



الحرب وخلق عام ديستوبي: دراسة في قصة حسن بلاسم كلمات متقاطعة وامبروز بيرس شيكاموكا

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الجامعة المستنصرية | كلية الاداب

قسم اللغة الانكليزية وادابها

تاريخ الاستلام : 13-04-2021

تاريخ القبول : 28-06-2021

المستخلص

: الحرب وخلق عالم ديستوبي: دراسة مقارنة لقصة "كلمات متقاطعة لحسن بلاسم وقصة "شيكاموكا" لامبروز بيرس. تظهر الدراسة كيف ان الحرب تخلق عالما ديستوبيا اسوء من العالم الذي يصوره قصص الديستوبيا حيث تخلق الحرب عالما دائريا او مغلقا لا وجود فيه لنهاية النفق. تناقش الدراسة قصتين واحدة للكاتب العراقي حسن بلاسم بعنوان "كلمات متقطعة" والآخرى للكاتب الامريكي امبروز بيرس بعنوان "جيكاموكا". تقع هاتين القصتين ضمن احد فروع الديستوبيا حيث يشهد المجتمع نتائج الحرب بحيث يكون كلا من المدنيين والجنود ضحايا. بالرغم من عدم تبني القصتين النظرة المستقبلية المعتمدة في القصص الديستوبي الا انهما يعبران عن فكرة كاتبيهما من ان ما تمر به المجتمعات في بعض الاحيان بالرغم من انه حقيقي الا انه يعد ديستوبيا في نفس الوقت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الديستوبيا، الحرب، التحرر من الاعتياد، حسن بلاسم، امبروز بيرس



War and the Creation of a Dystopian Reality: A Comparative Study of Hassan Blasim's "Crosswords" and Ambrose Bierce's "Chickamauga"

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Receipt date: 2021-04-13

Date of acceptance: 2021-06-28

Abstract

The study shows how war can create a dystopian reality worse than the reality depicted in the dystopian stories. War creates a circular or enclosed world that has no exit where people cannot see the end of the tunnel. The study discusses two short stories; one is for the Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim entitled "Crosswords" and the other for the American writer Ambrose Bierce entitled "Chickamauga". These two short stories fit one of the categories of dystopian fiction where society witnesses the effects of war and civilians and soldiers become the victims. Though the two stories do not adhere to the futuristic perspective of dystopian fiction, they could express the thought of their writers' that what is going on in the society though it is real, it is at the same time so strange and horrible, dystopian .

Key Words: Dystopia, War, Defamiliarization, Hassan Blasim, Ambrose Bierce.



1.1 Introduction

There is always that human desire of living in a utopian world, a perfect, just, and peaceful one where people can enjoy their freedom and security without transgressions from authoritarian or tyrannical powers and where justice can prevail. From Moore's Utopia (1516) with its connection to Plato's Republic (380 BC), thinkers and writers continue to envision a utopian world, a kind of an antithesis to the existing one giving the hope that such a world might and could exit. On the other hand, there are attempts to portray an opposite picture, a dystopia or a bad place. Dystopia could be defined as "an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic". Due to the two great world wars, a cold war, and the frightening advancement in technology especially that is connected to eugenics, there begins a new impulse, an emphasis on a dystopian world, worse than the real with all its atrocities, a kind of cautionary one.

Pamela Bedore believes that "the caution that they [dystopias] give is not to avoid specific technological or political changes. It is to avoid the cognitive slippage where we can no longer be quite sure of what we consider real" (98). Dystopian fiction portrays a dark, sardonic world that becomes a threat to human beings aiming to fully control or to eliminate them entirely and in both cases, a man /woman becomes prey for termination. Surviving becomes a kind of art that cannot everybody enjoy. The creation of such a world inheres a skepticism and raises the doubt that a utopian one can never exist due to what Judith Shklar mentioned in the title of her book , After Utopia (1957), "the decline of political faith". Shklar explains "For political helplessness induced by years of instability, war, and totalitarianism manifests itself intellectually no less than in popular feeling" (vii). The sense of pessimism elevated by different historical events especially wars, makes people lose any sense of utopia or the good world. Commenting on such a kind of fiction, Erika Gottlieb states: "there are historical phenomena that create societies that should be described as dystopic, societies where the literary imagination refuses to envisage a world worse than the existing world of reality"(5).

By locating its setting in unrecognized places and times, Dystopian fiction presents "fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable" (Booker, 19). This kind of fiction focuses on depicting familiar minute details in people's lives by making these details appear very strange as if the reader encounters them for the first time. This perspective to portray life in an unfamiliar way



startles the reader and makes her/him reconsider comprehending reality. This focus on depicting familiar details by making them strange and shocking is called "defamiliarization". Therefore, dystopian fiction adopts defamiliarization as its major technique. The word defamiliarization was coined by the early 20th-century Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Technique"(1917) included in Theory of Prose (1925). Shklovsky warns against making things familiar. He states:

Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been." And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. (Italics added, 2)

Shklovsky argued that defamiliarization is, more or less, the idea of all literature. Literature makes language strange, as well as the world that the language presents. Other terms connected to defamiliarization are Bertolt Brecht's "alienation effect" used in the 'Epic Theatre' which interrupts the passive contentment of the audience and obliges them to analyze critically the play in particular as well as the world in general and Darco Suvin's "the cognitive estrangement" which connects dystopian fiction to science fiction. Though there is a great deal of overlapping between dystopian fiction and science fiction, one major difference between them in the words of Booker is "in the specificity of its attention to social and political critique" (Booker,19). By depicting strange unfamiliar worlds, dystopian fiction tries to kill the habitualization or automatization in human beings by making them fully aware of the horribleness they live in, motivating them not to give in to their suffering but to work hard in order to get rid of it.

The term "dystopia" has been coined for the first time in 1952 by J. Max Patrick, when he suggested in his The Quest for Utopia that "the opposite of eutopia[sic], the ideal society, [is] a dystopia, if it is permissible to coin a word" (Gottlieb, 4). According to Bedore, dystopian fiction is divided into three categories. They are:

- 1.The harsh dystopia, where an authoritarian government controls the awful place and thus oppresses people's lives .
2. Stories about a dystopian society that seems moving towards



apocalypse and sometimes even tells the story of that apocalypse.

3. A dystopian society that has survived the apocalyptic event. (102)

The study discusses two short stories, one is for the Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim entitled "Crosswords" and the other for American writer Ambrose Bierce entitled "Chickamauga". These two short stories fit the second category mentioned by Bedore above where the society witnesses the effects of war and civilians and soldiers become the victims. Though the two stories do not adhere to the futuristic perspective of dystopian fiction, they could express the thought of their writers' that what is going on in the society though it is real but it is at the same time, dystopian. The horrors faced by people in certain societies, especially at the time of wars prevent them from imagining that there are places worse than the place they are living in or that there are atrocities greater than the ones they are confronting.

In this light, despite the historical and geographical differences between the two short stories, this paper demonstrates how Hassan Blasim and Ambrose Bierce depict a world which has been overturned by the dreadfulness of war and how war helps to create a dystopian reality that eventually affects people's life.

2.1. Hassan Blasim's "Crosswords"

Anaïs Nin writes in her book *The Novel of the Future*: "It is the function of art to renew our perception. What we are familiar with we cease to see. The writer shakes up the familiar scene, and as if by magic, we see a new meaning in it" (25). The Iraqi writer, Hassan Blasim adopts this style in writing familiar events but in unfamiliar and shocking way hoping that people everywhere can understand the "unfamiliar reality" (Blasim,51) of suffering of Iraqi people under different kinds of oppressive powers like dictatorship, successive wars, economic blockade, and terrorism. When he has been asked during an interview about the reason that drives him to write in such a way, Blasim replies:

What is happening in Iraq now did not come about by chance. It's an extension of the destruction and the wars that the dictator (i.e., Saddam Hussein) fought earlier, wars in which international capitalism was, and still is, a significant factor...Iraq has been a maelstrom of violence and destruction for more than five decades. Literature is one form of human cognitive defiance. It's



like life, which violence cannot stop, however vicious it might be. We can't just sit around watching and waiting. We have to get on with it. (Ashfeldt, 1)

Hassan Blasim is an Iraqi writer. He was born in Baghdad in 1973 and graduated from the Academy of Arts, department of Cinema. He currently lives in Finland where he continues his literary achievement. His fiction has twice won the English PEN Writers in Translation award and his stories were translated into Finnish, Polish, Spanish, and Italian. Hassan's short stories depict Iraqis social lives focusing on Iraq's successive wars and their effect on the lives of Iraqis. Blasim's short story "Crosswords" is part of a collection of short stories entitled *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq* (2014) that Penguin Books published.

The title of the story "Crosswords" compares Iraqis' life to a game or a puzzle where one needs to use her\his mind to fill in the white squares with the suitable words to make sense of things. War in Iraq is not an accidental or temporary event. Unfortunately it plays the dominant part in Iraqis' modern life for decades leaving them all the time in a state of instability, fear, and insecurity. It has created a dystopian place for Iraqis which is worse than all the places that could be created in fiction. Blasim takes the lead to create such familiar/unfamiliar world through his stories. Commenting on Blasim's stories, Bhaswati Ghosh writes:

With scathing candour, he reveals the lives of a people whose entire world is war — not only the external conflict raging around them, but a series of battles — against international sanctions that leaves them without electricity for 20 hours a day, avenging the killings of loved ones, and against one's own fate and even conscience. (Ghosh, 1)

So, in his collection of stories, Blasim does not need to go to the future to create a dystopian, cautionary world, he could only depict the realistic and horrible events of Iraqis' lives and the result is a dystopian reality.

"Crosswords" is written in different voices reflecting the points of view of two of the three male characters in the story. The first narrator is nameless and is better identified in the story as the friend of Marwan. The second narrator is also nameless and he is identified as the friend of the first narrator and Marwan. He is intersecting the narration to comment and his comments occur in the form of italics. This variation in points of view might suggest the fragmentation in the lives of Iraqi people. Though, there are three characters, it seems that only Marwan is given a name



perhaps to demonstrate that no matter who or how many they are, the three characters could be regarded as one devastated identity.

Most of the dystopian stories do not use real names of places or even particular dates but usually they make affinities with real places that readers could recognize. "Crosswords" is set in a nameless place and the time of the story is swaying between the present and the past. The events are fragmented. Only by giving clues, the reader could detect the time, but the place remains the wide and poor Iraq because in the title of the collection, the writer mentions that these stories are about Iraq, otherwise the narrator never mentions the name of the place in the whole story. The story opens unexpectedly with someone who feels very thirsty and immediately the reader is confronted with the image of injured man who drinks a cold glass of water only to be thanked by the thirsty voice. It is a hospital room with a patient who is coming into consciousness and looking at an obese nurse giving an injection to another mutilated man. So, the first image gives the impression of sickness and dismemberment. This patient appears to be Marwan, the central character in the story who has survived a terrorist attack. Marwan is a young journalist who works in a magazine in charge of the page of crosswords. He was at work when two cars were exploded, a daily phenomenon in Iraq for many years.

Next, the narrator shifts to the past in a kind of flashback. He begins to describe his childhood with Marwan. It is a time of war. Till now four years pass and the end of the war seems far away. Though the narrator never mentions the name of this war but we can detect that it is the Iraqi-Iranian war (1980-1988) which took the lives of thousands of Iraqi young men, leaving other thousands either missing or deformed. The narrator and his friend seem to be poor and live in a nameless poor district where the streets are full of pools of mud. This mud as it suggests the poverty of people and the meanness of their place, ironically becomes the only solace for mourning women whenever they lose a beloved in the war. It becomes a custom that they throw themselves in these pools smearing their faces and bodies as a gesture of deep mourning. The mud replaces the cheap herbal odors a wife usually wears for a husband and especially a husband she might not see in months. As these details seem unfamiliar nowadays, Blasim's emphasis on them shows the depth of loss for these poor women and the fracture in the society as women become widows and children become orphans.



The narrator and Marwan are long life friends. As children, they were very close to each other. The most important memory in their childhood is their chasing of the car of coffins of the dead in the war. The narrator states: "We...built our own world out of the strangeness of the world surround us. We watched the adults' wars on television and saw how the front ate up our elders. Our mothers baked bread in clay ovens and sat down in the sunset hour, afraid and with tears in their eyes"(52). War has opened these children's eyes to the reality of death. Should they become familiar with death at this early age? As children, war becomes for them only a game of waiting for those coffins wrapped in the flag and tied firmly to the top of a car. They come to imitate the older people in their reaction towards these coffins. Whenever these coffins pass, they stand up to raise their hands sadly in a gesture of farewell. Blasim portrays the atmosphere of fear and insecurity in a country burns by war where people are silenced that the only thing women can do is to wait in tears the coffins of their beloveds and the men can only wave farewell for the dead.

The game of chasing the coffin cars turns from waiting to a game of guessing, a kind of a puzzle, where the car will stop and at which house. This game has acquired a different reality when once the car stops at Marwan's house: "His mother came out screaming hysterically. She ripped her clothes and threw herself in the pool of mud. Marwan, who was standing next to me, stood stock-still and stared in a trance. His big brother noticed and pulled him into the house" (Blasim,54).

From chasing death as a game, it turns into a strange reality because the dead is Marwan's father. Shockingly, the two children have to face closely the reality of death at this early age. Marwan is shocked because he cannot comprehend clearly what is to lose a father forever. The narrator hurried in tears to his mother announcing the death of the father of his closest friend. Ironically, the mother who seems to be accustomed or habitualized to death, asks him coldly to wash his face and buy her half a kilo of onion.

In dystopian fiction, writers are cautionary against familiarizing or naturalizing things as if they are inevitable. After many years of war, for Iraqi people and for the narrator's mother losing lives in the war has become a familiar thing, they have habitualized it, and accepted it as an inevitable doom, but in a moment, death becomes different for the narrator and his friend Marwan. The use of irony in asking the child to bring onions is a kind of black irony to show how much Iraqi people willingly or unwillingly have familiarized death without complaining or reviewing the real causes of war and whether it is wrong or right for they were ruled by an oppressive authority that



prevented anyone to raise such questions. So, life in Iraq becomes a game with death whether in the war itself or outside it, and people have to cope with it. However, as a matter of fact, in his story, Blasim warns that it is not and should not be a game.

Satire is one component of dystopian fiction. It is used by Blasim to break the familiarity people have accustomed to. There is no chance to read about events like chasing death cars as a game for children or sending a boy to buy onions in the midst of death news. As death becomes habitual, the author wants to startle his readers in order to make them fight this idea of familiarizing death. If the characters in the story are doomed forever without any opportunity of being redeemed, the readers have the opportunity for salvation.

Life in Iraq continues to be a ceaseless battle; violence and fear seem the companions of Iraqis. Fear and lack of security continue to dominate the place and people have to cope with them. As the narrator and his friend Marwan grow older, they have to face another kind of war (2003-) and another cycle of violence and sectarian elimination. Iraqis have to confront thousands of terrorist attacks. Two explosions occur near the magazine where Marwan works. The building is kept from being collapsed by the concrete walls surrounding it put for security reasons. The narrator comes to portray the scene graphically:

First they (the terrorists) detonated a taxi in front of the magazine's offices...The second vehicle was a waterlemon truck, packed with explosives. The first police patrol to arrive after the first explosion brought three police men. The murderers waited for people to gather and then detonated the second vehicle that killed twenty-five people. Two of the policemen were killed on the spot, and their colleague caught fire and began running in every direction, Finally he staggered through the door of the magazine building and collapsed, a lifeless corpse. (Blassim, 255) (parenthesis added)

The above horrible scene becomes unfortunately one of the familiar scenes in the life of Iraqis but Blasim wants to defamiliarize these scenes, to focus on their details to show how terrible they are for they are inhuman and they come to leave perpetual scars in the mind and heart of survivors:

...the first explosion shredded Marwan's face. The windows shattered and the cupboards fell on top of him. His mouth filled with blood. He spat out teeth and indistinctly heard the screams of his colleague, the editor of the new woman section. The dust made it impossible to see. She crawled



over the rubble screaming "I'm going to die...I'm going to die". Then she fell silent suddenly and forever. Marwan bled a long time only to recover consciousness in the hospital. (Blasim, 54)

After this accident, Marwan's world has collapsed and he could not restore his old mental condition though his injuries have not been deep. As a result of the shock, he suffers a trauma, a split as he believes that the soul of one of the dead policemen comes to live inside him and haunts him and that he becomes its host. Samir Al-Mukhtar comments on the relation between the title of the story and Marwan's condition, stating "Hassan Blasim takes us to very strange circumstances as he gives the idea of crosswords a highly symbolic value that reaches to intersecting (not only words) but also souls" (AL.Mukhtar, 1). Marwan almost goes mad as he listens to the thoughts and desires of the dead policeman. The horrible traumatic experience leaves him a different person. He could neither work or even live a normal life. Marwan experiences what S. Felman and Dori Laub refers to as defenses from trauma: "a sense of paralysis, outrage and anger, withdrawal and numbness, flood of awe and fear, obsession with fact finding and hyper-emotionality" (Felman & Laub, 72). He feels angry all the time and thinks that he is always spied on by the dead policeman, he could hear the voice of the policeman inside him very clear and serene like a conscience. As a result, he becomes a heavy drinker and at one night, he swallows a razor blade, vomits blood and dies immediately. Marwan could not succeed to make sense of his experience, so that he not only becomes but also remains the victim of such experience. Kirby Farrell believes that "in trauma, terror overwhelms not just the self, but the ground for the self, which is to say our trust in the world. In this way, trauma is an injury not just to the central nervous system or the psyche, but also to the culture that sustains body and soul" (Farrell, viii).

Marwan's is the story of many Iraqis who suffer the endless atrocities of war, a war that has become part of their daily life shaping and directing their steps in a country that has become a trap- like for them and though death is horrible as it hardly occurs of natural causes, sometimes it becomes a kind of relieve.

Dystopia is a bad place set in the future as a warning that if you follow these steps, you will arrive to such a disastrous result, but Blasim's story violates this futuristic characteristic in dystopian fiction to portray a present dystopia , a daily living one, or an unfamiliar reality where the reader does not need to travel to the future to see how far it is devastating, and this dystopia is called Iraq.



3.1. Ambrose Bierce's "Chickamauga" (1892)

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) is an American short story writer. In 1918, H. L. Mencken called Bierce "the one genuine wit that These States have ever seen" (Joshi, 2002, p. 1). Bierce served as a war veteran. He witnessed many of the American civil war battles and depicted the events of these battles in narrative form even before Stephen Crane's iconic novel *The Red Badge of Courage* which came to immortalize and celebrate the American civil war, simply because Stephen Crane was born six years after the end of this civil war. Unlike Crane's, Bierce's stories portray the dark nature of war and that there is no real heroism in killing. Weird-fiction critic and editor, S. T. Joshi mentioned that Bierce has a great impact on his own work, and has praised him for his satire, stating:

Bierce will remain an equivocal figure in American and world literature chiefly because his dark view of humanity is, by its very nature, unpopular. Most people like writing that is cheerful and uplifting, even though a substantial proportion of the world's great literature is quite otherwise (Joshi S. I.—T., 144).

Gordon Breg comments on Bierce's attitude towards war saying that in a period that celebrated idealism, honorable progress, and virtuous issues connected with the war, "Bierce was the first writer of his era to cry out that war was also about wasted lives, mutilation, disease, decay, and death" (Breg, 1).

Though all of Bierce's short stories depict battlefields and the suffering of soldiers, "Chickamauga" which is incorporated in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1892), is alone distinct in its depiction of the life experience not of the soldiers fighting for freedom or any good cause, though the title refers to one of those battles, but of a deaf-muted child experience of the war being one of its casualties. In fact, and contrary to war stories written about the American civil war or even the wars after it, Bierce's focus is on portraying how war can devastate life in general and the lives of soldiers and civilians together in particular. He pictures a dystopian world falling apart, a kind of apocalypse with people behaving unnaturally driven by an urge for survival but at the same time by an urge for brutality.

Bierce's literary style could be summarized by an unexpected beginning, the use of gloomy imagery, imprecise references to time, short descriptions and incredible events. As for his characters, George Sterling states "His heroes, or rather victims, are lonely men, passing to



unpredictable dooms, and hearing, from inaccessible crypts of space, the voices of unseen malevolencies". All these merits make "Chickamauga" a good example of a dystopian story that defamiliarizes and shocks the readers' reality. The title of the story itself gives the impression of an exotic and far way place. The story opens with a nameless six years old boy carrying a wooden sword and playing the game of war. The boy's father is a farmer who once has served as a soldier. So, seeing his father's passion with military books and looking at the pictures of war, the boy tries to experience his own version of the game of war. Unconscious how far he moves from his home, and terrified by a rabbit, the boy slips between two rocks and gets asleep from fatigue. When he wakes up and without any awareness of time, he decides to move deeper into the forest. While he sleeps, unrecognized group of soldiers cross the forest into the other side. When the boy wakes up, he sees these soldiers in their retreat. Not comprehending what had happened, he saw men crawling and smeared with blood. Here, the writer begins to portray a dystopian, very strange world. Not understanding what is war, for him what he sees is a game, so he begins to participate in it. He rides on the back of one of the crawling soldiers imitating what he is used to do at home when he is riding the back of his father's slaves until surprisingly, the soldier moves him violently from his back only to be shocked seeing the man with half a face. The child continues to move with the soldiers who sometimes stop moving suddenly because they fall dead. When the others reach a lake, some of the soldiers try to swim but unfortunately being too hurt, they drown. At last, the boy decides to return home only to find that his house is burning and his mother has been violently killed.

Bierce's story is a war story, but it is not the familiar story of victory, courage and heroism. Ironically, the retreated discouraged soldiers are portrayed as struggling with their lives in an attempt to survive and not to acquire a badge of heroism as it is portrayed in the traditional stories. In fact, it sets to depict the hidden ugly face of war, the unspoken of thing. Soldiers who are almost horror –stricken, and who have lost control of themselves, are severely wounded, or have lost parts of their bodies. They move in the darkness of the forest like phantoms or like lost spirits. Their familiar world has collapsed and with it the reality they used to know. This world is turned into a dystopian one on the verge of apocalypse:

They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by



foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by dozens and by hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible. The very ground seemed in motion toward the creek. Occasionally one who had paused did not again go on, but lay motionless. He was dead. Some, pausing, made strange gestures with their hands, erected their arms and lowered them again, clasped their heads; spread their palms upward, as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer. (Bierce,26)

What distinguishes Bierce's short story is its panoramic nature. For readers of the twenty first century, the darkness, the smoke of artillery, the redness of blood are familiar images in colored war movies, but the story is written in the nineteenth century where only those who have engaged in the war, could confront such imagery. To write in this way obliges Bierce to confront his readers of all times with an unfamiliar reality, being away from seeing for themselves such scenes, Bierce defamiliarizes war for them making them see it from a different perspective. Such well-taught values like honor, courage, heroism and loyalty disappear suddenly to leave instead, pain, bewilderment, disappointment, and death.

The child has to comprehend such a horrible reality. In his innocence, he could not understand that what is going on in front of him is not a game. For him the creeping soldiers are only babies and their swollen red faces remind him of "the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them" (22). For him, it is only another game for these creeping men also remind him of his father's slaves as they creep on their knees and hands to make him happy. The first time the child comes to the recognition that this is no more a game is when he tries to ride the back of one of these crawling soldiers. As the child is pushed away by the soldier, he is terrified to see that this is no man at all:

then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone. The unnatural prominence of nose, the absence of chin, the fierce eyes, gave this man the appearance of a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast by the blood of its quarry. The man rose to his knees, the child to his feet. The man shook his fist at the child; the child, terrified at last, ran to a tree nearby, got upon the farther side of it and took a more serious view of the situation. (Bierce, 23)



This is a scene from a horror movie for the modern reader. Unfortunately, what was once a great soldier, a hero, becomes a Zombie figure who has confronted the child. Fear kills the sense of innocence inside the child and for the first time he begins to comprehend reality differently. Fear drives the child to end his game and choose to return home leaving this horror behind. Not realizing that the blaze that he has admired and chased minutes ago is his own home, the little boy confronts a darker reality greater than the one he has already seen because this one touches him personally :

For a moment he stood stupefied by the power of the revelation, then ran with stumbling feet, making a half-circuit of the ruin. There, conspicuous in the light of the conflagration, lay the dead body of a woman—the white face turned upward, the hands thrown out and clutched full of grass, the clothing de-ranged, the long dark hair in tangles and full of clotted blood. The greater part of the forehead was torn away, and from the jagged hole the brain protruded, overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the work of a shell. (Bierce, 25)

Only after seeing this horrible scene of burned home and murdered mother, readers could hear and share the cries of the child for the first time. Readers themselves are going to discover a very strange reality that throughout the events of the story, the boy could not hear the horrible sounds of explosions for he is a deaf-mute child.

The child moved his little hands, making wild, uncertain gestures. He uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries—something between the chattering of an ape and the gobbling of a turkey—a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil. The child was a deaf mute. (Bierce, 26)

As the story begins in a utopian description of the boy's life being the descendant of great people who strove for freedom, it ends with a dystopian note about the price people have to pay for gaining such utopian values. The child's experience could be the experience of all innocent people who have to pay that heavy price. The deaf-muteness of the child is the condition of innocent people, usually the casualties of war whom no one either from politicians or military people (war mongers) cares for.

4.1 Conclusion



Dystopia or the bad place has occupied much interest in fiction past and contemporary. The aim of such fiction is to defamiliarize the atrocities of reality in order to direct readers' attention to the damage done to human values through the act of familiarizing such horrible things like war and the violence results from it. Though Hassan's and Pierce's short stories are written in different periods of time, both respond to the same social anxieties that war destroys the humanity of people leaving them suffering. Sometimes people survive like Marwan in Hassan Blasim's short story or the six-years old boy in Bierce's but both characters are left traumatic without any hope of recovery because the damage is complete. Though Hassan's short story ends with Marwan as a young man vomiting blood and dead, Bierce's short story is not far from Hassan's end because the little child could be the little Marwan who has to face the murder of his father when a child and to live with it carrying this sense of loss to the end of his life only to witness as a young man the loss of other lives in his country. The two stories show how war can devastate the experiences of two children leaving them with psychological scars.

War creates a dystopian world that people can hardly cope with. People, unfortunately, sometimes naturalize their loss as something destined, or inevitable, but by defamiliarizing death resulted in wars, writers like Blasim and Bierce make people aware of the fact that war is not something unavoidable and thus it must be rejected. Defamiliarizing war is obliging people to think twice about participating in such an inhuman action no matter what the justifications are.

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