



VIETNAM WAR: REDRAWING OF LOADS THROUGH THE WORKS OF TIM O' BRIEN'S *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*

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Abstract

*War and memory are interrelated and it represents a verisimilitude approach through the presentation of distinction among legitimate history, intellectual history, and the military histories of the war (written history of armed forces, journalist). In the history of War, there are natural tendencies of legitimate historians to hide the discursive history of war (from ground zero) from the ordinary people. Most of time, the physical and psychological pain of battalions during the war, their agony, trauma, and frustrations are not penned down and people of the nations (defeated and triumph nations) are unaware of the true history of ground zero. In this paper, I would like to analysis American War on Vietnam through the work of Tim O'Brien. Vietnam War is also known as "War against the Americans to save the Nation" or "American War in Vietnam." Tim O'Brien is an American novelist and he contributes in the war. He has ranked as a sergeant in military. His semi-autobiographical novel, *Things They Carried* points out his experiences in*

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the Vietnam War. It is an empathetic, as well as, fictional account of nonfictional story of American soldiers through the jungles of Vietnam. It is a story of loss and love, guilt, and fear. In War, soldiers carry their necessary things (physical objects) like matches, Morphine, M-16 Rifles and Candy. After the War, they bring grief, terror, guilt, confusion, and the brutality of War as a return gift. After life of War, each soldiers' physical loss underscores under emotional loss. In this memoir, Tim O'Brien delineates how soldiers carry heavy physical and psychological loads in the War.

Keywords: verisimilitude, ground-zero, legitimate, battalions.

Introduction

“War is hell, but that is not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty: war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead.” (O'Brien,51 “How to Tell a True War Story”)

Tim O'Brien's novel *Things They Carried* is a collection of interrelated short stories about the experiences of soldiers who fights for American side in the Vietnam War. It is the shared stories of soldiers of Alpha Company during and after the Vietnam War. Each and every soldier share experience, guilt, horror, anxiety and confusion during and after the War. Lieutenant Jimmy shares his love for Martha and his guilt for Ted Lavender's death. O'Brien shares his own guilt over

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killing a man. Bowkar shares his failure to save Kiowa who was killed in the war. In his memoir, *If I die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, O'Brien writes, "Can the foot soldier teach anything important about war, merely for heaving been there? I think not. He can tell war stories." About the death of high number of Vietnamese, as a true war commentator, Tim O'Brien comments, "A perverse and outrageous double standard what if things were reversed? What if the Vietnamese were to ask us, or to locate and identify each of their own MIAs? Numbers alone make it impossible...from my own Sliver of experience__ one year at war...I can test anonymity of a great many Vietnamese dead."

In War, obligation of soldiers and obligation of ordinary people are not same. These loads of obligation are confined in responsibility to join in the War as a citizen of Nation. In *Things They Carried*, we have seen that so many soldiers are obliged to go but they have lack of love about war, they have only joined in the war for reputation of their country. In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien has shared his own feelings and intention regarding the joining of War. War seems to him wrong because its causes and effects are uncertain. His community pressures him to join in the War. The fictional Tim O'Brien is the spokesperson of the author Tim O'Brien. The author, Tim O'Brien comments on the confusion that soldiers have experienced on the demands of their country, as well as, on the demands of their community conflicted with the principles of their own. Jimmy Cross has an obligation to lead the battalions and only for his responsibility as a Lieutenant to save the lives of other fellow soldiers, he forgot his love for Martha. His inability to save the

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lives of soldiers confesses his guilt till the aftermath of war. When Lavender was shot, Jimmy was thinking about Martha, whom he had a close relationship and once he dated with her in his college life, left her for Vietnam War. Twenty years later of the War, he feels guilty over Lavender's death.

In *The Things They Carried*, there are several collective short stories; "Love", "Spin", "On the Rainy River", "Enemies "Friends", "How to Tell a True War Story", "The Dentist", "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong", "Stockings", "The Man I killed", "Ambush", "Notes", "The Lives of the Dead" etc. Each story carries the burden of the Vietnam War through the experience of soldiers as a recollection of memory. In "How to Tell a True War Story," O'Brien writes,

"A true war story is never about war. It is about sunlight. It is about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It is about love and memory. It is about sorrow. It is about sisters who never write back and people who never listen" (O'Brien,54).

In "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong,"

"Vietnam was full of strange stories, some improbable, some well beyond that, but the stories that will last forever are those that swirl back and forth across the border between trivia and bedlam, the mad and the mundane" (O'Brien,56).

In the story "The Man I Killed," O'Brien consoles for the death of the man whom he killed in the War and the man is the replica of him. The brutality of the war is different from the fantasy about

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War. Nature and the creatures are not afraid of War; they have faced the brutality of the war. O'Brien points out the ambiguity and complexity of Vietnam War through the death of his victim. After the death of his fellow Vietnam soldiers, the tiny blue flowers and butterfly have found their home amid the tragedy of death,

“His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a star-shaped hole, his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's, his nose was damaged, there was a lobe of one ear.... there was a butterfly on his chin, his neck was open to the spinal cord and the blood there was thick and shiny and it was this wound that had killed him.” (O'Brien,79).

The atrocities of the brutality of War remain alive in the heart of the soldiers after the end of the War. It is a memory of horror, brutality and valor, guilt, and confusion. These memories come back invisibly from the war and placed in the hearts of the soldiers. Tim O'Brien tells, “You can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil” (Brien,46). Bao Ninh is similar with Tim O'Brien in this respect. Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is a true contrapuntal war story of Vietnam in American literature. Ninh writes, “The ones who loved war were not the young men but the others like the politicians, middle aged men with fat bellies and short legs” (Ninh,75). The documentary on war or true war history delineates the uncompromising suffering of both sides of war. *The Things They Carried* and *The Sorrow of War* repeatedly redraw the suffering of Vietnam

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Conclusion

War is unnatural and disturbing, as well as hellish object. The contrapuntal reading of Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* ironically retells the true history of War. The textual and historical references about Vietnam War delineate the atrocities of human being, as well as, the twisted morality of war. Soldiers try to find out the actual solution of the problem of war aftermath of the War. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* describes the twisted morality of war. The guilt of soldiers finds the problem. If the guilty of soldier avoids, they would not feel guilt and shame of War. The physical loads of soldiers become emotional loads during and after Vietnam War.

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Selected Web

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