

Short Communication

Rich heritage of war literature in Vietnam

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Literature is a surface phenomenon so that deep factor like war, economic, religion and politics could affect it deeply so that the procurer and its content have been suffered by deep changed. The Vietnam War in History, Literature is billed as an interdisciplinary approach to the Vietnam War that clarifies the relationships between how that war is portrayed. Hardly rather than clarify anything, the paper straddles the fence on the issue. This paper skillfully outlines how much of the journalism, history and novels related to Vietnam is politically motivated and designed to manipulate the audience into be familiar with the truth of war and preserve this truth to the new generation and younger one.

Keywords: Literature, Vietnam, War, Novel, History, Media

INTRODUCTION

Wars are not games, they are conflicts carried on by force of arms, as between nations or between parties within a nation, that leave a lasting impact on people and places. Wars may be started by merely placing pieces of soldiers, equipment, etc. on the battlefield, not unlike the board games, with full of risk or Strategic. However no war when finished can simply be forgotten without worry or consequence. The Vietnam War is not an exception. It may have begun with the United States choice to place their men overseas to take part in a conflict, a War. Yet at the end of an eight-year struggle, the war didn't vanish from America's eyes. It stayed and remained alive in the hearts and souls of the American people. Vietnam War literature played and plays a primary role in impacting Americans in the 1980s and today. Not many literature works came out in the first few years after the withdrawal of American troops, but many poured out in the late 70's and early 80's. Most of these early accounts were personal narratives written from experiences as well as from people actually in Vietnam such as soldiers, reporters, and medics. Both old and new Vietnam War literature continues to impact Americans today, with both

their historical and personal perspectives. As stated earlier, Vietnam War literature began to grow in the late 70's and early 80's. This writing usually told anti-heroic stories that tried to affirm the morality of America's involvement in the war. Many works tried to get rid of ideas of patriotism or glory that are sometimes associated with war. Beidler asserts that another key component of Vietnam War literature was the emphasis on the differences between Vietnam and other wars as the Vietnam War having no moral substance (1997:132). In many works that you read you will notice that the people present in Vietnam, had no idea why they were there or what purpose they served. They cannot find any moral substance to what they were doing. Historically, Vietnam War literature gives historians and society a clearer picture of the actual war. Many novels were written in the traditional war story format of straightforward detail. Santoil (1981: 42) believes they were non-fiction and gave accounts as remembered with none or little emotional sentiment. These non-fiction pieces are some of our best resources to understanding the United States involvement in Vietnam. Emotionally,

Vietnam War literature touches American's hearts. Many books were written in non-fiction, direct combat detail laying out the events in an attempt to provide more details of the war to those interested. Just as many if not more, however, were written in fiction to try to convey the trauma of war and the everyday hardships faced by ordinary men and women overseas. These books are emotionally moving to the majority of people that read them and give a clearer insight to everyday life in the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War was a confusing war and difficult to follow. The conflict began in 1954 between communist North Vietnam and noncommunist South Vietnam. Vietnamese communists attempted to take over the South, by invasion from the North and guerrilla warfare. The United States entered the conflict in 1965 supporting the South Vietnamese. The involvement was extremely controversial. There were some who supported it wholeheartedly, others opposed openly, and others seemingly relied on the government to decide the best course of action. Ehrhart (1985: 65) believes that in the end of the United States eight year involvements more than \$167 billion had been spent on the war and there were more than 58,000 dead. Vietnam War literature is what connects us to the past, to that war and the people that suffered in it. The war literature gives us a picture of the actual war and the things that happened there. The Vietnam War was fought in guerilla warfare on unfamiliar jungle terrain and many were killed in ambushes, sniper attacks, and bombs connected to trip wires.

The historical or political questions of the war were too difficult to answer in a book. Many people that had been present in Vietnam didn't even know the answers. The fiction literature will almost always focus on the everyday experiences, routines, jokes, conversations and superstitions instead of historical or political questions of the war. In *The Things They Carried* published in 1990 and written by Tim O'Brien (1990: 61) is a Vietnam War book that mixes fact and fiction and is a related series of stories before, during and after war. The novel is both a love story and a war story. It makes you believe emotionally because your heart and stomach become wrapped up in it and you feel involved. Ninh says that (1995: 42) another novel, *Fallen Angels* published in 1988 and written by Walter Dean Myers was a fictional story told from the eyes of Richie Perry, an African-American soldier who served in the Vietnam War. This novel is one that does perhaps the best job of explaining the trauma of the war but it cannot be properly. Myers goes into the minds of soldiers with not just facts and dates but actual emotions. He may not have been to Vietnam but he has a strong connection with it, since his brother died there during the war. The book is dedicated to him. This sort of emotional fictional books that teach real values and life lessons are books that touch and cultivate a society. Yet recently *Fallen Angels* was challenged in 2000 by many high schools and students becoming the fifth out of ten on the "Top 10 Challenged

Books List" for high schools. It was given this title for offensive language and being unsuited to the age group.

Myers declares (1988: 76) that later in 2003 Franklin Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana banned the story because of its profanity after it was originally assigned to more than 200 students. Principal Kevin Koers banned it from the school after a parent and two students complained about the foul language. Mr. Koers stated "They just said "Mr. Koers, look at this. We'd get in trouble if we said this in school," and I said, "That's exactly right; you would." Koers also said "I think it's an excellent book however I think that the content, if it were a movie would be PG-13 maybe more for the graphicness of it." Some students protested saying that the Principal was naive in his view that the students did not use this language frequently on their own. One girl claimed that it was a part of the novel and the way they actually talked in Vietnam. She claimed it could not be written without. Now at the high school, whenever a parent or student challenges a book it will be assigned to a committee who will decide if it can remain challenged or not. This censorship of *Fallen Angels* is just another example of how Vietnam War literature impacts our country. Vietnam War literature explains to people what went on that historians can never tell you. The novels and poetry describe feelings that take place and what thousands of Americans went and suffered through.

After the United States ended combat in Vietnam in 1973, thousands flooded home. In 1975, the North Vietnamese Army took over Saigon. Most Americans refused to think about their nation's longest war and the only war that the United States has ever "lost." George R. Kennan, a career Foreign Service Officer during the Cold War, said of Vietnam "the most disastrous of all America's undertakings over the whole two hundred years of its history". Buitenhuis believes (1993: 55) the United States spent \$167 billion on the war and more than 58,000 died. It took a while before Americans could once again become interested in what had happened, but when they did literature poured out. Novels and poetry full of lessons and legacies were produced on the war. Vietnam War literature tells the story of the average everyday soldier who serves in Vietnam either by his own choice or against his will. It tells of the struggles the soldier went through, before the war, during the war and after the war. Vietnam War literature teaches society of how soldiers, medics and even reporters were faced before, during and after the war. When the 2 million-plus Americans who went to Vietnam, came home they were shunned. 1.6 million had served in combat, 300,000 were physically wounded, many were left with psychological scars, 2,387 were listed as "MIA" and more than 58,000 had died. Still all their effort was unappreciated by many. American culture did not truly acknowledge the sacrifice and suffering until the 1982 dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Many people suffered through so much trauma and pain because of the Vietnam War. 700,000 draftees, the majority of them

poor and badly educated, could not get jobs, maintain good family relationships or stay out of jail after Vietnam. They received less than honorable discharges and were deprived of educational and medical benefits. More than 700,000 who served in Vietnam were afflicted by (PTSD) Post traumatic stress disorder as well. If that wasn't enough, more Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than died in it.

The stress and trauma of the Vietnam War can only hope to be portrayed through its literature. From Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*, it reads of the stress of the war "We had ways of making the dead seem not so dead By slighting death we pretended it was not the terrible thing it was. The Vietnam War forced the soldiers to struggle with their conscience. It was hard for them to distinguish the enemy, the Viet Cong from the South Vietnamese loyalists. The soldiers never knew who to kill and whether the old, women or children had anything to do with the war or its cause. In *Fallen Angels*, the main character, a soldier overseas in the Vietnam War cannot believe what he sees on the day of battle where many of his fellow Alpha Company soldiers die. Perry's thoughts reflect his experience. People were not supposed to be made like that. People were not supposed to be twisted bone and tubes that popped out at crazy kid's-toys angles. People were supposed to be sitting and talking and doing. Mcnamra asserts (1995: 26) that emotionally gripping Vietnam stories highlight hope, power and loss, trying not to lose sight of the suffering of the whole war when concentrating on individual characters. They help our country remember those who gave up their lives and those who served with the reality that they might give up their lives. Marshall (1987:12) announces that Vietnam Veterans Memorial stands today as a sad, somber reminder of the loss of too many young Americans. Thirty-four years after Vietnam, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the most visited site in our nation's capital. Those who have survived Vietnam are nearing death and when they die, we will have only one way to get a glimpse of what they have been through and the legacy that they have left behind. It is extremely difficult to convey the trauma of a war experience but there is only one way for us to see a part of their world and that is through Vietnam War literature. As Tim O'Brien (1990:

34) said, "It's a literature that speaks to the human heart."

CONCLUSION

What characterizes the Vietnam War literature is its account of real male stories. Men are the protagonists of an exceptional guerrilla experience in foreign jungles where they have a hard time even distinguishing between their enemies and their allies. As it traditionally happens in war fiction, the focus is on male soldiers, who are present and active, whereas women are either absent or represented as passive, as if they were part of the background. Playing only a secondary role, women characters in war fiction and movies tend to experience the consequences of the war and not the war as direct action, thus underlining even more the concept of war as a uniquely male experience. The Vietnam War Literature has highlighted the masculine side of the war by portraying it as a typical male experience. The stereotypical representation of the war and of the roles that men and women play in society, underlines even more the concept of the war as strictly male, a rite of passage real men have to go through in order to properly perform their gender identity.

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