Just as telling stories that get at the truth of the war are acts of reverence, the custom of treating the dead with ceremony is a type of custom that Woodruff says belongs to reverence, a custom "by which human beings distinguish themselves most importantly from beasts of prey" (Reverence 97). Although Kiowa died like an animal in the most repulsive of manners, through ceremony and the truthful telling of his story, his death is granted honor and reverence. O'Brien's detailed telling of "story-truth" elevates the metaphysical importance behind the war and invites a sense of reverence to the narrative. Just as the reiteration of every concrete, tangible object that the men carry lends weight to the symbolic and metaphysical things they carry, a story with gruesome details of the brutality of war lends weight to the symbolic and metaphysical meanings some battles carry. The close attention to the death and transformation of the body lays bare the paradox that characterizes any recounting of the war, emphasizing the very real horror of death even while elevating it into an aesthetic moment. The elevation of horror to an aesthetic moment is an act itself of reverence, and it also provides the transcendent truth of beauty and the sublime as another thing to be in awe of, and to feel reverence for. The language of storytelling accesses the transcendent truth of beauty and the sublime as it creates an attitude of reverence toward its subject. In W.T. Fitzgerald's essay, "Speakable Reverence: Human Language and the Scene of Prayer," he says: "the conditions for manifesting an attitude of reverence are basic to our experience with language" (156). While the stories that O'Brien tells may be profane and irreverent in content, it is the act of using language to attain truth through storytelling that provides reverence for the lives wasted by the Vietnam War. Through stories, O'Brien "can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God" (172). Through his stories of Vietnam, the reader has an experience with reverence and feels awe inspired both by the brutality and the final humanity of the stories. As O'Brien says, "It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe" (74).
“If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark. For it is not the 'greatness,' the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.”

T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
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