Turner has felt at home.

"I really enjoy it here," he said. "It's one of the jewels of America. The campus is beautiful."

Meeting the author

Starting today, Turner will share his insight with the community in a two-day event at SNC. The function will include readings from his arsenal of texts and a poetry workshop.

When asked about the event, Turner said he was excited to share his voice with the community.

"I'm looking forward to it," he said. "I don't stress my own writing. I also like that it's open to the community. I get to meet people in other jobs that are poets as well."

The Friday reading is from 7-9pm in the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences and is open to the public and students. The poetry workshop on Saturday has a \$50 registration fee and spans from 9am-noon. Both events are a part of SNC's Writers in the Woods Literary Speakers Series. A book signing will follow the reading tonight.