THE BODY OF
AN AMERICAN

BY DAN O’BRIEN
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS

JANUARY 7–FEBRUARY 1, 2015

Education Guide
How it all began...

Playwright Dan O’Brien first heard photojournalist Paul Watson’s voice on NPR’s *Fresh Air* in 2007. Paul told his story of being haunted by a photograph he shot in 1993. Dan was moved and unsettled by Paul’s story. He felt a strong kinship between Paul’s haunting and the more private hauntings in his own life.

“I knew I wanted to write about him, but I didn’t know how, or whether he’d let me. But I did something I’d never done before: I wrote to a stranger, and he wrote back.”

– Dan O’Brien

DAN O’BRIEN

Dan O’Brien’s *The Body of an American* premiered at Portland Center Stage, directed by Bill Rauch, and received the Horton Foote Prize for Outstanding New American Play, the inaugural Edward M. Kennedy Prize, the PEN Center USA Award for Drama, and the L. Arnold Weissberger Award. In 2014, *The Body of an American* received a European premiere at the Gate Theatre in London and Royal & Derngate in Northampton, directed by James Dacre, and was shortlisted for a 2014 Evening Standard Drama Award. Dan’s debut poetry collection *War Reporter* was published in 2013 in the US and the UK, where it received the Fenton Aldeburgh Prize. Dan lives in Los Angeles with his wife, actress and writer Jessica St. Clair, and their daughter Isobel.

PAUL WATSON

Paul has been a photojournalist for the *Toronto Star* and *The Los Angeles Times*. While working for *The Los Angeles Times* he was based in Jakarta as the South Asia bureau chief, covering Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Iraq. In his current position with the *Toronto Star* he covers Afghanistan and the Arctic-Aboriginal beat as a multi-media reporter. In 1993, Paul risked his life to infiltrate a mob in Mogadishu and snap a photo of the corpse of Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland, Jr being dragged through the streets. Paul was awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography for this image he took during the civil war in Somalia.

Released in August of 2007, Paul’s book *Where War Lives* was named one of the “year’s 100 most notable books” by *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto.
Paul Watson’s memoir, Where War Lives, was published in 2007. Later that year, he was a guest on Fresh Air, promoting his work.

From Where War Lives:
“For as long as humans have honored organized killing with the name war, storytellers and writers have tried to give it meaning. On September 7, 1939...[Albert Camus] wrote in his notebook that he had solved the mystery of where war lives. It lives in all of us. He described the internal conflict that consumes us, whether it’s in the hearts of soldiers on the battlefield, or those of folks safe back home, wondering, and regretting ‘that they can’t share the way the others are going to die.’

“Loneliness and humiliation: I think they explain a lot about war and terrorism. When the questions echoing in my mind speak with a voice other than my own, it is usually that of a ghost I fear, a man with whom I desperately want to make peace. For too long, I have known him only the way a camera lens, and my anger and guilt, allowed me to see him; the battered corpse of an American soldier, bound by thick ropes, lying at the feet of Somalis celebrating their victory over the world’s most powerful military. Now I long to restore some of the honor that I stole in that second when I pressed a button, and a thin metal shutter opened and closed in a blink of history’s eye.”

Paul Watson, Where War Lives Prologue

From the Fresh Air interview:
“I was terrified but at the same time determined to get that picture, and it’s really hard to describe the state that you go into in a moment like that. It’s cliché to talk about out-of-body experiences, but it really did feel like I was watching somebody else do it. And when you have a camera in front of your eye and you’re focusing so intently, you know, to get a sharp good image, you tend to shut out anything that's peripheral. And at that moment, even though there was the noise of the crowd and the helicopters and various other things going on in the city, everything went completely silent and I felt almost what I can only describe as an immediate contact with that dead soldier and, you know, almost a conversation.

“I heard a voice, very distinctly. I've sought psychiatric help in subsequent years and my psychiatrist said it was my superego. I believe it was William David Cleveland’s voice. And he said, as clearly as something inside your head and outside at the same time, ‘If you do this, I will own you forever.’ And then I tried, without opening my mouth, I tried to say, ‘Forgive me but understand why I have to do this.’

“If someone hadn't photographed what those Somalis were doing, obviously it would have been real, it would have happened, but it would have been kept on the streets of Mogadishu. By photographing it, it became a global image. It became a repetitive abuse of a man’s body.”

“I'm just sick of being lied to. And I take it as a personal challenge to make sure nobody's lying to me, which simply means going out there and looking for myself.”
Walter Bilderback: At the heart of *The Body of an American* is the story of your friendship with journalist Paul Watson, beginning 7 years ago when you heard him interviewed on *Fresh Air*. Without giving away much of the play, has the friendship changed your life?

Dan O’Brien: Absolutely. But my life was already in the process of changing pretty drastically when I met him, so Paul’s story—simply the sound of his voice in that radio interview—was both haunting and familiar. Uncanny. I felt like he would understand what I was going through, and maybe I could understand what I thought he was going through. I knew I wanted to write about him, but I didn’t know how, or whether he’d let me. But I did something I’d never done before: I wrote to a stranger, and he wrote back.

As for how my work with Paul has changed me, I consider him one of my closest friends now, maybe my closest, and we continue to work together, to discuss plans for future projects, to visit each other occasionally in LA, where I live, or Vancouver, where Paul lives when he’s not working abroad. We email each other several times a week, sometimes daily.

WB: You have won prizes for both poetry and drama. Do you find it difficult moving between them?

DO: Lately I’ve found myself telling people I write plays like a poet, and poetry like a playwright. Who knows if this is a good idea—to write like this, or to admit it. But it’s the most honest way I can write lately, the best way I know to try and express my life as I see it.

WB: This won’t be apparent to the audience watching the play, but *The Body of an American* is written in ten-syllable lines. You’ve suggested to me that you don’t think of this as “verse” in the conventional sense. How did you come to choose this form?

DO: Yes, it doesn’t seem to play like poetry. But there is a specificity and quickness and rhythm to the language that I think an audience senses as not being strictly naturalistic, at times. The way the verse changes the written (and performance) style has to do with being inspired by the condition of PTSD, and with the fact that the audience is often inside Paul’s memory and consciousness—though maybe half the play happens in a “realer” place, in the Canadian Arctic in the present.

The convention of the line break was very useful to me, as it can often suggest subtle ironies and ambiguities and subtexts I wouldn’t be able to indicate otherwise. Which is a good thing, because there isn’t a single stage direction for the actor in the play either. There are references to production design, to time and place, but nothing else.
The ten-syllable line was also just a tool for me: it helped focus the material in general. So much of this play is derived—and often derived almost verbatim—from Paul’s own writing, our emails to each other, transcripts and recordings of our encounter, and various other sources. To try and fashion all this material into a dramatic 90 minutes requires a certain ruthlessness, and the poetic line—and the poetic mindset—has helped me. Dramatists must be ruthless with their writing, of course, but poets maybe more so.

I don't want to give too much away for people reading this before they see the play, but you also do something very unusual, at least in terms of character. Can you talk a little about the effect of this on the storytelling (without spoilers)?

Lately I've found myself wanting to let a handful of characters, sometimes just one or two, play many different roles in the play. It gives the storytelling a kind of fluidity and quickness and freedom that I think makes sense, at least to me, as these plays are in some fundamental ways about consciousness and memory. (The House in Scarsdale I call a "speculative memoir," as it details a documentary approach to investigating several mysteries in my family's past.)

A lot of plays, of course, use this kind of theatrical device. What might be a little different here is that sometimes my characters play the same character at the same time, as if different aspects of that person is addressing (and in conflict) with each other. This is particularly meaningful to me in the moments when The Body of an American attempts to communicate Paul Watson's sense of his identity splitting if not splintering in the midst of war trauma.

Perhaps something else that's a little different here is that I like to think that the actors are playing specific characters at base level throughout the entire play. Dan and Paul remain essentially Dan and Paul throughout The Body of an American. But sometimes more minor characters come channeled, as it were, through these characters, as they recall if not relive specific events. These are haunted characters, after all.
On Confessing Painful Truths

*From an Open Stages interview with Paul Watson by Wilma Dramaturg Walter Bilderback*

Walter Bilderback: You and Dan O'Brien have known each other for 7 years now. Has your friendship with Dan changed you?

Paul Watson: I rarely reply to emails like Dan's. He was a stranger, pitching a play, and coming out of the blue as it did, I thought it sounded bizarre. But I'm a diehard fatalist and my inner voice told me to do whatever Dan asked and I have. I told him at the start, as I warmed to the idea, that he would be my confessor. And that's the main affect he's had in my life. Normally, I don't like to talk about the subjects he brought up unless it's to my wife, in my own home. But Dan has lead me over important ground, and to me, his art is in expressing painful truths that pure journalism can't capture. So, more and more, I prefer to avoid war and related subjects unless I can face them with Dan. It's less painful, and I trust him to tell hard truths in ways that touch people's hearts... Dan gets that fundamental truth across to audiences with a visceral power that I could never muster. For that, I'm forever grateful.

The only thing that gives me hope is the thought that if enough people see and feel what I did, they will come to the same conclusion: we have to fundamentally change the way we live and how we treat one another, and that will take us closer to liberating ourselves from the war that lives in all of us.

WB: You've so far avoided seeing a performance of The Body of an American. Why is that?

PW: I can remember a time when I was able to see people suffering, confront it through writing and photography and move on. I think humans are wired with a kind of emotional filter which makes that possible. Otherwise, the empathy that makes us human would overwhelm us in day-to-day life. My filter fried somewhere along the way. I only need to sense someone's fear, sadness, or other emotional pain from a distance and it becomes my own. When you can't escape that feeling, it's natural to retreat to avoid the triggers that make life so hard to endure. I've become better at managing the risks in my own mind. But I want, I need, peace. And that escapes me. I know that seeing Dan's play would only make peace more elusive. So I avoid it. I can't even read the script. It's the same reason that I put off answering [these] questions as long as possible. They raise important issues, ones that I want to talk about, but I know I'll have to struggle to recover hard-won emotional ground.

WB: It seems that war reporting is becoming more and more dangerous. What do you think is the future of reporting from war zones and other crisis points?

PW: Over the 25-odd years that I did war reporting, I lost journalist friends and colleagues in virtually every conflict. I've always been a bit put off by foreigners, whether they're aid workers, journalists or any other unarmed civilian who chooses to enter a war zone, who try to claim what is effectively a right to special protection. The simple truth is that no one is safe in war. That's why we should be doing a lot more as a civilization to prevent them.
On Bearing Witness

From an interview by John Barton of The Malahat Review
SHOCK, AWE, TRUTH, AND THE HORRIBLY BEAUTIFUL: In Conversation with Dan O’Brien & Paul Watson

John Barton: Paul, do you perceive yourself to be a “witness”—or to be “witnessing”—with your work being a transcript of what you have seen? Dan, do you see yourself as a witness as well?

Dan O’Brien: Absolutely. If there’s an overarching theme in the play, it’s to do the work of witnessing each other’s stories. And I should say that this documentary style is a major departure for my work, and I credit Paul largely with this change.

Paul Watson: I deeply hope I’m doing more than writing a transcript of what I see. What I try very hard to do, which requires tremendous personal risk in places like Afghanistan, is to be the medium through which ordinary people can speak to the outside world. The impressions created in the traditional media of foreign countries, especially their conflicts, rarely match what I feel in those places. I’m often guilty of the same failings in my reporting. I think it’s a fatal flaw of the form, one that poetry is able to correct. As best I can, within the constraints of journalism, I hope to let readers sit as witnesses themselves, and judge for themselves the central issues raised in stories that I write. All I know is that prejudices and hatreds are very hard to sustain when you’re sitting face to face, listening carefully to understand a person who would normally want you dead, or at the very least entered the conversation intending to spit on you or deliver a solid sucker punch. I have the luxury of being able to go to see such people. I try to bring readers along with me.

JB: As witnesses, do either of you feel implicated or are you simply participant observers?

DO: I think it’s impossible to not feel more responsible for the events you’re witnessing, which can often feel overwhelming, if not depressing. But that’s the challenge for me when approaching Paul’s stories—how to find the beauty and hope in it, as well as the rage and sorrow, just as Paul does. Of course, I’m greatly insulated from these stories, acting as a kind of interpreter between Paul’s life and the lives of people who read poetry or see plays.

PW: I’m a participant by being wherever I am in the same sense. I think that anthropologists know their presence has some impact on the people and events they are studying. So I don't claim to be able to hide behind journalistic objectivity. But I do strive to stay as uninvolved as possible. For instance, that means avoiding the sort of crusading moral judgments that permit other journalists to write about evil in certain places or regimes. The more I learn and experience, the more elusive truth is, so I’m reduced to gathering details, whether they are facts, contradictions, or descriptive elements that make a place or person more vivid in a reader's mind.

To read more visit: http://www.malahatreview.ca/interviews/watsonandobrien_interview.html

- 9 -
Glossary

Fresh Air with Terry Gross (pg 1)
An American radio talk show broadcast on NPR stations across the United States. Produced by WHYY-FM in Philadelphia, its longtime host is Terry Gross.

*Paul Watson was interviewed on Fresh Air in 2007 about his book Where War Lives. Dan O’Brien heard this interview and a week later he was moved to contact Paul.*

![Fresh Air with Terry Gross](image)

Photo by Will Ryan

The Battle of Mogadishu (pg 2)
The Battle of Mogadishu was fought in October, 1993 in Mogadishu, Somalia, between US forces and Somali militiamen loyal to the self-proclaimed president-to-be Mohamed Farrah Aidid. A US Army force in Mogadishu (Delta Force) attempted to seize two of Aidid’s lieutenants during a meeting in the city. Shortly after the assault began, Somali militia and armed civilian fighters shot down two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. The battle resulted in 18 deaths, 80 wounded, and one helicopter pilot captured among the US raid party and rescue forces. American sources estimate between 1,500 and 3,000 Somali casualties, including civilians.

*It was in this battle that Paul Watson was notified in Mogadishu of an American soldier being dragged through the streets. On October 3, 1993 Paul Watson snapped the photo of the dead Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland in Mogadishu. It was right before he clicks the shutter that Paul heard Cleveland’s voice say, “If you do this, I will own you.” And from then on, Paul was haunted by Cleveland.*

![Battle of Mogadishu](image)

Photo from India Times
**Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland** (pg 4)

The American soldier pictured in Paul Watson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph.

![Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland, Jr.](image)

**Andrew Stawicki** (pg 7)

Andrew Stawicki began his photographic career in his native Poland. In 1982 he brought his family to Canada, where he joined the staff of the *Toronto Star*.

Andrew Stawicki was a friend of Paul Watson. He was a voice in Paul’s head as he took the photo of an almost-naked Cleveland. He heard Stawicki say, “They won’t print it…the kid’s dick is showing!”

**Rwanda** (pg 8)

In Rwanda, 1994 there was a mass slaughter of Tutsi and moderate Hutu (two African ethnic groups of the African Great Lakes region) by members of the Hutu majority. During the approximate 100-day period from April 7 to mid-July, an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed, constituting as much as 20% of the country’s total population and 70% of the Tutsi then living in Rwanda. The genocide was planned by members of the core political elite known as the akazu, many of whom occupied positions at top levels of the national government.

Paul Watson believes his photo had an impact on the United States’ decision to intervene in Rwanda. “The heat was on President Bill Clinton to do something. And that something was to announce immediate withdrawal of American troops [from Somalia]. Then, when it became time to decide whether or not the United States should lead an intervention in Rwanda...President Clinton decided not to use the word “genocide” so we wouldn’t be forced to intervene.”

![Photo from India Times](image)

Read more on Rwanda: [http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm](http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm)
Kosovo War (pg 10)

Kosovo is the disputed borderland between Serbia and Albania. It is a partially recognized state in Southeastern Europe that declared independence from Serbia in 2008 as the Republic of Kosovo. The war was an armed conflict in Kosovo that lasted from February 1998 until June 1999. It was fought by the forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian rebel group (KLA) with air support from NATO and ground support from the Albanian army. The 1999 NATO bombings led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo, the establishment of a U.N. mission in Kosovo, and put an end to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s.

Paul Watson spent time covering the Kosovo War. He described a day there: “There are a lot of people on the streets. Even this morning at 10 o’clock in the morning as large explosions were rocking highrise buildings in the center of the city there were people strolling up and down and oohing and aahing as if they were watching a fireworks demonstration.” (Watson on his time in Pristina, Kosovo: http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/watson/radioInt.html)

![Photo by Teddyboy](image1.jpg)

Kosovo War Chronology: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/etc/cron.html

Thalidomide (pg 14)

Primarily prescribed as a sedative or hypnotic, Thalidomide was used against nausea and to alleviate morning sickness in pregnant women. Shortly after the drug was sold in Germany, between 5,000 and 7,000 infants were born with phocomelia (malformation of the limbs). Only 40% of these children survived. Throughout the world, about 10,000 cases were reported of infants with phocomelia due to thalidomide; only 50% of the 10,000 survived. Those subjected to thalidomide while in the womb were born with limb deficiencies where the long limbs either were not developed or presented themselves as stumps.

*When Dan O’Brien asked Paul Watson if his handless left arm is a result of his mother taking thalidomide, Watson said, “No she didn’t, something in the DNA”.*

![Photo by Andrew Stawicki](image2.jpg)
Bellevue Hospital “makeshift” morgue (pg 15)

After 9/11 a large tent was erected behind Bellevue Hospital in New York City, where workers sorted through over 14,000 human remains in a makeshift morgue.

Dan O’Brien’s running route in New York City in 2001 took him past Bellevue Hospital.

Albert Camus (pg 30)

A French Nobel Prize-winning author, journalist, and philosopher. His views contributed to the rise of existentialism. He wrote that his whole life was devoted to opposing the philosophy of nihilism while still delving deeply into individual and sexual freedom. Camus did not consider himself to be an existentialist despite usually being classified as one.

Paul Watson has clearly been shaped by Camus and his quote “We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realize that we know where it lives...inside ourselves.” In fact, the title of his book Where War Lives comes directly from the quote, which he refers to in The Body of an American.

Burma Cyclone (pg 17)

Cyclone Nargis was a rare, eastward-moving, low-latitude, strong tropical cyclone that caused the worst natural disaster in the recorded history of Myanmar (Burma). It hit during late April into early May 2008. The Irrawaddy Delta lies in the lowest expanse of land in Burma that fans out from the Myan Aung to the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.

Paul Watson covered the cyclone in Burma for the LA Times in 2008. “With the Tribune (who owns the LA Times) execs measuring the column inches we produce, not getting into Burma to cover the cyclone devastation would’ve been career suicide. Hiding by day in the hull of a riverboat in the Irrawaddy Delta. Among hundreds of corpses bobbing at dusk in the sea-soaked paddies is the body of a child.”
Auschwitz and Sarajevo (pg 20)

Auschwitz concentration camp was a network of concentration camps and extermination camps built and operated by the Third Reich in Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany during World War II.

The Siege of Sarajevo was the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. After being initially besieged by the forces of the Yugoslav People’s Army, Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was besieged by the Army of Republika Srpska from 1992 to 1996 during the Bosnian War. A total of 13,952 people were killed during the siege, including 5,434 civilians.

Paul Watson referred to opening the gate to a church courtyard in Nyarubuye in Rwanda and finding that it looked like Auschwitz, like Sarajevo. He was indicating that there were piles of bodies strewn everywhere. “They’d come here hoping God would protect them somehow, but it only made things that much easier to get butchered.”

John Honderich (pg 21)

A Canadian businessman who was the publisher of the Toronto Star from 1994 to 2004. Paul Watson’s former boss at The Toronto Star from 1994-1998 (Paul worked there starting in 1987). In The Body of an American, he suggests that Paul speak to Cleveland’s family. “Have you thought about finding his wife, or his mother? Hunting them down?” He also delivers the news of Kevin Carter’s death to Paul.
Kevin Carter (pg 21)
A South African photojournalist and member of the Bang-Bang Club (four photographers active in South Africa in the early 90s). He was the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for his 1994 photograph depicting the famine in Sudan. He committed suicide at the age of 33.

Carter was a friend of Paul Watson. “Kevin Carter, who just last month was snorting Ritalin off the floor of my apartment...Carter killed himself last night. Parked his pickup truck in Johannesburg, duct-taped a garden hose to the tail pipe. Left a suicide note that I’ll paraphrase: I have been haunted so now I’ll haunt you.”

Ken Oosterbroek
A South African photojournalist and member of the Bang-Bang Club. He worked for The Star in Johannesburg. He was shot and killed by peacekeepers east of Johannesburg in 1994.

Oosterbroek was friends with Carter and was killed only two months before Carter’s suicide.

Greg Marinovich
A South African photojournalist, film maker, and member of the Bang-Bang Club. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography in 1991 for his coverage of African National Congress supporters brutally murdering a man they believed to be an Inkatha spy.

Marinovich was a friend of Carter and Oosterbroek. He was shot alongside Oosterbroek in Johannesburg in 1994 but survived. He wrote the screenplay for The Bang-Bang Club.


**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** (pg 24)

PTSD may develop after a person is exposed to one or more traumatic events, such as sexual assault, warfare, serious injury, or threats of imminent death. The diagnosis may be given when a group of symptoms, such as disturbing recurring flashbacks, avoidance or numbing of memories of the event, and hyperarousal, continue for more than a month after the occurrence of a traumatic event.

*Paul Watson’s psychiatrist, “Grinker”, diagnoses him as clinically depressed with PTSD during their first meeting.*

**Schizophrenia** (pg 25)

A mental disorder often characterized by abnormal social behavior and failure to recognize what is real. Common symptoms include false beliefs, unclear or confused thinking, auditory hallucinations, reduced social engagement and emotional expression, and inactivity. Diagnosis is based on observed behavior and the person's reported experiences.

*After hearing Paul Watson say he thinks he is haunted and cursed, Grinker responds saying, “[If you told me that], I’d ask you some questions to rule out schizophrenia.”*

**Super-ego** (pg 25)

The id, ego, and super-ego are the three parts of Freud’s structural model of the psyche. According to this model, the id is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends; the super-ego plays the critical and moralizing role; and the ego is the organized, realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the super-ego.

*Paul Watson’s psychiatrist indicates to Watson that the voice he heard say, “If you do this, I will own you,” was not actually Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland, but rather his super-ego – instilling a sense of morality.*

**Mosul** (pg 25)

The Battle for Mosul was fought during the Iraq War in 2004 for the capital of the Ninawa Governorate in northern Iraq. It occurred concurrently with fighting in Fallujah.

*Paul Watson describes a detailed story of being stabbed in Mosul while trying to take a picture. “And while I’m switching lenses you can see the switch go on in somebody’s head. Like, He’s white, what the hell’s he doing here?...I had absolutely no sense of wanting to live. Or fighting back. Protesting my innocence… I had this sense of. Well we knew this was coming.”*

**Abu Sayyaf** (pg 26)

A militant Islamist group based in the Philippines, where for more than four decades groups have been engaged in an insurgency for an independent province in the country. The name of the group is derived from the Arabic abu (“father of”) and sayyaf (“swordsmith”).

*Paul Watson went to the Philippines in 2009 to cover the local al-Qaeda affiliate which was “on the march again” for the LA Times.*
Sam Zell link (pg 27)

Paul Watson sent the below link to Dan O’Brien saying, “I thought you might enjoy hearing this sound bite directly from the fetid mouth of our paper’s new owner…I do wonder what he’s up to. Especially after publishing a new employee manual telling us all to question authority and ‘push back.’” Paul referred to Dan’s script in progress, “if ghostly voices ever figure into this script, maybe this clip will make a good one.”

Video of Sam Zell: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDy7vn7-LX4

Photo by Tom Uhlman

Upper Arctic (pg 32)
A polar region located at the northernmost part of the Earth.

Dan met Paul in the Upper Arctic in Ulukhaktok, Canada.

Inuit (pg 33)
Inuit ("the people") are the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, and the United States.
Yellowknife, Kugluktuk, Ulukhaktok (pg 33)
The capital city and largest community of the Northwest Territories, Canada. Kugluktuk ("the place of moving water," formerly Coppermine) is located at the mouth of the Coppermine River in Canada, southwest of Victoria Island. Ulukhaktok is a small hamlet on the west coast of Victoria Island.

Dan O’Brien flew from LA to Vancouver to Yellowknife to get to Northern Canada. It was the closest large city to Kugluktuk where he flew in a small turboprop plane. He then flew to Ulukhaktok where Paul was working.

Ernest Shackleton (pg 37)
An Anglo-Irish explorer who participated in four British expeditions to the Antarctic in the early 1900s. Shackleton was determined to cross Antarctica from sea to sea, via the pole. Disaster struck this expedition when its ship, Endurance, became trapped in pack ice and was slowly crushed before the shore parties could be landed. There is a story in Shackleton’s book, South, in which he reported situations where an unseen presence provided comfort and support during the crews traumatic experience struggling to survive. Shackleton described his belief that an incorporeal being joined him and two others during the final leg of their journey.

Dan referred to Shackleton’s experiences when he pondered Paul Watson’s ghost. “Who is that man who walks always beside you?...Is Staff Sgt. William David Cleveland following me? And what could he possibly want from me?”

Celsius and Fahrenheit (pg 39)

0°C (Celsius) is the freezing point of water, 100°C is the boiling point.
32°F (Fahrenheit) is the freezing point of water, 212°F is the boiling point.
Negative forty degrees is the temperature where the Fahrenheit and Celsius scales correspond with one another (-40°F = -40°C).

At such low temperatures (and with an actual meeting point of Celsius and Fahrenheit) it made sense why Dan and Paul might get confused about what temperature scale they are using at a below a certain temperature. “My iPhone says it’s negative 50 out there...Celsius or Fahrenheit?”
**Phosphorous Bombs in Fallujah (pg 43)**
During military combat operations in Fallujah, Iraq in 2004, white phosphorus munitions were used by US military forces as an incendiary weapon and as an obscurant. The US denied allegations that white phosphorus was used as a weapon against civilians, stating that it was only used to target insurgents.

_Dan O’Brien described Paul Watson as courageous and altruistic. Paul dismissed these descriptors: “Most people don’t care what’s going on, or they don’t know what they’re supposed to do. So we just stop listening to the litany of evidence.” He provided the phosphorous bombs in Fallujah as a piece of evidence. “I object to the word altruistic…I see it as a labyrinth: if you can find the truth you get out. But you don’t, it just gets worse, you get more lost.”_

**Abdul Haq (pg 52)**
An Afghan commander who fought against the Soviets and Afghan communists during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. He was executed by the Taliban in October 2001 while trying to create a popular uprising against the Taliban in Afghanistan in the wake of September 11.

_Paul Watson met Abdul Haq when he was interviewing him after 9/11. He was killed in October 2001 just weeks after Paul met him. “Taliban captured him…and hanged him from a tree with a metal noose.”_

**Fallujah Bridge (pg 57)**
The 2004 Fallujah ambush occurred in 2004, when Iraqi insurgents attacked a convoy containing four American contractors. The four armed contractors were killed and dragged from their vehicles. Their bodies were beaten and burned, and their charred corpses were then dragged through the city streets before being hung over a bridge crossing the Euphrates River.

_Paul Watson was on the phone with Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland’s brother insisting that he knows they hate him. “I read this interview about that thing in Fallujah...And your mother broke down crying and told the reporter she hated the person who did it then, like she hates the people that do it now...She was talking about me, sir! I know it!”_

**Little Mogadishu (pg 61)**
The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis is sometimes called “Little Mogadishu.” It's center of the nation’s largest concentration of Somalis.

_Dan O’Brien was working at The Playwrights’ Center in “Little Mogadishu. He says,”[There are] Somali refugees everywhere...It would be strange to have you here with me, Paul. I don’t know whether you’d hate it. Or love it.”_
In *The Body of an American* two actors largely play **Paul Watson** and **Dan O’Brien**

An actor in his 30s plays Dan most of the time; an actor in his 50s plays Paul most of the time. The older of the two actors has the first line of the play. With each new character-heading—even when it’s the same character—the actors alternate. Below is a list of the different characters each actor plays. Parentheses indicate the first page on which that character appears; many reappear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ACTOR PLAYING “PAUL WATSON”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Watson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Gross (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan O’Brien (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendant (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Guy (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuit Girl (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi Driver (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuit Woman (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ACTOR PLAYING “DAN O’BRIEN”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan O’Brien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Watson (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Gross (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutale (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Stawicki (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kid (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Dealer (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixer (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translator (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honderich (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinker (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khareen (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zell (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Theresa (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother/Ray (55)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dan/Paul Timeline

1987 PAUL begins working for The Toronto Star in Canada
1993 PAUL clicks the shutter in Mogadishu, Somalia
1994 PAUL reports from Rwanda
1994 PAUL’s friend, Kevin Carter, commits suicide in South Africa
1994 PAUL is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph
1995 PAUL starts seeing a psychiatrist, Dr. Grinker
1998 PAUL leaves The Star to work for the LA Times
2001 September 11 attacks in New York City
2001 PAUL interviews Abdul Haq, who is killed a month later
2004 PAUL reports on the Battle for Mosul in Iraq
2006 PAUL speaks to Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland, Jr.’s brother on the phone
2006 DAN begins his fellowship at Princeton University
2007 PAUL is interviewed on Fresh Air
2007 DAN emails PAUL, they continue to e-mail for the next three years
2010 DAN and PAUL meet in the Arctic
2010 DAN develops The Body of an American at The Playwrights’ Center in “Little Mogadishu”
2012 DAN’s play, The Body of an American, premieres at Portland Center Stage
2014 DAN’s play, The Body of an American, is produced at the Wilma Theater

Paul Watson and Dan O’Brien. Photo by [private], not for public use.
A Web of Inspiration

Paul Watson’s famous photograph, memoir, and life have inspired Dan O’Brien (and others) to tell Paul’s story over and over through multiple art forms.
Below is a chart of how the inspiration spread.

Paul’s Photo

2007
Where War Lives by Paul
A Memoir

2007
Paul on Fresh Air

2007
Dan e-mails Paul

2013
War Reporter by Dan
A Book of Poetry

The War Report Paul Watson Hears the Voice
We ask them, Have you seen the American soldier? Someone says he saw him tied up in a wheelbarrow. I take a picture of children bouncing on a rotor blade in the smoldering wreckage of a Black Hawk. Has anyone seen the dead American soldier? The mob parts around me, I look down in the street. And I meet the man. When you take a picture the camera covers your face, you shut the rest of the world out, everything goes dim. And I hear a voice both in my head and out. If you do this I will own you forever. I took his picture. While they were beating his body and cheering. Some spitting. Some kid wearing a chopper crewman’s goggles, face screwed up in rapturous glee while giving the dead man the finger. An old man’s raising his cane like a club and thudding it down against the dead flesh. Men holding the ropes that bind the dead man’s wrists are stretching his arms out over his head, rolling him back and forth in the hammering morning light. I’m standing outside myself. I’m watching someone else take these pictures. Wondering, You poor man. Who are you?

2011
Under Fire: Journalists in Combat
A Documentary

2013
The Body of an American by Dan
A Book of Poetry

2013
New Life by Dan
A Play

Photo by Stanford University
Wilma Design Concept

Wilma set designer Misha Kachman considered one major question before commencing his design plans for *The Body of an American*:

“In a play about words, how do you structure a physical space to create a theatrical experience?”

1. Embrace intimacy of play/cast, while still utilizing large Wilma space
2. Explore similarities and distinctions between Act I and Act II
3. Employ projections as part of set and participant in play

**Act I: Various Locations around the World**
Embraces remote characters, generic locations, and abstract storytelling

**Act II: Hotel Room in the Upper Arctic**
Embraces slightly more focused characters, specific locations, and realistic storytelling

**SIZE AND SCALE:**
An image on stage may “zoom in and out” using the projectors in conjunction with live space. This allows the abstract and the realistic to coincide in the theatrical space.

*For example:*
1. Image of snow is projected on the big black wall
2. Close-up image of snow is projected on the small white wall
3. Snow falls outside the hotel room window onstage
In the Classroom

Before Seeing *The Body of an American* at the Wilma

1. **Belief Line Exercise:** This activity is meant to be done in the classroom as it always prompts meaty discussions around the key themes in the play. However, if you’re reading the guide on your own, you can still take a look at the Belief Line statements and see where you land for each one. After you’ve seen the play, go back to the Belief Line statements to see if any of your opinions have shifted or if your arguments have grown more nuanced.

**Directions**
Make a line down the center of the room with a piece of yarn or tape. One side represents “I agree” (with the statement) and the other side is for “I disagree.” After you have read (and explained) each statement, students should indicate whether or not they agree with it by positioning themselves on the corresponding side of the line. More specifically, if they strongly agree with the statement they should be as far from the center line as possible, but if they only slightly agree, or can’t decide one way or the other, they should stand very near or directly on the line. After the students have found their positions, do a quick go-around, asking students to explain the reasoning behind their choices using specific examples. They should feel free to change their positions on a statement at any point in the discussion if they are legitimately swayed by a classmate’s argument.

**Belief Line Statements**

- Journalists have an obligation to report objectively on the facts of an event regardless of the potential consequences of revealing the truth. (A photo used as propaganda by the other side, or a report on marines desecrating the Koran inciting retaliatory violence)

- There is no such thing as complete objectivity in journalism.

- We can tell someone else’s story more truthfully than we can tell our own.

- Art (poetry, theater, etc.) can be more truthful than journalism.

- War lives in all of us. When pushed far enough, under the right circumstances, all are capable of taking another’s life.

- Bearing witness to another’s story can help us make sense of our own stories and the ghosts that may haunt us.

2. After completing the belief line, read the series of interviews with Dan O’Brien and Paul Watson on pages 8-9 of this guide. After reading the interviews, are there any belief line questions that you might answer differently?
3. Dan O’Brien plays with several non-traditional playwriting forms in *The Body of an American*. The first is that he writes the play for two actors who play all of the roles, which in itself is not unusual. However, in Dan’s play the actor primarily playing Paul starts off by saying the first line of the play and from then on the actors simply take turns reading the lines. This means that, at times, the actor primarily playing Dan says Paul’s lines and visa-versa. The second thing Dan does is give each physical line on the page 10 syllables. Finally, the text of the play is derived almost exclusively from actual conversations (mostly emails but also recorded conversations, etc). With this in mind have two volunteers read the first scene of the play (or at least the first five pages of it if you don’t have time for the whole scene) taking turns with the lines.

What impact did hearing the scene read aloud have on its audience? Any thoughts about what the playwright might have been going for with this style of theatrical storytelling? How might a director stage such a play?

4. Read the interview on pages 6-7 between Walter Bilderback and Dan O’Brien in which Dan discusses a bit why he wrote the play in this particular style. Now that you have a better idea about what he was going for, what are your initial impressions of the first scene? Do you think it has its desired impact? Be sure to revisit this question after you see the full production and notice whether any of your initial impressions have changed.

**After Seeing *The Body of an American***

**Post show discussion**

- All art is subjective and no two people seeing the same play will have the same experience of it. We recommend beginning your post show conversations with a “reader response” approach. Validating each viewer’s subjective experience serves to stimulate rather than shutdown thoughtful, probing conversations about the play. Challenging students to back up comments with specific details will encourage higher-level critical thinking without dismissing individual opinions.

- As you think back on the play, is there a particular scene or moment that continues to stick with you? Do you remember how it landed on you at the time? (i.e., were you moved, amused, stunned, disturbed, etc.?) Can you identify any specific theatrical element(s) that contributed to the impact of that moment for you? (i.e., an actor’s performance, the connection between two actors, a sound affect, lighting cue, costume choice, etc.)

- Take a look at page 23 of the guide that explains some of the challenges the set designer had to address when designing this play. What is your understanding of what these challenges were? Do you think the production succeeded in meeting these challenges with its set design? How did these choices impact you as an audience member?

- What questions do you still have about the play? These can be anything from points of confusion to questions about certain choices made by the playwright or members of the production’s artistic team. They could also be questions related to issues that the play tackles such as how much of it is factual and how much is just the opinion of the playwright.

- Although the events in *The Body of an American* take place anywhere from several decades ago to several years ago, what about it still feels relevant to you in 2014. Did it resonate with you in light of more recent events closer to home?
Appendices

The Body of an American by Dan O’Brien
The Play

Where War Lives by Paul Watson
Prologue

War Reporter by Dan O’Brien
Book of Poetry

War Reporter composed by Jonathan Berger, libretto by Dan O’Brien
Chamber Opera, full video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfYw7VCkLc&app=desktop

Fresh Air interview with Paul Watson