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م.م. سفانه حاتم خليل الشمري
وزارة التربية العراقية : مديرية تربية الرصافة/ الثانية

البريد الإلكتروني Email : savannahatem@gmail.com

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The War Impacts on Personal Human Relations: An Analysis Study of Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut and The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien

Asst. Lect. Savannah H. Khalil

savannahatem@gmail.com

Iraqi Ministry of Education - Directorate of Education Baghdad
Rusafa II

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مُستخلص البحث:

الدراسة الحالية ، ومن خلال مفهوم نظريه الصدمة، تستكشف بطريقه نقديه تحليليه آثار الحروب على الأفراد في (المسلخ الخامس 1969) رواية الكاتب الأميركي كورت فينيغوت ، ورواية (الأشياء التي حملوها 1990) للروائي الأميركي تيم أوبراين. هذا الإطار النظري بمفهومه الأدبي نشأ نتيجة تداخل علم الإجتماع المتخصص بالعلاقات الإنسانية وكذلك نظريه الصدمة والنقد الأدبي لفته مابعد الحادثة، ومن خلال هذا التحليل متعددة الأبعاد سيتناول هذا البحث دراسة تأثير الحرب على العلاقات الإنسانية. وخاصة العلاقات الشخصية في إطار ما بعد الحادثة. تفترض نظرية الصدمة أن الأشخاص يعانون من صدمات نفسية عميقة عندما يواجهون أحداثاً لا تُقاوم، تهدد سلامة البشر والحياة، إن مشاعر العجز العميق، الإهمال الشديد والعنف والحوادث والكوارث الطبيعية، كل هذه أحداث وأكثر تسبب صدمات نفسية للأفراد تستمر لفترة

طويلة وتترك آثاراً مؤلمة جداً وعميقة. الشخصيتان الرئيسيتان في الروايتين (بيلي بيلجرم) والملازم (جيمي كروس)، كلاهما يتأثران بشدة بتجارب الحرب، ويواجهان صدمات أثناء فترة حرب تؤثر عليهما نفسياً. بيلي الجندي هو الأسير الغير متحمس للقتال، يواجه أعراض اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة، في حين أن الملازم كروس هو القائد الذي يشعر بالذنب ويتحمل المسؤولية تجاه رجاله معتقداً أنهم غير قادرين حقاً على تحمل أعباء الحرب. تُشكل صدمات الحرب المتوالية كل شخصية، وتؤثر شخصيتيهما يُعزى إلى كونه ناتج عن ازِمات الحرب ولكنهما يستجيبان للصدمات النفسية بطرق مختلفة. على الرغم من أن الروايتين تدور أحداثهما في أزمنة تاريخية مختلفة، الحرب العالمية الثانية (1944-1945) وكذلك حرب فيتنام (1969-1971)، إلا أنهما يتجاوزان سياقاتهما المحددة ليقترحا فهماً عالمياً للعاطفة والعلاقات الإنسانية كحيلة للحرب. قام كل من الكاتبتين فونيجت وأوبراين بتجاهل ورفض تمجيد الحروب السابقة، والتركيز بدلاً من ذلك على تأثيراتها القاسية والمدمرة العميقة على الأفراد وعلاقاتهم الإنسانية مع الآخرين في المجتمع. من خلال تصوير الروايات للصدمة والشعور بالذنب والاعتراب، يعرض الكتاب العواقب الوخيمة للحرب، مع التركيز على هشاشة الروابط الإنسانية في مواجهة الاضطرابات وعنّف الحرب. لذلك، من خلال مزج الأبعاد الثقافية والنفسية، تمثل الأعمال قيد المناقشة تحليلات مؤثرة للصراعات الحربية، وتقف بمثابة شهادة على تكلفة الحروب الدائمة على مستوى العلاقات والمستوى الشخصي. استخدمت هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي لدراسة نصوص الروايات المختارة. تكمن أهمية الدراسة في المنهج الفريد الذي اعتمد نظرية الصدمة، وكذلك النقد الأدبي لما بعد الحداثة ونقد علم اجتماع فيما يخص العلاقات، كمنظور متعدد الأبعاد لتقييم تأثير الحرب على تواصل البشر مع بعضهم البعض، حيث أنها لا تزال غير مستكشفة في الأدب المعاصر لاسيما أن الحروب في استمرارية والصراعات أصبحت يتخذ أشكالاً مختلفة وتسبب آثاراً رهيبية وعميقة على الجميع.

ABSTRACT

The present study, through the trauma theory lens, critically explores the war effects on individuals in Slaughterhouse-Five (1969), novel by the American writer Kurt Vonnegut and The Things They Carried (1990), novel by Tim O'Brien the American novelist, this conceptual framework initiates in the intersection of relational sociology, trauma theory, as well as postmodern literary criticism, through this multi-dimensional lens this study would analyze war's impact on human relations especially personal relationships in a frame of postmodernism. Trauma theory supposes that persons suffer deep psychological trauma when they face events that



are irresistible, threatening safety and life, which create deep helplessness feelings. Severe neglect, violence, accidents and natural disasters, all of these events and more cause psychological traumas for individuals last for long time leaving deep impacts. The protagonists in the two novels *Billy Pilgrim* and *Lieutenant Jimmy Cross*, respectively, both are heavily impacted by the war experiences, they face different psychological war traumas. Billy, the war prisoner, is an unenthusiastic soldier who faces the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.), whereas Lieutenant Cross is the leader who bearing guilt and responsibility toward his men, he thinks neither of them truly able to grips with the war toll. Different kinds of trauma shape each character, both are attributed to the war cost but respond to their psychological trauma in different ways. Even though the two literary works being set in different historical times, World War II (1944-1945) as well as the War of Vietnam (1969- 1971), respectively, they exceed their definite contexts to suggest universal understandings into the emotional and relational war toll. Both, Vonnegut and O'Brien put away and reject previous classic war glorifications, concentrating instead on its deep devastating harsh influences on individuals and their human connections with others in society. Through the novels' portrayal of trauma, guilt, and alienation, the writers present the monstrous consequences of war, emphasising the human bonds' fragility in facing upheaval and war violence. Therefore, by blending cultural as well as psychological dimensions, the under discussion works represent poignant analyses of war conflicts, stand as a testament to the lasting human wars' cost on relational and personal levels. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method so as to examine the selected novels' texts. The study's significance lies in the unique approach that adopted trauma theory, as well as postmodern literary criticism and relational sociology criticism, as a multidimensional lens to evaluate war's impact on human relations especially personal relationships as they remain underexplored in contemporary literature since war is a continuous conflict that takes different forms and causes deep terrible impacts on all.

1. INTRODUCTION

For long times, **war** has served as a bountiful fertile field for literature, it offers many stories that prob the human suffering, confronting this suffering as well as transformation to endure the suffering, war just like any other traumatic events that leave feelings cause trauma, lead to experiencing intense sense of fear horror or shock or even sense of helplessness (Futtermann, & Pumpian-Mindlin, 1951, p.p. 401-408).



Experiencing **trauma** is a very critical part of human being; history of humanity was written in blood. Though art and literature have always had some preoccupation finds people coping with life's inevitable tragedies, the study of trauma's effects on mind and body had to wait until the late twentieth century. When psychiatry has started to study trauma, it becomes the soul of it. The deep following up for the (P.T.S.D.) **posttraumatic stress disorder's** development creates a framework to understand people's conceptions of their world, their personalities and biology which are inseparably formed by severe experiences which cause the trauma deepens the people's inability to grapple with real experiences overwhelming their ability to cope (Rivkin, & Ryan, 2017, p. 488).

Till recently war trauma and its results on soldiers have been mostly ignored, this is another aim of the present study is to focus on the roots of mental illness and the victims of war from the soldiers or veterans. The Austrian neurologist **Sigmund Freud** (died in 1939), has many works concerning the trauma, he coined considerable principles in his works including that Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920, p. 49). He did quite a few works even before the advent of the actual studies on war trauma, but his theories, especially the ones about the psyche, have become a standard through which modern trauma studies are done, especially in relation to repressed memory. Freud discovers the recurring suffering phenomenon that the individuals who have afforded traumatic experiences face. These individuals constantly experience repeated nightmares or even they are unable to control the painful events in their conscious, because these events are fatal and entirely outside their wish or control (Freud, 1920, p. 21).

Additionally, **Cathy Caruth** is among the prominent scholars who are interested in trauma's studies. Her Extraordinarily unique and mind-boggling, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996) is an insight into the world of individual trauma theory, which Cathy Caruth pioneered single handedly. Caruth thinks that trauma amounts to more than just a psychological injury, rather it disrupts the memory, the time, temporal understanding and narrative cohesion. The author further puts forth that trauma becomes an issue of focus because it possesses depth. The event is not fully understood and is instead executed in a "belated" manner, this suggests that the traumatic event is not that a singular event must be dealt with at the same time of its occurrence, rather the complexity of the issue forces a person to branch out and deal with the phenomenon which returns later in different fragmented forms and troubling ways like disturbing memories or even flashbacks (Caruth, 1996, p.4).



In the context of **war trauma**, **Caruth's theoretical framework** carries a fascinating amount of understanding soldiers' war experiences. Wars contain elements and severe events that are too great and irresistible to be comprehended and processed by human mind, the result is memory's fragmentation, war trauma, also, causes flashbacks as well as making the integration of the experiences into a coherent personal narrative impossible. Caruth's theory of "double telling" of trauma (the need to remember and forget at the same time) mirrors the soldiers' inner conflict they encounter when veterans attempt to reconcile the present life's events with the traumatic experiences of the past (Ibid, p.7).

Caruth's perspective is indeed very relevant in examining war literature or historical accounts of soldiers, for it emphasizes the fact that trauma is not an individual, psychological problem but rather a narrative and historical one (Ibid., p. 11). Thus, within her work is a lens to view not just the ways that war trauma ruptures both personal and collective histories, but also how survivors might struggle to express their experiences in ways that are both personally relevant, meaningful and on a social basis understandable.

writers have always used war as a pivotal backdrop through which to investigate the human experience regarding trauma, sacrifice, identity, or violence impact on persons and society. War literature often reflects the human situation, which articulates individual and mass suffering in conditions of chaos and total destruction. It treads upon questions of heroism, ethics of violence, and psychological burden borne by soldiers and civilians alike. With such narratives, literature becomes almost a mode of confronting suffering brought on by war as if it showed insights into human spirits' strong and frail parts.

Some Postmodern novels tackle these severe impacts, among them, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Such novels, through some innovative narrative techniques, they present testimonies to articulate how war has caused the most profound impacts in psychological as well as interpersonal terms. The present study critically studies how the two novels' texts represent the long-lasting effects of war on identity, both individual and personal connections through addressing trauma, memory, and people's communications.

Like *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Vonnegut's which delves into war absurdities through the fragmented journey of Billy Pilgrim, where alienation from personal relations is paired with the chaotic disintegration of World War II, so does O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*. It chronicles the physical and mental struggles of soldiers in the Vietnam War and reveals the immense agony of guilt as well as the inescapable

need for solidarity and what it takes to stay alive. Both novels transcend traditional forms of war narratives and war fiction designs by creating integrity between non-linear narrative and metafictional elements to mirror the encompassing disruptive nature of trauma and its subsequent impact on human relationships and identity (Caruth, 1996, p. 60).

Post-modern writers often employ non-linear narratives and fragmented storytelling so as to echo the discordance and chaos in the individual lives of people grappled by war ("Postmodernism and Fragmented Narratives in World Literature", 2023, para.2). They assert the collapsing of established structures, especially of relationships, under the most traumatic disruptions. These techniques mirror the personality fragmentation of individuals in the postmodern time (Sunayna, 2024).

In fact, most of the modern novels challenge heroism traditional notions. They depict human emotions' complexities and the struggles that individuals encounter to merge their experiences with other personal relations and their societies' expectations. It is evident in works such as Slaughterhouse-Five of Kurt Vonnegut, where a fragmented narrative is employed to illustrate the war disorienting effects on the protagonists' as well as the personal identity (Shi, 2019, p. 553).

War effects on personal life and relationships have in post-modern literature been the subject of study in terms of studying resilience, human conditions and the aftermath of war on persons when physical wars have ceased. Based on analyzing these two novels, this study contributes to understand more about the role of war literature in trying to center wider themes in identity crisis, alienation, and disintegration in relationships. It engages also with trauma theory, especially the insights of Cathy Caruth regarding the cyclical and traumatic memories' unresolved nature, while also exploring in what ways postmodernism would reform the war narratives. The present study, therefore, lays at the intersection of literary discourse, historical and psychological discourses and, therefore, it provides a nuanced view of the enduring impact of war on both the personal experiences as well as collective human experiences.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

War impacts do not just affect nations and societies. Personal relationships are profoundly affected by war, leaving an individual grappling with the trauma's influences and altered human relationships. This theme is explored more intricately in literature, especially in Slaughterhouse-Five Kurt Vonnegut's novel and The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien. Compared to both works, the two have disrupted and ruptured interpersonal bonds, even the meanings associated with



manhood, heroism, and the human emotions' fragility under extreme conditions.

Still, there is a need to study how these texts explicitly represent the psychological war aftermath on relations and the characters in their struggles to reconcile with what society and the self-expect of them regarding their war experiences. The present study seeks to bridge this gap through probing deeply the long-lasting war impacts on human relationships in the two seminal novels.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

War's effects on personal relationships create a significant interest in postmodern literature, especially such texts as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. With these novels which are prominent texts, scholars emphasize the war psychological toll on interpersonal relationships and the way characters confront issues of identity, memory, and reintegrating back into society. This literary review studies the scholarly discourse concerning the two novels, focusing on their coverage of war effects on the aspects of interpersonal relationships. One of the very significant features of post-modern war literature is most notably that it has introduced non-linear storytelling and fragmented narratives. Both novels employ this same technique to represent the disorientation and chaos stemming from war. *Slaughterhouse Five*, Vonnegut's narrative is critically analyzed through the traumas' studies framework, concentrating on the psychological fragmentation of Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist, and the description of (PTSD). Veas-Gulani is one of the Scholars who argues that the nonlinear style of the novel mirrors the trauma's disorienting effects. Veas-Gulani (2003), also, discovers how trauma and therapy are interplay in this novel which confirms Dresden bombing significance as non-forgettable traumatic event. The novel's structure reflects Billy's incapability to process his traumatic experiences linearly, she states: "Vonnegut's fragmented narrative structure mirrors the disorientation caused by trauma, creating a literary therapy for both, the writer and the reader"(Veas-Gulani, 2003,p.177).

So, Vonnegut, uses fragmented narrative form as a means of suggesting the disorientation and trauma that Billy Pilgrim experienced. Nonlinear storytelling has been scrutinized as a literary device that reproduces the psychological war aftermath, it shows that events as traumatic as this shatter the individual's sense of self as well as their relationships with other persons (Broer,1994, p. 89). Critics argue that Billy's disconnection from time and relations exemplifies that feeling of



estrangement many veterans face when readjusting to civilian life, where they struggle to reintegrate with family and friends (Benesh, 2010, p. 17).

Similarly, *The Things They Carried*, this novel examines how the war of Vietnam war affect soldiers and shapes their emotional lives and their relationships in their societies. O'Brien creates interrelated stories' collection to depict the psychological burdens that each character carries, that, of course, is represented by the physical loads. **Kaplan** (1995) is one of the scholars who analyze how O'Brien writes all these stories to emphasize certain aspects of camaraderie complexities, longing and guilt (p. 85). For example, the unrequited love of Lieutenant Jimmy Cross for Martha contrasts sharply with his guilt over the death of Jim Shultz's men. Their interplay represents how a personal desire interplays to creates conflict with professional responsibilities at the time of war (CliffsNotes, n.d.).

War often deeply impacts people's sense of personal identity as well as disrupts their personal relationships by laying down psychological traumas that create alienation from social surroundings. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the alienation becomes clear when Billy Pilgrim detaches from his wife or even when he fails to form any meaningful ties with other people. In this case, the victim of this indifference that becomes a consequence of Billy's inability to align with the identity he brought from pre-war times with what might be described as the horrors he had witnessed (Benesh, 2010, p. 18). Billy's connections or relations with his comrades fall way short into being what one might describe as human: valuable, dear, but basically superficial, which emphasizes the absence of deep connections because of war's violence.

The **horrors of guilt and loss**, with devastating consequences of war, ruin the lives of people, the two novels exhibit greater similarity in these themes. Their expressions of these emotions are heightened by war experiences. Vonnegut's irony and futility define the love aspect of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. This marriage (Billy's), devoid of intimacy and passion, is an image of the emotional void created in a wartime setting. O'Brien, on the other hand, sees love in terms of yearning and nostalgia, such is the case in Jimmy Cross's obsession with Martha. Such longing is often a means of escape (a coping mechanism), although it deepens feelings of guilt in the end (Abubakar, & Abubakar, 2017, p. 119).

Loss permeates the two novels, there is loss in innocence added to the sense of the loss of life, loss of identity and even loss in emotions and emotional connections. One is also reminded of the recurring motif of physical and emotional burdens, as in *The Things They Carried*, which underscores the soldiers' attempts to deal with these losses. O'Brien



skillfully narrates how each character handles the death of his fellow mates, delving into the impact such deaths have on interpersonal relationships shrouded in grief (Herzog, 1997, P. 13).

Generally, postmodern literature rips apart classical hero depictions and presents soldiers not as glorified beings but as greatly flawed individuals, who struggle with traumatic events. Vonnegut and O'Brien, in these novels, dismantle the idealized symbol of the soldier-hero, to substitute it with a more nuanced human vulnerability description. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, for instance, the satirical tone of Vonnegut and passive acceptance of fate by Billy, do satire and criticize the war glorification. The refrain "So it goes," that Billy keeps repeating at each mention of death, which represents a comment on the futility of heroic ideals in front of their indiscriminate destruction (Holdefer, 2017, para. 3).

On the other hand, the author O'Brien deliberately obscures the border amongst fiction and reality to put the reliability of war narratives themselves to the test. So much so that the novel relies on contrasting and multiple unfixed perspectives, raises *The Things They Carried* from the traditional and invites readers to rethink and re-evaluate storytelling methods. Such ambiguity was a true representation of the fragmented and often inconsistent and contradictory state of things in wartime experiences (Robinet, 2007, p. 292).

The two novels challenge the **conventional heroism notion** by portraying soldiers as a damaged and deeply flawed persons, whose emotional agony emphasizes the human relationships frailty under the war pressure (Shaw, 2007, p.p. 23-38).

Thematically, both novels criticize the societal expectations of bravery and endurance, emphasizing instead the psychological scars and vulnerability that left by war. This approach reflects the interrogations of postmodern traditional tales that glorify war (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 268).

Through their rich depiction, Vonnegut and O'Brien represent multidimensional portrayal that invites the readers to pause and think about the war lingering effects not just on personal relationships during the war but also on after that. This literature review thus calls for a deeper understanding of these texts in terms of the concepts and themes concerning resilience and human emotions in the re engagement of society following war trauma.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's significance lies in its broadening the theoretical discourse on the impact of war on human relationships and seeks to connect literature with psychology in addition to cultural studies. It calls readers

to re-evaluate the war narratives and its aftermath and severe results, highlighting the continuing narrative power in the recording to criticise and evaluate the human experience nuances. This study is important for it employs a unique interdisciplinary, narratively specific critical approach to thematically interpret this study as a different critique that constructs a layered understanding of personal relationships forged and destroyed in time of war. Such a critical reading, focusing mainly on the emotional and interpersonal dimensions in the two novels, would contribute to literary studies and resonate with the larger discussion concerning trauma and resilience in the frame of the human condition.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present research study's conceptual framework originates in the intersection and fusion of trauma theory, relational sociology and postmodern literary criticism, as a multidimensional lens through which this study would analyze war's impact on human relationships especially personal relations. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and by Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, the phenomena of war are studied as literary representations of this psychological, emotional, and societal consequences that war invariably produces. The framework visualizes war, not merely as a past event, but as a major event in human experience capable of breaking apart identity, memory, and personal relationships.

As for trauma theory, it reinforces a deep analyzing of the fragmented narratives of characters and their confused psyches by symptoms of (Post Trauma Stress Disorder) and survivor's feelings of guilt. Along with this is postmodern literary criticism deconstructing the classic notions of heroism and war, which brings up nonlinear, fragmented storytelling to both authors. They reflect the war chaotic realities and challenge any traditional notion of cohesion and closure.

The foundation of relational sociology is set for an exploring individual trauma versus collective expectation. This type of perspective also has a qualm of interpersonal relationships, whether romantic relationships, family, or friendships, transformed and constrained under the burden of physical and psychological rigors imposed by war. Overall, the novels appear to fit within the framework of case studies in the larger interest of understanding what war has done to human relationships, thus promote an interdisciplinary dialogue among literature, psychology, as well as sociology.



6. METHODOLOGY

This study thus employs a qualitative literary approach for analysing the relationship effects of war on individual human relationships as portrayed in *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut and *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. The study uses an in-depth textual analysis that focuses on the themes, characters and their development, narrative structures, in addition to other presented texts symbols and literary devices that portray both relational and psychological effects of war. The study, however, employs theory of trauma studies, as well as postmodern literary critics, in addition to relational sociology for a clear multidimensional analysis.

A deep textual analysis and close reading of the two novels' primary texts reveals how war changes personal relationships. It examines the key passages that reveal the emotional dynamics, psychological, and social dynamics of the characters, focusing on symbols, metaphors, and repeated motifs therein. For example, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* the phrase "so it goes" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 15), as well as in *The Things They Carried* the emotional and physical burdens are points through which trauma and unstable or disconnected relationships may be understood.

Moreover, a trauma theory approach analyses how war experiences disrupt and alter the identity and personal ties of the characters. Post Trauma Stress Disorder, survivor's guilt, and disconnection, they serve to examine the fragmented narratives that represent the psychological disorientation. In other words, Billy Pilgrim's travel across time is an indicative of anything unresolved, whereas in O'Brien's novel the episodic storytelling functions as a very post-traumatically fragmented representation of memory and relations.

Also, this research paper employs the postmodern criticism to examine the ways both authors exploit and disrupt the traditional narratives of war. Narrative techniques such as metafiction, nonlinear storytelling, and irony are analysed to reveal how the two novels challenge traditional images of war and heroism. This approach deeply highlights the coherence disintegration in the lives of both the characters as well as the narrative structures, giving the sense of chaos that war imbues into relationships.

A comparative approach will be adopted to reveal both the differences and similarities in the way Vonnegut and O'Brien depict relational war consequences. Based on an apposition of the World War II *Shades of Slaughterhouse-Five* and Vietnam in *The Things They Carried*, the present study also shows how, within cultural and historical contexts, these two worlds shape the individuals' interpersonal struggles as well as their social rehabilitation as an effective person in their society.

The study will be supported by various secondary sources like books, journal articles, and theoretic texts about trauma, war literature and postmodernism. The employed sources offer a critical background to the secondary material, wherein understandings of the existing discourse introduce unique contributions, while the whole study remains sensible toward the trauma's representation and its effects, ensuring that it does not underestimate the war veterans' real-life experiences and their families.

This organizational approach confirms a nuanced, comprehensive exploration of the ways that Slaughterhouse-Five and The Things They Carried depict the war continuing effects on human social relationships, contributing to the fields of trauma studies, literature, and cultural history of individuals.

The Influences of War on Human Relations

War occurs as the last step in the conflicts because of the international relations nature along with human history. War causes many changes, in states and individuals, particularly in their lives. Regulations are meant to be adopted in the system through some war normative dimensions, which are, thus, intended to provide protection to individuals and societies. On the other hand, there are situations needed to be called into question concerning morality and fairness when setting aside the normative dimension of war (Özcan, 2021, p.111).

War is an old phenomenon in human history, for many centuries it has been continuance as a basic part of the historic process, alongside the evolution and development of human society and nations' formation and individuals' development. As an event, war has several quantitative differences as well as qualitative variations, it always leaves negative consequences. War distorts human experience, as it is that transformative human experience which disrupting the personal relationships' structures and making the individual alienated, emotionally fragmented, and isolated (Western Front Association, n.d.). The description of the war effects on international relations, particularly on the individual level, will be studied critically in the present study.

Kurt Vonnegut in Slaughterhouse-Five, as well as Tim O'Brien in The Things They Carried, have concerned themselves with the war deep effects on personal human relationships, to explore how trauma, feeling of guilt, in addition to societal expectations, all distance or cut those ties.



In this critical analysis, the reconstructions are cited from the texts, with scholarly perceptions.

Though it looks that the individuals play a minor role in the system of any state, but it is actually the individuals who form the system's core, so the center is the individual, war exhibits the individual as related or shaped, and human nature standards only which form individuals' lives and personalities. War, among the factors that form the people's lives. War causes **trauma**, it results in an extensive range of both disorders and psychological consequences that may render many individuals quite incapacitated along with their families. At war times, available resources and means are entirely strained to deal with all the demands of sufferers of war trauma (Hulsey, 2019, p. 6). Very relevant indeed in that role is where survivors become managers of their mental conditions as a way of curtailing their inner suffering. Unfortunately, in most cases, this role is trivialized or even ignored by all concerned parties.

People's resilience and their self-efficacy are very crucial elements that any person should not underestimate and must be built upon. Solutions depend on reaching more satisfying and permanent effects if the person has a positive active part in discovering them (Militaire Spectator, n.d.). When encouraging the own resources and own experiences' use in addition to using problem-solving skills, these could be all it takes for survivors to feel empowered and enabled. Survivors' involvement in the recovery process through self-help skills generated a more positive attitude towards their conditions and own health. With even small steps, enhanced involvement curtails progress in learned helplessness and thus lowers the psychiatric morbidity levels.

The two novels present **trauma** as a force that destructively distorts interpersonal relations. Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* the protagonist, he epitomizes this form of alienation: emotionally disconnected from family and society, as his traumatic experiences have shattered his sense of reality. The phrase, "I have come unstuck in time" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 23) explains that he cannot engage in any meaningful manner with other people because of the war traumatic experiences that formed his feelings. Similarly, Tim O'Brien in *The Things They Carried*, when the author talks about Norman Bowker, just that he looks back on the times where he could share his war experiences with others, he says "If I could have one wish, anything, I'd wish for my dad to write me a letter and say it's okay if I don't win any medals" (O'Brien, 1990, p.



147). Here, the missing validation that Bowker would preferably have so much needed in actuality only reinforces the despair and alienation veterans face when they finally try to merge into civilian lives. The incapability to articulate trauma expands the gap between the soldier and his family members, leaving him imprisoned in isolation.

Trauma, can remain long, maybe days and even months after painful incident like war, when death occurs, especially, people experience difficulties and doubts about why they survived and others did not. Survivor's guilt is the name given to this condition. It's a mental health problem worth treatment and a lot of sensitivity. Survivor's guilt feelings put into the mind of a person that he has committed somethings wrong when he (or she) survived from a traumatic event while others did not survive, so the individual feels guilt (Pajer, 2019, para. 2)

The **survivor's guilt** pattern who hold inner emotional burdens, is exemplified in the two novels which portray survivor's guilt as yet another personal barrier to sustaining relationships. Billy's continuous refrain, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he repeated many times "so it goes" (Vonnegut, 1969,p.15), mirrors his acceptance and detachment in confronting death which impedes his inner ability to construct deep emotive relationships. His relationship with Valencia, as a husband, is depicted as being lacking intimacy, with this contact being determined more by the expectations of the society than by true love. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut uses a constantly matter-of-fact tone to depict each of Billy's confrontation with death, whether it be the disastrous of Dresden bombing or the candles made from the fat of killed prisoners.

In O'Brien's novel, survivor's guilt displays intensely, it acts as a main theme in Lieutenant Jimmy Cross's story. He thinks that he was responsible for Ted Lavender's death: "He pictured Martha's smooth young face, thinking he loved her more than anything, more than his men, and now Ted Lavender was dead because he loved her so much" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 23).

Love, here, becomes guilt source rather than comfort in exemplifying how war has corrupted and twisted the personal sentiments. Cross feelings of guilt prevent him from ever really being able to foster or even develop a meaningful relationship; instead, it serves to consume him in a state of recrimination and deep self-blame.



As for **camaraderie** and the **war bonds fragility** during wartime, which underscores by literature, it becomes so obvious in this form of literature that there exist close ties which were forged among soldiers during war, because these relationships become one of the most important coping mechanisms. Yet, in Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, such a fellowship in battle is well captured through Paul Bäumer's comments, he states that: "We are brothers and press on shoulder to shoulder, fighting. I belong to them and they to me; we all share the same fear and the same life" (Remarque, 1929, p. 87). Such bonds created from a common struggle for survival, serve as bonds of emotional and psychological stability in the midst of this chaotic war.

The war relationships of Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* novel, with other soldiers provide him refuge in the turbulence of war. In Dresden, Billy has to, like many other prisoners, resort to humor in figuring out how to find comfort and lessen the direct suffering blow with their shared experience as they face death and deprivation. Through the character of Billy, Vonnegut highlights war camaraderie, as this character represents how even absurdity moments support soldiers endure: "There was a camaraderie that almost made the war bearable for Billy, a sense of belonging in an otherwise incomprehensible situation" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 114).

Likewise, Tim O'Brien, in *The Things They Carried*, emphasizes the war connections between soldiers as a support tool. O'Brien describes the role of shared rituals and humor in creating unity among otherwise panic-stricken companions: "They carried each other, the weight of memory, and the weight of survival. For each other, they bore the unbearable" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 23). These bonds are depicted as crucial to soldiers' psychological survival, allowing them to face and cross the war mass and chaos.

The **war bonds**, in peacetime, in spite of their strength during war time, these connections, when the shared crisis is tending to fade, they often falter and disappear or maybe became so weak. The character of Norman Bowker in *The Things They Carried*, after his returning back to home, his reaction mirrors deep alienation feelings, he lacks the sense of shared understanding with civilians around him increases his isolation and loneliness: "The silence of the town mocked him, the weight of his memories heavy, the bonds that once sustained him reduced to echoes of a distant war" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 137).



Same as the feelings of Billy Pilgrim after war, in Slaughterhouse-Five, his detachment from war relationships with other soldiers becomes an obvious prove about his struggles to reconcile his inner traumatic memoirs with civilian life after the war end. His feelings of isolation mirror war connections' inability to exceed the battlefield, Vonnegut mentions: "Billy had become unstuck in time, drifting from one moment to another, the camaraderie of war fading into fragments of memory" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 183).

So, even though wars tend to unite soldiers, they both reflect the **temporary nature of such bonds outside the battlefield**. All of the men in The Things They Carried bear the open wound of memory, as O'Brien describes, he states: "They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 14).

Certainly, that shared experience was enough to last for some time to create impermanent unity sense during military service and war times. The transition to civilian life shows how fragile these relationships are; the suicide of Norman Bowker as described in O'Brien's is a tragic reminder that reflects the sense of isolation encounter by many veterans. War bonds' fragility, regardless of their being steadfast during war, most of these bonds often fail to endure and end up beyond the battlefield.

Such is what The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien explores the theme of a disconnection felt by soldiers as they return to their civilian life, O'Brien himself reflects over this loss when he states: "The old rules are no longer binding, the old truths no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 78).

This speech, which includes these statements, emphasises that kind of relationships which formed in the extreme context of war grow feeble when exposed to peacetime norms. Experiences remain, shared in battle zones, which became after-war memories in the civilian world that resurface at reintegration, making reintegration difficult and enhancing the soldier's feeling of alienation and enfeebled.

Vonnegut also expresses the wartime camaraderie fragility by showing the attitude of Billy Pilgrim toward his fellow soldiers; he appears to be distanced from them altogether. In this novel, Vonnegut follows Billy Pilgrim, like many other people, a very ordinary man who turn out to be unstuck in time. The novel depicts different moments in the life of Billy,



starting from his experiences in World War II as a soldier, up until his abduction by the planet Tralfamadore's aliens. By such presenting events, the author employs a non-linear fashion to strongly emphasise the absurdity and war chaos, disorienting the reader's understanding of history and time. This fragmented structure reflects Billy's trauma, highlighting the enduring war effects on the psyche of human ("Postmodernism and Fragmented Narratives in World Literature", 2023, para.4).

The absurd Tralfamadorian belief Billy adopts "everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 76), it is a prime illustration of his unwillingness to form human ties, even suffering ones, his belief mirrors his withdrawal far from human relationships. Here, it is important to mention that the Tralfamadorians are aliens who abduct Billy Pilgrim, imprison him, and impart their philosophy of life to him. They are fatalists; they feel that all things are predestined and the course of universe is unchanging so there is nothing can change the universe's course (Czajkowska, 2021, p. 64).

The Tralfamadorians can travel through time, they know when and who the whole universe will end, they accept this, it is their worldview. They teach Billy to repeat and believe in the phrase "so it goes" as a way of acknowledging the death of any person, while remembering that death is an evitable part of every being's unalterable fate, so there is no need to mourn or sorrow over the dead; for that person lives well in other later times (SparkNotes, n.d.)

Tralfamadorian philosophy believes that life and universe have no intrinsic meaning, this absurdist philosophy inspires Billy, alike most Americans, is quite enthused and familiar with the monotheistic worldview, to free from guilt and get rid of some of his trauma. The acceptance of a certain pre-deterministic world view may help Billy in his cope with post-traumatic stress because it matters much more to Slaughterhouse-Five. The Tralfamadorians are merely a means through which Vonnegut tackles the larger question concerning any belief system or life philosophy that can really bring understanding and peace into such wide disturbed world!

Also, there is a deep interplay between strength and fragility, both narratives indeed demonstrate how war ties are a strength source and at the same time represents a fragility symbol. These relations can be used



as a lifeline during the immediate war horrors, yet, in the absence of a crisis, they become unsustainable and incapable of survival. Transforming these relationships to fragmented memories is the dissonance between life as a veteran, war, and peace. In the two novels, the bonds or connections strike a dual chord of great strength yet simultaneously act as a fragility symbol and bitter edge of sorrow. While they support soldiers endure through the great combat horrors, in peacetime, these bonds often change to be untenable symbolising a larger dissonance between the war stark realities and the alienation feelings that follow the post war life.

Both Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five and Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried tackle the war bonds dual nature: they serve as a strength source during combat time but, at the same time, they often fade once the instant war horrors subside. These relations, which forged under extraordinary war time circumstances, become so weak and fragile when shared crisis that created them is faded.

War deeply disturbs **romantic relationships and familial bonds**, war creates emotional distance, promoting trauma, and changing the support and love dynamics. Carrying psychological scars, often veterans return their homeland with symptoms of post trauma stress disorders which create difficulties obstacle their engagement in meaningful relations with society, so they feel detached in romantic relationships, the guilt controlled their feelings.

Billy Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five is a good example to a soldier returns to home after war carries trauma, the novel describes how war trauma enhances the veterans' feelings of isolation. This emotional withdrawal of Pilgrim from Valencia, his wife, has its roots in the inability of Pilgrim to fathom the past wars in which he has engaged; Valencia is very aptly described as "a woman to whom the idea of war meant nothing" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 156).

These are very strained family relationships, since becoming a soldier would create difficulty when it comes to talking and interfacing with people. The incapability to re-communicate with society leaves veterans with alienation and prefer to solitude away from their families, considerably disrupting those ties that were once very close. War reconstitutes emotional availability as well as personal identity, thus making the intimate relations reshaping a so painful, difficult and



challenging process. Vonnegut's perspectives about war's effects remains essentially international.

Similarly, in *The Things They Carried*, as for romantic relationships, war increases the veterans' guilt and detachment feelings, in Jimmy Cross's feelings, his deep passion towards Martha is overshadowed, the sense of loss and emotional burdens of leadership deepened his suffering, O'Brien says: "He had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence, Lavender was dead" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 16). Here, Cross's love to Martha is his unfulfilled desires, symbolizing the distance of normal life in the midst of the war's furnace. The things he fantasizes about were ruined by the war responsibilities that make attachment and connections with family not possible.

The two novels exemplify how the war strain reform romantic and familial relationships. Both novels emphasize how war burdens extend outside the battlefield, causing traumas and lasting scars on familial relationships. These novels and many other narratives, also, help in **creating relationships preservation sense**, they would also be a vital device of processing and preserving relationships post-war. The authors take these characters in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Things They Carried* through a journey with memory, all trying to create sense of their familial relationships and keep them significant. It goes further for veterans where they can reclaim and reshape relationships that have been strained or broken by war.

Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, his fragmented narrative mirrors his struggle to make sense of his wartime experiences and relationship. Memory upon memory thrums in and out of his mind, haunting him with Dresden memories and fellow prisoners, examples of how the act of storytelling oftentimes is a way or mechanism to confront bonds been forged by trauma. Vonnegut says: "And so it goes" (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 102), implying the inevitable loss indeed, but also the knack of narrative to clutch bearers into what had been meaningful and important.

Similarly, Tim O'Brien uses the narrative in *The Things They Carried* to pen down his emotional memories with soldiers and thus deal with their deaths. While pondering over the demise of Kiowa, he notes: "Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you



were to where you are” (O'Brien, 1990, p.36). That is the way O'Brien keeps the very emotional side of these relationships alive while they seem to fade out by time and even by distance caused due to war. The two novels emphasize the role of storytelling in processing the clutter of war, in addition to storytelling role in promoting those bonds to exceed memory and time.

Both novels explore the emotional isolation and fragmentation that result from war in human relationships. Through survivor's guilt, fragmented narratives, and alienation descriptions, both critiqued the dehumanizing relationship effects of war as well as they challenge the heroism traditional concept and resilience notion. Nevertheless, storytelling gives both works the continuing power of narrative to work through trauma and maintain connections in the face of destruction by war.

Regarding the Relational Sociology Theory, which is significant in the study of social relations because it suggests a dynamic social network rather than a stagnant entity. In novel like Slaughterhouse Five, the mutual relations among people carry trauma and memory which reform the individuals' identity. The recurrent images of being weighed down by social and emotional burdens are viewed as reflecting the entangled relationships of camaraderie during wartime. Relational sociology, here, emphasizes the significance of these relations in shaping their experiences and identities. This dimension thus informs how the protagonist Billy Pilgrim experiences are reshaped by the **relational dynamics and the surrounding** social background.

Billy relations to other soldiers in various ways, including Roland Weary and Edgar Derby. It indicates a fragmented relationship formed during an extreme condition such as war. Such relationship will demonstrate how identity gets tied up with a social role. For instance: Weary's obsession about being a hero and hatred for Billy exemplify the war relational pressures within the war absurdity, "Weary scorned him for being too weak to save himself, for being too stupid to save himself." (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 49). This shows how war transforms relationships into hierarchies of networks whose latter purpose is survival.

The social relations concept shows closely how O'Brien examines these soldiers' complicated interconnections, the things or burdens they shared, and the emotional and moral implications of their painful



experience. The human relations among soldiers in *The Things They Carried*, specifically between Jimmy Cross, the leader and his men, stress leadership, responsibility, and guilt as fluid concepts. For instance, the emotions Cross feels upon learning about the death of Ted Lavender, which highlight how this coaxing of relational dynamics produces emotional burdens. “They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing they carried shameful memories” (O’Brien, 1990, p. 21).

Also, the detachment and alienation are to be interpreted in terms of the disintegration of relations. The protagonists in the two novels cannot make adequate relationships in a postwar setting, indicating trauma that carries relational traces into the future.

From the perspective of **postmodernism**, it is not something other than a postmodernist conceit of fragmentation, metafiction, or truth’s instability, and those are exactly what Vonnegut and O’Brien’s texts emphasis on, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, also, it emphasizes the questioning of neutral truth that aligns with the storytelling approach the Vonnegut employs in the novel’s structure, it’s fragmented structure and Billy’s “unstuck in time” storytelling defies the classical understanding of causality and chronology, the writer says: “Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. He has seen his birth and death many times.” (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 23). Here, the nonlinear structure embodies the confusion of war and memory, echoing postmodernism’s skepticism towards cohesive.

With respect to the narrative instability, when Vonnegut himself appears in the novel as he comments directly as a character in *Slaughterhouse Five*, is to mirror the metafictional nature of the narrative. For instance, in the opening chapter of the novel, the writer represents his struggle to describe the heavy bombing of Dresden as questioning the text nature of the novel, “All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true.” (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 1). Here, there is no clear limits between reality and fiction, which affirms the subjective truths’ viewpoint that postmodernism emphasizes on.

The blending of relational sociology with postmodern criticism theory is an indication of how the fragmentation of interpersonal relations and Billy’s identity align with the narrative structure’s fragmentation. The characters are connected together by the common experience of war despite the fact that they form a very fragile web of relationships,



whereas the postmodern disruption of both narrative and time becomes the very possibility of meaning in such social relational networks which questions. Billy's experiences and relationships are affected by both societal structures (relational sociology) and his incapability to harmonize them through a cohesive clear narrative due to the postmodern critical concept of grand narratives.

O'Brien seems to twine **fact and fiction**, exposing the essence of storytelling itself as questioned, "A true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. It's about sorrow" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 68). The non-linear structure of the novel gives testimony to the postmodern skepticism regarding large narratives. Each chapter acts as a segment of the larger mosaic of identity, memory, and war that resists a unified singular meaning. Together, relational sociology with postmodern criticism develop the readers' understanding of *The Things They Carried*. The soldiers' personal bonds with its postmodern structures of fragmentation and metafiction initiate a deep interaction that echoes the ambiguity and chaos of war.

7. CONCLUSION

The critical exploration of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried* shows that war brings great havoc on even the most personal of human relationships, bringing psychological fragmentation and much emotional disconnection and spreading pervasive alienation feelings. Though the novels were written in different periods, World War II for the former and the Vietnam War for the latter, they exceed over historical contexts to introduce deep universal insight, they are both a gift to humanity, displaying from a cultural context the most personal cost of war. It shows damaged individuals suffering from guilt, trauma, and estrangement which both **Vonnegut and O'Brien** create in their war stories-and, instead, emphasis on the monstrous effects of war on people and their relations, as opposed to glorifying the act of war itself.

Billy Pilgrim shuns everything in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, his existence there, his own passive acceptance to the war chaos, emphasizes the inevitable scars of war. The things they carried in Tim O'Brien's novel portrayed soldiers losing into more tangible and intangible burdens, discussing how tenuous human relations bring such suffering, the novel highlights human bonds' fragility in wartime. In fact, both novels, by their fragmented narrative styles, bring forth the psychological





disorientation that is quite intense in their protagonists and therefore make form inseparable and content close in critical forms, attacking war as existential affairs and relational consequences.

Thematically, the novels reflect the intricacies of intimacy and bring out that war erects barriers to emotional connection. In this regard, the novels depict love and friendship as casualties of war-whether Billy's detachment or separation, because of war, away from family or even Lieutenant Jimmy Cross's fantasies laden with guilt about Martha. The novels portray their camaraderie, often romantically glorified in conventional warfare accounts, less as a permanent source of fractured consolation than as a reminder of agonizing loss.

In addition, Vonnegut and O'Brien utilize the self-reflective nature of storytelling in order to employ narrative to be a coping mechanism. The act of storytelling is developed to be as device of processing war trauma and protecting individual relationships, not forgetting the challenge of memory and closure which places doubt on the concept of reliable memory and ultimate closure. The narrative technique thus puts creation into a humanized form and compels readers to face the dilemmas of war and its consequences and moral ambiguities accompanying war aftermath.

Ultimately, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Things They Carried* magnify the testaments of war on human relationships. The novels invite readers to reevaluate what war does emotionally and relationally as toll of war conflicts, the two novels call for a deep understanding of human spirit's resilience and fragility. By highlighting the war personal costs, both novels add fine layers to enhance the community discourse on memory, trauma, and the eternal search for connection amid the chaos outside.

8. SUGGESTIONS

More impact has been war in the human lifetime than any amount of contact. The after-effects of war in each individual involved are permanent, regardless of what conflict aspect had been entered into by the individual. The soldiers were, of course, the hardest hit psychologically and physically, as they were thrust into a total alien situation that could not be compared in any sense to any other undertaking in their normal day-to-day lives.

The war influences are very deep and multifaceted on the soldiers and their human familial relationships immediately after coming back from combat. These changes manifest in the individuals' psychological, social and emotional lives, and the effects suggest important changing about

how these individuals connect with their families and with other individuals.

The psychological trauma is one of the most common impacts that soldiers face because of war, which hinder their capability to maintain familial relationships or form new relations, war time experiences cause changes in their personality by creating feelings of isolation which impact negatively their close relations with their families. This vital field of study inadequately engages with theoretical discourse concerning the impact of war on human relationships and seeks to connect literature with psychology as well as cultural studies, to more enhance the critical discussion on how war influences on human familial relations as introduced in Kurt Vonnegut's novel Slaughterhouse-Five and Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried, numerous aspects for broader exploration can be suggested.

Researchers, through expanding the analysis scope, may study critically literary works from contexts in a comparative analysis to examine diverse historical and cultural contexts, Iraq War novels, for instance, shed lights on the culture and universal dimensions of war's influences on human relations, Korean War as well. Comparing the novel of The Things They Carried to The Sorrow of War novel by Bao Ninh, the previous North Vietnamese soldier, or even The Kite Runner by the American novelist Khaled Hosseini, is a good example that might provide comparative perspectives that expose cross-cultural confluences regarding how the war causes fissures in human connections.

Lastly, discovering the relevance of these two novels in contemporary discourses on familial resilience, veteran or soldier's reintegration, mental health in post-war societies could link literary analysis with worldly applications. This would further emphasise the enduring meaning of these texts in re understanding the personal costs of war conflicts. Through pursuing these suggestions, researchers can develop the critical discourse concerning both novels, Slaughterhouse-Five as well as The Things They Carried, presenting fresh insights into the complicated war dynamics and human bonds while also engaging with wide-ranging psychological, cultural and sociological dimensions.

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