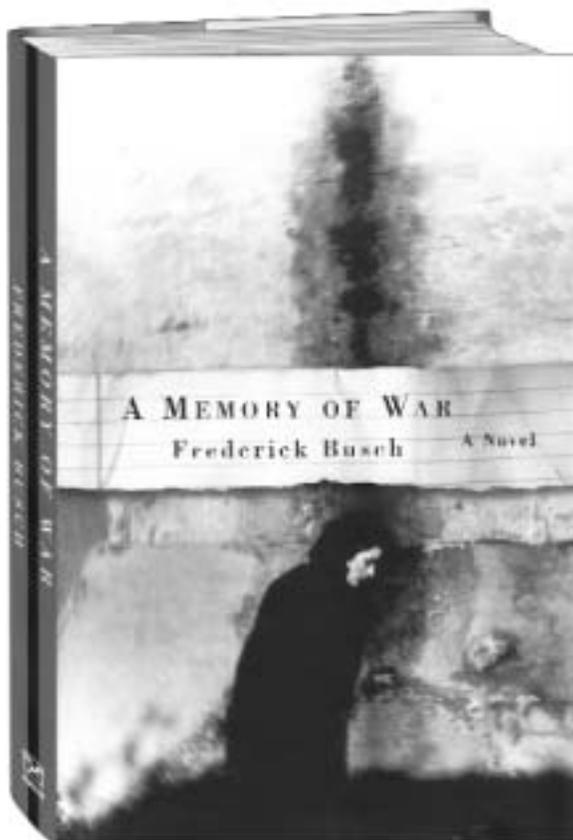


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A MEMORY OF WAR

A novel by the author
of *The Night Inspector*

FREDERICK BUSCH

"Masterful . . . Powerful . . .
a meditation on the long
reach of history, and its
aftermath of alienated souls."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"One of the great living
masters of fictional
technique. . . . In a seamless
fusion of scene, dialogue,
and reminiscence, Busch
draws us into the turbulent
psyche of Manhattan
psychologist Alexander
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Editor's Choice

A Memory of War, by Frederick Busch

What happens to soldiers in wars happens also to the rippling circles of those who know or love them—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, lovers, pet dogs, hometowns, nations. And the reach of war is long. Remember back far enough or imagine ahead and you'll find war—or it'll find you.

My father had wanted to serve in World War II, but, because of a damaged eye, could not. He'd wanted to sign up with his best friend Sidney. The Navy was signing up pals for the same ships. Had my father had his way, he would have signed up with Sidney and been assigned to Pearl Harbor. Sidney was never removed from the U.S.S. *Arizona* which settled to the bottom of Wai Momi, as the early Hawaiians titled the "pearl waters" of that harbor. Whatever would have happened to my father with Sidney aboard that ship would have happened more than four years before my birth.

One of my sons served as a Force Recon Marine. All during his hitch, I worried where he might go, and for what reason. What was I doing—imagining a possible memory? We have, each of us, factual histories and imagined histories, backfilling, always, when memory proves deficient, though "it's a poor sort of memory," Lewis Carroll's Queen says, "that only works backwards." All this to say that Frederick Busch's *A Memory of War* is a book that spoke to me, and I believe will speak to many.

War and its consequences, imagined and remembered, is at the core of Busch's ferociously intelligent work. Alexander Lescziak is a prosperous Manhattan psychoanalyst. It is his business to mine the heart's deep holes and reaches, and this he does. Facing a deteriorating marriage and involved in an unruly affair with a patient, Lescziak is then confronted by an alleged half-brother who claims that he is the issue of an illicit affair between Lescziak's mother and a German POW in wartime England. It is to this wartime England of Lescziak's childhood that the psychoanalyst returns in memory and imagination.

Lescziak's parents had escaped the Nazis by fleeing Poland to England only to conclude in Alex's mother's affair with a German soldier. The extent and passion of that liaison is a product of Alex's mind. It may be that the mind is the main character and subject in this, Busch's twenty-fifth book. Lescziak imagines his wife conducting an affair with Teddy, a friend and fellow psychoanalyst. His purported half-brother is, of all things, an historian who imagines that the Holocaust is a Jewish construction meant to harm Germans. Nella, Lescziak's disappeared patient and lover, is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. She seems to suffer herself for her parents' sufferings, which can only be imagined. Another of Lescziak's patients is an angry cop, a Vietnam veteran who tells what might be invented stories of his war, and who might well be raping his own wife, his war experience somehow an excuse.

I stop with this summary, because it does no justice to the intricacies and precision of Busch's own mind and writing. *A Memory of War* is a talky book, and I came away wondering who in the world writes better dialogue than Fred Busch? And whose characters reveal more of themselves by speaking than Fred Busch's? When asked how war, in general and in particular, affects his work, Busch replied, "I was a war baby."

I was born at the start of World War II, and my father was in Italy, distinguishing himself while getting blown up as he served in the ski troops of the 10th Mountain Division. I lived with wars—Korea when my father was home, and of course Vietnam, which harvested so much of my generation. My son is a major in the US Marine Corps, waiting in North Carolina to be sent to the Gulf. I suppose there's a reason I wrote a novel about the Korean conflict called *War Babies*, and why war is in so many of my stories and books—as Vietnam, for example, runs through *Closing Arguments*. I was born in war and conflict between states informs my most interior visions of American life.

A Memory of War is a war story, but war stories are always about more than war. They are about memory and love and resentment and loss and disbelief and defiance and humiliation and earnestness and blame and shame and blood and sacrifice and courage and sorrow. War stories, even

if set in the past, seem to be written in an urgent and immortal present. They identify us, war stories. *They are about us*: a thing Fred Busch well knows and has documented fiercely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Donald Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Editor of **WLA** since 1989, **Donald Anderson** is editor, too, of *aftermath: an anthology of post-vietnam fiction* and *Andre Dubus: Tributes*. His collection *Fire Road* won the 2001 John Simmons Short Fiction Award.