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**Female Voices in the Aftermath of the
Iraqi War in Helen Benedict's Wolf
Season**

A B S T R A C T

Female American novelists have written novels on the Iraq War that express a perspective rarely encountered in modern war literature. Helen Benedict is one of the female novelists who used fiction to portray the Iraq War, particularly via the viewpoints of female main characters, to convey women's issues and the pain experienced by humanity. Benedict, a journalist, has extensively documented the impact of war on female troops in Iraq. In her works of fiction, she specifically focuses on the psychological and physical aftermath that war imposes on women. The author's work elucidates that while the war may have concluded as a historical event, its repercussions persist for individuals who served as troops in Iraq or experienced the loss of loved ones, whether they were in Iraq or back home in the United States of America.

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أصوات نسائية في أعقاب حرب العراق من رواية موسم الذئب للكاتبة هيلين بنديكت

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الملخص

كتبت روايات أمريكيات روايات عن حرب العراق تعبر عن منظور نادرًا ما نواجهه في أدب الحرب الحديث . هيلين بنديكت هي إحدى الروائيات اللاتي استخدمن الخيال لتصوير حرب العراق، خاصة من خلال وجهات نظر الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية، لنقل قضايا المرأة والألم الذي تعيشه الإنسانية . وقد وثقت بنديكت، الصحفي، على نطاق واسع تأثير الحرب على القوات النسائية في العراق .تركز في أعمالها الروائية بشكل خاص على الآثار النفسية والجسدية التي تفرضها الحرب على النساء . يوضح عمل المؤلف أنه على الرغم من أن الحرب ربما انتهت كحدث تاريخي، إلا أن تداعياتها لا تزال قائمة بالنسبة للأفراد الذين خدموا كقوات في العراق أو عانوا من فقدان أحبائهم، سواء كانوا في العراق أو في وطنهم في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

الكلمات المفتاحية: حرب العراق، الصدمة الجماعية، اللاجئين، موسم الذئب، محارب قديم

1- Introduction

The Iraq War is one of the most catastrophic and chronicled occurrences in recent history and influences certain American literature. A majority of Americans likely did not want to go to war in Iraq, knowing the horrors of war. Resistance was gradually accepted into the public consciousness, inspiring several American authors to write about similar dynamics. Critical and narrative interventions might highlight the perspective of troops who are personally idealist and politically cynical. They see their sorrow and suffering in others' suffering and recognize literature's therapeutic healing power after soldiers return home. (Gupta, 2011, p. 12)

American soldiers inflict violence on Iraqi civilians as invaders. Still, they are caught up in a meaningless war “as puppets of the political, military, and economic concerns invested in justifying the war” (Williams, 2005, p.53). Their precarious status qualifies them for this binary. Iraqi civilians

see the violence against them and their fellow civilians, becoming both witnesses and victims. After trauma, both sides negotiate between surviving and victimization amid morality, ethics, guilt, aggression, and heroism.

For this need, a veteran-narrated story was needed to provide readers with a better understanding of the Iraq War and how each author and the fictional protagonists lived it.

2. Literature Review

The researcher can provide certain literature reviews on *Wolf Season* by Helen Benedict, there are some related studies and scholarly works that address themes similar to those found in the novel. These studies can provide valuable insights into the broader context of war literature, trauma studies, and feminist narratives. Here are some key areas of research that may be relevant:

Firstly, works such as Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* are frequently examined to analyze how authors depict trauma, PTSD, and the challenges of returning to civilian life after military service.

Secondly, novels like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* are often analyzed by feminist theory, the representation of women's agency and resilience, or the intersectionality of gender with other social identities.

Thirdly, some works like Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* examine how literature, memoirs, and other forms of storytelling contribute to healing and resilience.

Fourthly, novels such as Phil Klay's *Redeployment* and Siobhan Fallon's *You Know When the Men Are Gone* provide authentic insights into the experiences of military personnel. These works may explore topics such as military trauma, the process of reintegrating into civilian life, and the effects of war on human identity.

Finally, examples include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* investigate the long-term social, cultural, and psychological effects of war and violence.

It would appear that the methodology that was followed in this study involves conducting a qualitative analysis of the female characters, as well as the overall themes and societal critique that are weaved throughout the narrative. The analysis takes into account the viewpoints of multiple women impacted by the war. Polyvocality facilitates the intentional examination of divergent viewpoints, encompassing those of both males and females engaged in

fighting. Significantly, it illuminates the diverse ways in which the conflict affects women in varied positions.

3. War Literature and Collective Memory

Benedict's novels focus on victims since they are primarily concerned with exploring human experiences, intense emotions, and the suffering caused by conflict, drawing attention to their literary works. From this perspective, her stories illustrate the ambiguity and confusion of war, with army protagonists who exhibit violence and aggression and engage in harsh actions. These characters are experiencing difficulty in dealing with their wartime encounter due to their direct involvement in and observation of acts of violence. The soldiers undergo dehumanization, and the novels portray the resulting dehumanization.

In contrast to the conventional approach of focusing on a single combatant in American war novels, Benedict deviated from this norm by presenting her narratives from multiple perspectives, with at least one native speaker and the American protagonist present in each case. The reader is immersed in the experiences of both American soldiers and Iraqis or civilians in her novels. Benedict also incorporates her sources and appears to consider her work a starting point for the reader interested in learning more. Benedict adopts a "retreat position," as described by Linda Alcoff (1991, p. 20). This entails relinquishing one's position of power and allowing those who hold the disempowered position to enter a domain of authoritative discourse, where they can narrate their own experiences.

A novel about the wounds inflicted on soldiers, refugees, and their families, Benedict's *Wolf Season* (2017) explores the enduring consequences of conflict beyond the confines of one's residence. *Wolf Season* is the second novel by Benedict, following *Sand Queen*. Benedict examines in both narratives the experiences of soldiers, with a particular focus on female soldiers, throughout the Iraq War and the obstacles they faced upon their return as veterans. *Wolf Season*, similar to *Sand Queen*, explores the traumatic experiences of individuals who have endured conflict and subsequently attempted to cope with it. "This story of trauma and resilience, love and family, mutual aid and solidarity in the aftermath of a brutal war is nothing short of magical," Elissa Schappell writes in *Blueprints for Building Better Girls*. "The novel is fierce and vivid and brimming with hope." By perusing these pages, one is taken to a realm beyond sensationalism and dissemination, where one can directly witness the human toll of war. "You cannot depart from this novel without any changes." Schappell, 2012, p.6).

Wolf Season follows Benedict's *Sand Queen*, which depicts a female Iraq War soldier. However, it addresses loss and postwar suffering. *Wolf Season* is different because it is told from the perspectives of numerous women affected by the war. Polyvocality enables the deliberate comparison of contrasting perspectives, including those of both men and women in combat. Importantly, it sheds light on the various ways in which the war impacts women in different roles. (Gallagher, 2010, 57).

Erikson states that “the tissue of the community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body” (2005, p.185). Internalizing trauma areas and de-familiarizing familiar spaces alienates soldiers from society. However, inhabitants in occupied territory acculturate and fight de-familiarization and estrangement from previously inhabited regions. Living at a trauma site for a long period creates a shared resilience, adaptive response, and communal resistance to adversity. Inhabiting conflict areas as troops or civilians creates trauma spaces that disorient people and prevent cross-cultural connections.

It is well known that war affects people individually and collectively, whether positively or negatively. That experience unites them. Killing, torturing captives, abusing corpses, witnessing a friend die, and all the other agonizing conditions of war create moral tension that causes post-traumatic stress and communal trauma. A shared trauma causes psychological distress in a group, usually a culture, community, or large group. Traumatic events frequently damage the entire group (Alexander, 2015, p.105).

A sociologist, Kai Erikson, describes this collectivity as a fundamental injury to social bonds and communality (2005, p.456). He also claims that collective trauma impacts individuals but generates a community of survivors that might provide commonalities like common languages and histories. He claims that trauma can only be shared within a group, isolating individuals from other societies. (Eyerman et al.) also discuss collective identity and trauma-related memories in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. They note that “social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but “take on board” some significant responsibility for it” (Eyerman et al. 2004, p. 1). Thus, a shattering shock impacts a community with a shared memory and social identity. These two sections will benefit from each other in resolving the pain of American soldiers and their society and Iraqi citizens and invaders.

4. From Battlefields to Homes: Perspectives from Soldiers and Civilians

In Benedict's *Wolf Season*, female characters Rin, Naema, and Beth undergo communal tragedy at home. After returning from battle, soldiers struggle to integrate their experiences into society. This difficult transition ruptures the community tissue between the soldier's battle experience and the collective society's. Benedict says she deliberately chose Rin, Naema, and Beth to reflect diverse war views but treats them as real people. She wants to be seen as a woman soldier whose past shapes her present (not a housewife, widow, or mother). Cynthia Enloe offers a compelling analysis of the importance of nuanced characterization in her book, *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*—the nonfiction collection profiles eight women affected by war, consisting of four Americans and four Iraqis. The women Enloe (2010) described are neither exceptional nor applicable to all. Enloe (2010) argues that it is unnecessary to succumb to the temptation of considering each of these women as distinct persons who are separate from the rest of history, primarily based on their experiences and personalities (p. 32). Benedict portrays authentic women through her fictitious character Enloe in *Sand Queen* and *Wolf Season*, effectively demonstrating the interplay between individuality and universality. She undermines the war narrative based on American exceptionalism by presenting the perspectives of Beth, Rin, and Naema.

Benedict's chapters are narrated by three female characters: Rin, a sergeant who lost her spouse in Iraq while they were deployed; Naema, an Iraqi medical student from *Sand Queen* who has achieved professional success and is now a widowed refugee; and Beth, a former homecoming queen who has since become a housewife. Todd, Beth's spouse in the Marine Corps, has undergone a significant behaviour change and become an unfriendly individual. The multiple times he has been deployed have resulted in a distressing and unfortunate series of events for their family. At the end of the story, all three women have become both moms and widows. A deadly hurricane in their upstate New York hamlet unites their stories. After recovering from the natural disaster and the conflict that still impacts them, a veteran, refugee, and wife who was harmed yet freed by the Iraq conflict may share their experiences.

Rin returned to Huntsville after being raped in Iraq. The strong Iraq War veteran is still grieving her spouse and fellow soldier, Jay, and has shrapnel wounds. In the Catskills of New York, she raises their blind nine-year-old daughter Juney and various animals, including chickens, cats, dogs, and three wolves. She keeps three wolves illegally on ten fenced-in acres of her property to satisfy a promise to her late husband, hence the novel's title. She calls them Ebony, Silver, and Grey. She feels connected to the wild animals and comforted by them. She sees them prowling the woods “like souls freed

from the dead, their thick-furred bodies bold and wild” (Benedict, 2017, p. 21). By depicting her predicament, Rin may seem to express something. Wolves, as wild animals, are more compassionate than her battle mates who raped her.

Rin is healing from war's physical and psychological toll and her husband Jay's death in an RPG attack on their convoy during deployment. She cares for her sight-challenged daughter Juney while suffering from psychological illness. Rin is a broken, seasoned soldier who isolates herself. She avoids veterans and women. Rin refuses to mingle with women. Her eyes were discerning and critical. (Benedict, 2017, p.24). The monologue always starts in her brain when she connects with other ladies. She tries to focus on Juney, but it keeps going: Where were you girls when I needed you? I spotted you listening after showering. Each of you scattered like bedbugs under a lamp. Where were you when? (Benedict, 2017, p. 25).

In works like *The Lonely Soldier* and Kate in *Sand Queen*, Benedict highlights the long-lasting impact of sexual assault as a contributing factor to psychological trauma in times of conflict. This is exemplified by the narratives of women in the military. Rin asserts that sexual assault intensifies the military's tension. Amidst the clinic's waiting room, where mothers with sick or injured children sit in separate seats, the intense gaze of these women pierces through the room, revealing their shared feeling of being let down. They deliberately avoid making eye contact with each other, their paths crossing like the beams of headlights.

Rin's anxiety and scepticism grow as the nurse leads her and Juney into the local hospital's exam room and says, “Dr Jassim” will be there soon. The doctor's name intrigues her, and she anxiously wonders, “Where the fuck is she from?” The nurse says, “Mrs. Drummond, relax. She's our best doctor. You got lucky with her (Benedict, 2017, p. 26). The nurse exits, snapping the door as if to shut them in. Rin triggers Rin's post-traumatic memory by learning that the doctor, Naema, is Arab, causing her to tremble and become disoriented, her war memories drowning out the present. Rin's anxiety is typical of traumatic memory recall, in which “the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others and the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (Allen, 2005, p.172).

However, Rin is astounded that Juney was assigned an Arab physician, and her recollection of her deployment to Iraq serves to reinforce her long-standing bias that has its origins in the military. A frequent consequence of the V.A.'s employment practices is the selection of inadequate candidates. It can be assumed that she acquired her certification via an internet-based

platform and supplementary instruction from YouTube. Benedict (2017, p. 28) asserts that she probably dispatched several enemy combatants en route to this location. Rin meticulously scrutinises Naema's attire and conduct within the examination room: "A woman donning a white coat enters, projecting an aura of expertise in the medical field. The person being described lacks a head scarf and possesses blue-black hair and an olive-brown complexion. Their dialect exhibits a refined quality akin to that of snake-oil vendors, accompanied by a distinct yet readily discernible accent. Rin becomes trembling as she observes the guest afflicted with a panic attack. The countenance of the individual. A permanent scar that develops on the epidermis due to an operation or injury. Her breath is described by the author as being short and devoid of oxygen (Benedict, 2017, p. 28). At this moment, the hurricane, which she was certain she could successfully avoid, breaches the glass of the clinic, resulting in the three individuals being drenched in water, debris, and grime, ultimately leading to their demise. To safeguard herself and her daughter, Rin intentionally collides with Naema, driven by a combination of maternal instinct and a profound sense of fear. A brutal attack was inflicted upon a foreign woman by her aggressive mentality amidst the circumstances of war.

Wolf Season shows how Rin's homecoming tale contradicts the idea that female veterans feel comfortable at home. Since she is a wounded victim and a "trauma hero" who fights twice, "the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory" (Nguyen, 2009, p149), Rin may be violent and nurturing. In addition, Benedict wanted to show the Iraq War and its effects from the point of view of a female survivor. *Wolf Season* was one of the first books written by an Iraqi author to look at the lives of Iraq war refugees living in the United States. After the end of *Sand Queen*, Naema finished medical school, got married to Khalil, and had a son named Tariq. An American translator named Khalil is killed by a car bomb that also cuts off Tariq's limbs and runs away, forcing her to move to the United States. Naema, who is from Iraq, was wrongfully locked up in *Sand Queen*, and at Camp Bucca, she sadly lost both her father and her younger brother Zaki. This is something that most Iraqis have: a "splattered white scar on her right cheekbone" from the war (Benedict, 2017, p. 28). "The same car bomb that hurt her son and left a scar on her face also killed her husband," she remembers of her worst time. Both her father and her brother or sister died in the fighting (Benedict, 2017, p. 70). People can see right away that she is blind, even though it has nothing to do with Tariq's quick death or Khalil's death, whom she loved. "Her degrees and achievements as a doctor in Iraq count for nothing"(161). She needs further training and residency to become a U.S. doctor. She first appears as Juley's paediatrician in *Wolf Season* when

Rin assaults her while carrying her and Juney out of the storm-flooded exam room. She spends weeks in the hospital on air and IVs. She keeps experiencing flashbacks of Iraq, her house, her life as a young wife and mother, and the blast that killed her husband and damaged her kid. The refugee struggles with space and time in the novel's past-present contrast. She imagines being in Iraq in the 2000s but in New York in the 2010s. Naema affects many war refugees in the US. Homi Bhabha suggests that "liminality" is helpful. Bhabha defines liminality as transferring social places while puzzled. Afghan and Iraqi people are not culturally linked. In one page of "Mosaic," Naema's fractured mind travels from witnessing "Baby Tariq crawl, perfect and whole" to hearing the "call of the muezzin" and having "Tariq shocked stiff in her arms, his leg an incomprehensible rag" to seeing "the blinding green of the American countryside" (41). Tariq visits her in the hospital and takes her back in time. He looks at her wounded body with "the fear in his face," or "the same shocked expression he wore in the Baghdad hospital the day after the bomb, the day he was trying to grasp in his three-year-old way that it was his father he had just seen atomized into a cloud of blood; his leg that had just been sawn off at the thigh" (131).

After recuperating enough to return home, Naema begins to see spatiotemporalities, but her numerous identities—then and now—are always tied to her child. Her sole living reminder of her history and purpose is him. Like Rin and Juney, Naema's post-traumatic self-reconstruction is tough and child-centred. Benedict uses Iraqi civilian-turned-refugee Naema to demonstrate "how very long the reach of war turns out to be" (Benedict, 2017, p.178). War continues emerging in avoiders' daily lives. Alone in an upstate New York hamlet that is both bucolic and claustrophobic, Naema Jassim and her son Tariq are trapped like the other *Wolf Season* residents. Everyone is in everyone's business; therefore, intentions and lifestyles are questionable. Naema and Tariq are refugees fighting for survival in a war as dangerous as the American invasion of Iraq sixteen years ago. I was expecting a lady, Naema said in accented but near-perfect English when they were introduced, turning her gaze away. He looked at her tight lips and a white star on her cheek, hoping she never knew he was a soldier (Benedict, 2017, p.67).

The three wolves June and her mother have penned in on their little wilderness attract Tariq. He asks June, "Why does she keep wolves?" Yes, keeping wolves is cool. Juney smooths and evens the small grave's insides: "To protect us." Protect you from robbers? I dunno." She pauses to sway. Mom was in battle." She leans forward to touch the grave. "You think it's deep enough?" Tariq then adds another handful of earth to the neat pile beside him. (Benedict, 2017, p. 48) "I was in a war, too." These wolves

protect June and her mother but jeopardize their ideal life off the land and without strangers. Tariq thinks the wolves are especially receptive to his Arabic pleas because they may be his protectors.

Beth, the third primary character in *Wolf Season*, should be examined in the context of her role as a parent and her experience of grief. Beth is a lady serving in the military who experiences domestic violence from her husband and faces challenges in raising her difficult kid. She had the title of homecoming queen in her little town, where she was admired for her beauty and popularity. She married Todd, a long-serving member of the Marine Corps, "before he departed for boot camp, providing her with a reason to forgo pursuing higher education, which greatly displeased her parents" (Benedict, 2017, p. 90). She was the mother of Flanner, who was 10 years old. For 15 years, she endured the arduous task of waiting for him, first from various locations inside the United States, and then from the war-torn regions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite her part-time job as a children's dance instructor in a strip mall business, she is an alcoholic. In Benedict's (2017) study, the author highlights the aesthetic appeal of some elements in the house, such as curtains with a bright lemon colour, towels that match the curtains, and faucets made of gold (p. 61). Additionally, the presence of creamy velvet cushions contributes to the overall pleasant appearance of the house (p. 89). In addition, the establishment features a dining room adorned with luxurious butter and cream decor, meticulously maintaining cleanliness by regular dusting, vacuuming, and polishing (p. 149). However, Beth experiences a sense of confinement.

Beth indirectly encounters conflicts similar to those faced by Rin and Naema. Todd, her spouse serving in the Marine Corps, came back from Iraq filled with anger and emotional instability. She anticipates and dreads Todd's return home since with each homecoming, he becomes more emotionally guarded and distant. On his first day back, he loudly demands his wife hand over the keys and instructs his son Flanner to occupy himself with television or whatever other activity he currently engages in (Benedict, 2017, p. 149). Beth is emotionally affected by his traumatic dreams caused by post-traumatic stress disorder. Following his act of forcefully removing her from the bed or attempting to choke her, he regains consciousness while crying and expressing remorse, pleading with her to stay with him (Benedict, 2017, p. 90). Despite her repeated assertion that the war, not the person, is causing her distress, the frequency and intensity of these incidents suggest a pattern of domestic violence.

Benedict's portrayal of the circumstances faced by a military spouse serves as a reminder of the spouses who endure the challenges of war from the home front. Beth's response to Todd's demise after the narrative is extraordinary,

beyond her conventional position as a spouse who waits. Beth has a sense of freedom and release upon the passing of her spouse. She recognises that this emotion is atypical for a grieving spouse. The protagonist struggles to suppress her intense want to laugh throughout Todd's funeral (Benedict, 2017, p.238). Against her own will, she experiences the sensation of participating in a disturbing carnival, mimicking the behaviour of war widows she has observed on television (Benedict, 2017, p. 240). She declares, "The performance has concluded," as Louis escorts Beth and Flanner to the car following the burial. I require a beverage (242).

During the subsequent days, she oscillates between fulfilling her role as a wife and asserting her autonomy as an independent individual. The main character feels a sense of shame and is faced with a short moral dilemma about what she should do next: "She is now compelled to be two widows; it is as if she were to marry two Todds, one before the war and the other after; she will wake up to an unbearable burden; and she is so grateful to be rid of him that she can't even bring herself to look at her reflection in the mirror" (Benedict, 2017, p. 250). She decides solemnly to leave their residence, which she used to call home. Sarah sells the house three weeks following Todd's burial to go to New York City with Flanner. In her work published in 2017, Benedict provides a detailed account of a ceremonial event when a mother and her son systematically remove items from each area of the house, deciding what to pack, what to discard, and what to keep in storage (p. 288). In an attempt to start fresh in a different place and redefine her identity, she gets rid of "every single remaining piece of Todd's possessions from his time in the Marine Corps" (Benedict, 2017, p.288). By doing this, she leaves behind this phase of her life.

Because war teaches murder, senselessness, death, brutality, despair, and devastation, everyone is scarred. Its wounds are sometimes visible but usually in private houses and families. Thus, every war hides the veteran who attacks his wife. This survivor cannot trust the refugee who cannot hear rain without remembering bombs and terror, the former soldier who ignores his wife's illness until it's too late, and the child of the missing soldier who snaps at a friend. No one writes with more expertise or cool-eyed compassion on the experience of women in combat, both on and off the battlefield, than Helen Benedict writes David Abrams in *The Quivering Pen*. Her *Wolf Season* is more than a modern fiction; it should be essential reading (Abrams, 2019, p. 194).

To claim *Wolf Season* is a domestic conflict portrait is deceptive. Benedict's aspirations are broader because her characters' concerns and biases echo the difficulties following them. Her story avoids corniness by drawing analogies between a war, its aftermath, and the daily lives of those who survived it.

These three *Wolf Season* protagonists achieve a similar plane despite their different proximity and relationships to Iraq. Each had to raise a child alone after the war took their husbands. After their losses, motherhood has made them stronger and more capable of recovering from post-traumatic stress than men. Through Rin, Benedict illustrates the psychologically wounded female soldier post-war. Benedict depicts the traumatic story of an Iraqi civilian-turned-refugee through Naema. Benedict uses Beth to emphasize the international war's impact on domestic space and indicates that war widows can survive after their husbands die.

Body language shows what concealment could do to the psychological state and its consequences in a person's life, as well as its unexpected guarantees, as in the novel (*Fingers Pass*) by Mohsen Al-Safali. (Awoin,2024, p.164).

5- Conclusion

According to this study, War has lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities. It highlights the challenges of reintegrating troops and displaced people after the war. The work accurately depicts trauma's complex and varied effects on life and identity. Additionally, this story examines the female perspective in battle. Analyzing the stories' female main characters' perspectives reveals the unique challenges and psychological damages women face after the war. Female soldiers, refugees, and military spouses complicate the story by stressing trauma and resilience. Scholarly references and critical assessments provide the work rigour, creating a foundation in academic language and cultivating a thorough understanding of the subject. Sociological and cultural perspectives enrich the investigation, helping to understand the shared psychological anguish of conflict-affected people. Additionally, the research paper shows how people cope with personal and social tragedies. The study analyses novel characters' tales to show their strength in difficult situations. It acknowledges war's lasting impact on their lives.

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