The Tales of the War: Reporting from the Battlefield in Iraq

Prof. Dr. Jinan F. B. Al-Hajaj
College of Education for Human Sciences, Basrah University

Abstract

Many fictional and non-fictional works appeared after 2003 to explore various dimensions to the American military adventure in Iraq. Some of these works were written from first-hand knowledge by people who were embroiled in this warfare. Others were contributed by observers who find themselves in earnest to comment on and evaluate what was happening. The study first examines the writings that prospered in the wake of the American involvement in Iraq in 2003. War narratives, penned by American writers who bore witness to the war are basically investigated. The light is turned on publications between 2003 and 2008 during the war's ugliest phase. The themes prevalent in these narratives are inspected and the literary strategies and narrative modes adopted are discussed.

The book selected for the study, *Generation Kill* (2004) by Evan Wright, hosts an array of subject matters and perspectives. It also incorporates a spacious continuum of themes ranging from bitterness, suffering and frustration to disillusionment and indifference. In short, regardless of the ideological background of the selected work, it exposes an impulse to be realistic, objective, pragmatic and unromantic even if it occasionally fails to be so.

Key Words: war fiction, Iraq, America, marines, *Generation Kill*, Evan Wright

حكايات الحرب: تقارير ساحات القتال في العراق

أ.د. جنان فضل بريو الحجاج
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية/ جامعة البصرة

ظهرت العديد من الكتابات القصصية و غير القصصية بعد الحرب في العراق عام ٢٠٠٣ و التي حاولت تقييم أبعاد المغامرة الأميركية العسكرية في العراق. انطلقت بعض هذه الأعمال من وحي تجربة أصحابها المباشرة في الحرب وجاء بعضها الآخر كتعبير عن أراء المتابعين للحرب سعيا" منهم لتوثيق الواقع الحربي و الإنساني. تعرض الدراسة الحالية أنواع الكتابات الحربية التي ازدهرت عقب الحرب ٢٠٠٣ ثم تسلط الضوء على الكتابات التي راجت أثناء مرحلة الحرب الأكثر بشاعة و التي كتبت بأقلام أميركية. وقد عبر كتابها عن مواقفهم المختلفة فيما يخص تدخل بلادهم العسكري و تداعياته الإنسانية و الفكرية. و تركز الدراسة الحالية على رواية ايفن رايت (***جيل القتل***) المنشورة سنة ٢٠٠٤ والتي تبنت أسلوبا" إخباريا" تقريريا" في سرد وقائعها. اتسمت أحداث (***جيل القتل***) بطابع صحفي واقعي ساخر أحيانا" و خيالي بطولي في أحيان أخرى وجاءت شخصياتها لتعبر عن الصراعات الفكرية و الإنسانية التي أفرزتها الحرب.

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

Introduction

Moments of historical upheaval are marked by counterpart literary upheavals. A war is still perhaps the most intellect-challenging phenomenon that shakes the ground. Therefore, among the greatest literary writings of the world, those, which made the war their subject matter, stand out sometimes even as colossally as the event that triggers them in the first place. Therefore, the present study endeavours to shed the light on the tales of the war reported from the Iraqi front and which American writers contributed. The authors aspire to document as well as explore, assess and even criticise the American military experience in the region.

Though many fictional and non-fictional works have been published in reaction to the war since 2003, a few of these works were researched in depth. Many of them have been dismissed as unworthy and a very few others have been subjected to scholarly investigation. Hence, the current study aims to contribute to war literature scholarship by examining contemporary war narratives and focusing on Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* published in 2004. *Generation Kill* offers an impressive account of the war. The narrative traces the route followed by an American regiment at the break of the war in 2003 as it advances on its way to Baghdad. The book is a case in point as to the journalistic reporting of warfare and bears testimony to how Americans fight their wars. Though the book is by no means pro-war in orientation, it is too difficult to label it as an anti-war narrative. Wright's *Generation Kill* is as polemical and controversial as the war it centres around is.

War Fiction: an Overview

It goes without saying that the renown world-wide war literature is generally marked by originality, fidelity and creativity. Writers, from ancient to contemporary times, have put both their imagination and first or even second-hand knowledge of warfare to full use. From Homer's *Illiad* as the oldest example, perhaps, one could think of, to with selection imposed, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* on the European side, authors told tales of disappointment, defeatism and futility mixed with moments of triumph and glory.

The American war fiction is no less prolific whether the writings which the Civil War (1861-1865) yielded or the ones the two great world wars later produced. Among which are Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with The Wind* (1936)**,** Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* (1974), Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997), and Robert Kloss's *The Alligators of Abraham* (2012). The narrative response to the 20th Century wars dates from the early 1920s or even earlier up to contemporary times including such works as John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1921), F. Scot Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* (1926), Hemingway's **A** *Farewell to Arms* (1929) & *For Whom The Bells Toll* (1940), John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is down* (1942) & *Once There was war*

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

(1958), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and Sharma Shield's *The Cassandra* (2019).

Since the end of WWII, the innovative writings started to decline and a current of commercially promoted writings have commenced to emerge and multiply. Crime and science fiction has taken control since the 1960s. In a direct response to the Vietnam War for instance, the novelistic writings follow the commercial recipe of a successful suspense story. It seems that the role of literature in the cultural architecture diminished so considerably that it has little to say on the war question. Moreover, what it has to say seems to matter less against the backdrop of scorching reality. Not until decades later that the Vietnam question is placed in the right perspective for a handful of American novelists, for instance, Tim O'Brien's novels such as: *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973) and *The Things They Carried* (1990). There is a general and overall deterioration in the world of the novel because, as argued by Federman (2008: 221-22), intellectual and serious writings are 'nonmarketable' compared to commercial and entertaining books. Thus, 'important and innovative books are prevented from being disseminated by publishers, editors, literary agents, critics, librarians and even professors.' In effect, good literature is undergoing 'a crisis' where it is 'in danger of extinction.' Though Federman's statement may seem exaggerated or over pessimistic, still, it is barely far-fetched for books are now promoted, he adds: 'like any other products advertised on television', for instance soap, cars, deodorant, 'without any regard for literary excellence.'

The above observation in relation to Vietnam post-war fiction is relevant to the kind of fiction produced in response to the American war in Iraq. In other words, most of the so-called Iraqi war novels are commercially oriented, adventurous in spirit, patriotic in its bias towards the American involvement, brain-washed by the media-created terrorism phobia, and blind to political deception and double-dealing. Many of these novels belong to detective fiction proper, hence lacking authenticity. The plots invest in conspiracy theories with James-Bond heroes who could manage to land on their feet unharmed against all odds. Very few works deviate from this shallow, but prevalent mainstream.

From a different perspective, Berry and Di Leo (2008: 1) observe that stakes are very high before modern fiction, which has to meet demands that are 'unlike any it has experienced previously.' Modern fiction has to confront 'recent military, economic, and environmental threats', which require 'more direct forms of verbal intervention.' The war in Iraq is on top of these challenges. They wonder: 'To be present, what must fiction now do? Should the novel engage the politically and economically pressing issues of the day, in this way hoping to secure its relevance, or will fiction's effort to mirror contemporary history absent itself, dispelling what has made fiction distinctive? ' (2008: 1-2).

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

Relevance or rather irrelevance, according to (Federman, 2008: 221-22), emerges as a problem in this context for literature is suffering from 'reduction' and 'banalization' in the modern age caused by pressures exercised by mass media on 'contemporary culture.' Federman raises very insightful questions as to the ability of modern literature to 'survive the hypnosis of marketing, the sweet boredom of consensus, the cellophane wrapping of thinking, the commercialization of desire? In other words, can literature escape conformity and banality and yet play a role and have a place in our society?'

In regard to the shortcomings of contemporary war fiction, Lynne Hanley (1991: 5) postulates that war writings in general have a very serious drawback which is none other than being fictional in that danger has past and fear overcome and death defeated. No matter how a war fiction is 'vivid and gripping', it violates reality in its 'false sense of security' especially if the work is a memoir where 'the author has survived' as it most definitely happens. He complains that the reader 'settling down in an easy chair with a good book' would not be able to experience the 'entirely legitimate fear of losing one's life, limbs, or senses, or of seeing the person next to one lose his.'

In relation to political fiction under whose label the war narrative also goes, Harvie (1991: 58) affirms that writers today can influence politics and 'as entertainers, writers of political fiction have to be sensitive to a wide social constituency, and even the worst are forced by their subject-matter to write with some individuality and practical authority.' It seems that war as a theme has been always a prerogative of thrillers whose writers have 'been prophesying war for over forty years' (Harvie, 1991: 148) and so had been the spy-story tellers that depicted 'corruption in high places'. An examination of the literature generated by the war proves the superiority of poetry since 'in case of prose works only written—afterwards: it is the literature of the lost peace as much as of the war' (Harvie, 1991: 154). In all, the popular war fiction obviously written after the war remains polemical and the question of its merit unresolved.

Chronicling the War in Iraq (2003)

In his *Guardian* books blog entry, the president of the National Book Critics Circle, John Freeman writes: 'when it comes to the arena in which novelists can have the most impact – their art – this generation (with the notable exception of Gary Shteyngart and his *Absurdistan* has been rather silent about the Bush years.' Freeman probes into the problem as he reveals the potential reasons for the indifference or silence as he prefers to diagnose it as the corollary of 'the trauma, the anger and the loss of that event [9/11] have sucked up all the imaginative oxygen in the room.' Donadio (in Milletti, 2008: 18-19) clearly proclaims that 'it's safe to say no novels have yet engaged with the post-Sept. 11 era in any meaningful way. . . To date, no work of fiction has perfectly captured our historical moment the way certain novels captured the Gilded Age, or the Weimar Republic, or the cold war.' American novelists themselves like Tony Christini, Mike Palecek and Andre Vltchek (cited in Jacobs, 2006) wonder 'why there is no antiwar novels published in the US about its war in Iraq.' Jacobs

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No.: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

(2006:2) further debates that while political fiction that depicts Washington corruption and chicanery exists, 'there is little fiction that considers the politics of US extraparliamentary movements'. Thus, a good deal of the fiction written about the war is either too patriotic and or even tends to 'justify and encourage the war mongers and their backers'.

It seems that the contemporary war writings do not live up to the challenges of the war, yet books that address the war epoch will continue to emerge for a long time yet to come but in the same slow rhythm. Freeman tells 'six years after the [9/11] attacks, the novel-based responses to that day – including Don DeLillo's ***The Falling Man*** – continue to trickle in. But no one is writing about rendition or torture or trumped up fears.' Whether serious writings exist or not, the narrative portrayal of warfare provides 'a primary window on the human dimension, though it is not a completely transparent lens' as Vernon (2004: ix-x) insightfully puts it. Hence, these narratives must be subjected to 'serious inquiry' so as not to allow war representations whether 'hawkish or dovish' as they appear in some movies 'to foster a renewed romanticism for war' (Vernon, 2004: x).

One may hope that the works written to portray the 2003 war on the backdrop of September, 11th attacks have a different, if not indeed a more profound perspective. However, Peter Maas (2018) opines that 'a lot of' the current war writings 'are jingoistic and terrible, but it's nonetheless encouraging that we live in a time when more and more people who want to write a book on war can actually do so.' Many lists of Iraqi war fiction are available online. Each list is by no means exhaustive because one can simply add three dozens more at least just by simply surfing the net where some of these works are accessible online. However, the writings that assume to take up the Iraqi war question can be simply divided into three types:

1. Journalistic writings that launch their argument from a journalistic, documentary reportage perspective. The writers are reporters and press people who observed the war from inside Iraq either because of the actual physical presence during the war. These writings are marked by their matter-of-fact style and avoidance of fictional twists. Examples of such writings abound such as Lee Jon Anderson's *The Fall Of Baghdad* (2004), Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near* (2005) and Thomas Mowle's *Hope is not A Plan* (2007). These works claim to be factual and realistic down to the letter. The authentic objective reporting is affirmed by the narrator's detachment where the narrators keep their emotional distance. In support of the authenticity and factuality claimed, these accounts team with names of real people, some of them are public figures. politicians or activists. For instance, in *The Fall of Baghdad*, some of the former Iraqi ministers feature as well as many of the former regime's prominent men poets, artists, ambassadors, journalists and professors. A curious example is *Generation Kill* by Evan Wright. The author keeps record of what he claims to

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

be factual as he, a reporter, accompanies an American Marine Corps in their destructive journey through Iraq. The author affirms at the onset that he is only reporting the truth, using real names but of unknown persons, adopting rather fiction-like style and air.

2. Memoirs: they are autobiographical and their writers confer on them a realistic turn by claiming that these are not fictional, but based on true events. These narratives are mostly written by combatant soldiers who amateurishly relate stories that happen to be well-written and appealing. Hanley (1991: 106) points to the assets of a soldier's story which, 'rooted as it is in a particular man's experience of a particular war, tends not only to sentimentalize, but also to dehistoricize our apprehension of war.' The authors are claimed to be accidental writers who have very little or no previous writing experience, but still could excel under the impact of the war. The young, amateurish and disillusioned zealots- authors enlisted in the army and were given basic training that stressed killing and were deployed to Iraq soon after. This category includes such works as Bargain Price's *Warrior King: The Triumph and Betrayal of an American Commander in Iraq* (2008) and Ryan Smithson's *Ghosts of War: the true story of a 19 year old GI* (2010). Michal Anthony's *Civilianized: A Young Veteran's Memoir* (2016) is another book that bases its argument on autobiographical materials.

3. War Novel: There is the anti- as well as pro-war novel that is grounded in the fictional canon and whose authors make no claim as to its pure authenticity or truthfulness. These are non-combatant professional writers who write about the war from the comfort of their homes and learn about the war from TV reports and read about it in the papers while sipping their morning coffee but still endeavour to depict its atrocities and devastatingg effects. Their works lack in first-hand knowledge and betray ideological and/or attitudinal motives. This category includes works like *The Human War* (2003) by Noah Cicero, *Homefront* (2006) by Tony Christini and *The Ghost* by Robert Harris (2007). Later works include Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012) and Matt Gallagher's *Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War* (2013) and many others. These anti-war novels revolve around loss and suffering and invest in regret, remorse, and grief. Their orientation is at times over-emotional or even sentimental. As they try to emphasize loss and defeat, they occasionally stoop to naivety. Alternatively, there is the pro-war novel that discusses the war issue either from a patriotic or adventurous perspective. It is rather propagandistic in thrust and it nourishes the glorious image of warfare. The enemy is dehumanized or at least dwarfed and the author's own side is heroically and animatedly depicted. This category subsumes all war thrillers with their god-like heroes.

Generation Kill : War as an Adventure

Peter Maas (2018) points to the fact that contemporary war narratives have the drawback of focalising American soldiers as heroes and defocalising foreigners, or more accurately local people are more often than not spurned if not demonized. In consequence, stories of soldiers or about war camaraderie abound

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No.: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

in which very few or no foreigners feature. Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* is no exception. The author designs his narrative to testify to the first American convoys invading Iraq from their Kuwaiti Basis up to and even post entrance to Baghdad. Wright who ironically started as a 'chief porn critic for *Hustler'*, Leily Kleinbard (2012) explains, finds himself a war reporter first in Afghanistan and then Iraq. According to Clark (2016), the author covered for many years 'the military and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, alongside Marines, sailors, soldiers, and Army Special Forces as a *Rolling Stone* reporter.' His *Generation Kill*, is 'a gritty portrayal of the early days of the Iraq War, offering the perspective of the men who led America's charge in stripped-down Humvees across the desert into Baghdad.' Jennifer Ludden (2004) points to Wright's 'The Killer Elite,' which 'was the first in a three-part series that ran in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in the fall of 2003' as the seed from which *Generation Kill* grew. With its 'almost photographic account' of the time that Evan Wright spent with the marines, 'The Killer Elite' won its writer 'the National Magazine Award for Excellence in Reporting' (Ludden, 2004). As an expert in 'writing about young subcultures like radical environmentalists, skateboarders, criminals', Wright lands on his 'first job in a combat zone' to report on the military youth subculture that interests him most (Rose, 2017).

Being documentary in format, the narrative is heavily episodic as there is no evident main plot and the author claims that he is reporting his stories and not making them up. In an episodic narrative, as the large-scale plot is often missing, a number of small-scale or mini-plots unfold in its stead. Likewise, there is no one single hero or leading character; every episode is equipped with a different hero or even set of heroes. Each episode, as well, runs a full circle from beginning to climax and down to the final denouement. This multi-plot framework suits best the documentary nature of the book in which an intradiegetic narrator recounts from a relatively detached point of view being himself a passive participant in the narrative. He observes and jots down his observation as impersonally and authentically as possible or at least so claims the author all through the narrative and in the many interviews he gave later! The undertone that the narrator seems keen to emphasise is his non-bias to both sides: American and Iraqi as he keeps record of what he personally witnesses with objectivity and disillusionment.

The starting point to most participants in this enterprise, including the author, is adventurous in essence though the adventure is highly outweighed with risk. Like so many reporters, Wright was allured by the thrill of the perilous experience, which if he survived intact, would enrich both his imagination and boost up his career, perhaps for good. Telling the war from a first-hand knowledge and inside perspective has been one of the major techniques resorted to in war fiction to effect factuality and earn credibility. The narrative, assumingly, offers a slice of what actual fighting looks like and provides professional, at times, personal interpretations of war strategies.

Generation Kill presents shamelessly its crew of stereotypical American heroes who are peremptory killers by training, environment, and profession.

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No.: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

They joined the war to kill and unscrupulously plume themselves on having their bloody job perfectly and adequately accomplished. They entertain no regrets even though Person, one of the soldiers that appear in the book, years later claims that 'war is stupid. War is ugly. War is confusion. War is death,' (cited in Seck, 2016). Yet, despite the stupidity, ugliness and confusion, the soldiers in *Generation Kill* act the devoted warriors who are wholeheartedly involved in the war.

The book invests in humour right from its title down to the characters that feature inside. It is typical of superheroes to laugh in the face of adversity and embrace the fun spirit of the dangerous adventure. Wright tells James Clark (2016) that 'Combat can be fun'. In the same interview, Wright mentions his 'theory about the transgressive nature of the humor' according to which humour in the military 'is liberating' as it makes 'leaving aside the pressure of combat and facing a war' possible. Wright's explanation might seem at first glance apologetic about the heartless or, to say the least, insensitive humour pervasive in the text. Yet, these fighters are warned against emotional involvement and heartlessness or even cruelty is strongly recommended and lauded.

The humorous dimension to the war that Wright gushes about overshadows the choice of the title of the book itself. The author lands on a title that establishes connection with and parodies antecedent writings of the same genre. Wright explains to Angelo Matera (2005) that the title is inspired by *On Killing*, a book by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in which the author draws attention to how the infantry soldiers of the past wars were reluctant to fire their arms. In contrast, 'today's guys have no problem firing their weapons.' Today's soldiers are trained killers and the wars they fight are stripped of nobility and purpose. Killing is more a pastime and hobby than a necessity or a last resort. There is this latent creed that war is a hunting trip or an entertaining game to the point that one of the marines in *Generation Kill* would compare destroying a whole village 'to Grand Theft Auto, the video game.' In addition to *On Killing*, Wright drew inspiration from *The Greatest Generation*, a book by Tom Brokaw 'about the men who fought in World War II'. Wright comments that because of such books, 'a lot of people have developed this romanticism about the war.' Wright seems to give the impression that this so-called 'romanticism about the war' is to be frowned at. However, *Generation Kill*, in effect, does very little or even nothing to debunk the romantic myths and dispel macho illusions even if the writer thinks otherwise. Wright who joins the campaign to secure himself a good journalistic scoop casts 'a sharp view' to quote Hull (2007) on what the marines were up to though he obviously bonded with and even admired some of them. If *Generation Kill* was intended as a parody or a warning manual, then it would hardly categorise as such.

The book spins together supposedly factual, down-to-earth reporting, awe-inspiring incidents and comical sketches. The narration is spiced up with

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No.: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

sarcasm and the author revels in mockery, poking fun at the soldiers as well as the situations they encounter. For instance, the nicknames, with which every single marine in the corps is dubbed and which make up the subsidiary title, expose the frolicsome and cheerful character of the group. They are fighters and heading on a serious business, yet their minds are set to make of the grotesque affair of the war an enjoyable romp. Whether good or evil, these nicknames reflect the natures, attitudes, and instincts of the soldiers who do not fail to act as their nicknames dictate. Farcical and disparaging as they are, Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, Hammerhead and many similar nom de guerre are indeed 'the New Face of American War' as the title page of *Generation kill* makes clear. The contemporary American wars are as frivolous and insouciant as a sci-fi set or a Hollywood superhero film not to mention popular comic strips and webtoons, which sharpen the appetite for the fantastic.

The flippant, facetious mood thickens, in the prologue, which opens the narrative. It is expected to inaugurate a gloomy atmosphere of imminent risk and pending death as an ambush is described. Yet, this onset seems to be typical of an adventure book. In consequence, Wright's reports of the battlefield are riddled with romantic clichés which his interviews as well team with. He is obviously keen on emphasizing the euphoria that accompanies the battles he bears witness to. In this regard, Wright bluntly tells *Task & Purpose* that 'Combat can be fun. As distasteful as that is, it's also true. Surviving a battle without a scratch is exciting, profound, and invigorating'. For him, war is 'insidious' by virtue of its being 'simultaneously horrifying and thrilling' and for those who go to war, 'it's a peak experience.' Blending horror with ecstasy, the tale kicks off with such descriptions of the ambush as: *hellish twilight* of *murky red dust*, *winds howl*, *shattered Sewers and human excrement*, *flames and smoke*, *blasted walls and a chaos of bullets*, *bricks and donkey-carts* (emphasis is added). On the one hand, the grotesque descriptions provide sufficient clues of the somber, macabre reality of warfare. On the other, they are indexical of the rapture experienced by the soldiers in action, redounding to its romantic illusions and adventurous tenors.

Wright blames American male ideals which paint the army in romantic colours as 'one of the last all-male adventures left in America' (p. 21). He probes deeper into the grounds on which these marines enlisted stating that 'a lot of them were sparked by a specific TV commercial. In it, a cartoonish Arthurian hero slays a fire-breathing dragon, then promptly morphs into a Marine in dress blues standing at attention with a silver sword at his side' (p. 26). The fictive and surreal air of the mission is felt by the marines themselves and defined by the numerous references marines make to TV and popular fiction.

Likewise, Wright criticizes the mediocre sources from which soldiers draw inspiration. Specifically, the soldiers are fond of war bestsellers 'reading dog-eared copies of Sun Tzu, Elmore Leonard, Steven Pressfield's Greek military historical novel *Gates of Fire,* and *Hustler'* (P. 20). In addition to war

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No.: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

thrillers, the cinema is a source of inspiration and information as to warfare and nature of combat. These young men are addicted to watching heroic war movies, for instance '*Saving Private Ryan*' (p. 225) and even '*G.I. Joe* on the Cartoon Network' watched during childhood (p. 135). However, *Pocahontas*, where the legendary Indian wars are revisited, seems to impact them most (p. 193*)*. The movie-like aspect of the adventure is acutely conjured up by the marines as if 'everyone just stepped onto the set of a war movie' (p. 95). For instance, Trombley, one of the marines that feature in the narrative, liked to pose with the ammunition belts draped 'around his neck like Rambo' (p. 54).

Sometimes, certain war situations intertextually remind the marines of specific movies. Cinematic metaphors creep into the narrator's commentaries and evaluations. As such, the narrator thinks it noteworthy to say that a complicated military situation 'suddenly feels like we've stumbled onto the set of *Apocalypse Now'* (P.105). Even Fick, the officer in command, tells Wright privately later: "This is *Black Hawk Down* shit we are doing" (p. 211). Apparently the movie influence is so strong that they nicknamed one of their commanders '"Encino Man", after 'the movie of the same title about a hapless caveman who thaws out and comes to life in modern-day Southern California'. That soldier earns this nickname 'because of his Neanderthal features but also because of his perpetual air of tongue-tied befuddlement ' (p. 56). Speaking of commanding officers, these marines seem to have developed a sort of abhorrence if not disgust towards their commanders naming another as Captain America for 'the buffoon' he was during the invasion (p. 86).

The adventurous though sinister atmosphere continues to engulf all the ensuing events. The town where they were ambushed is nameless as the name does not matter and it is almost the same thing American Marines face everywhere on the map. The exotic and alien atmosphere fuels the indifference, detachment and excitement. The description of the marines reinforce the unfamiliarity and outlandishness which the war spawns. A week has elapsed since they crossed Iraqi borders and they: 'had spent the past week wired on a combination of caffeine, sleep deprivation, tedium and anticipation. For some of them, rolling into an ambush was almost an answered prayer' (P 2). The tone of frivolous boredom and the urge to engage in some action whatsoever copies though hyperbolically the mentality of the adventurous soldiers when unoccupied. The war started only a week ago and rumbling explosions heard from a distance barely satisfy their appetite for combat. The marines look forward to the feats they were promised as they left their California Base. They need to feel the rush of the adrenaline in their blood. As professional killers, they are eager to carry out their monstrous job and act the heroic warriors they think they are. Their eyes are gazing at the empty vastness of the desert in search for the first Cobra Helicopters, which they hailed with the marine famous cheer cry "Yeah! Get some!". This cry, the narrator tells:

> expresses, in two simple words, the excitement, the fear, the feelings of power and

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019

> the erotic-tinged thrill that come from confronting the extreme physical and emotional challenges posed by death, which is, of course, what war is all about. Nearly every Marine I've met is hoping this war with Iraq will be his chance to get some. (P.2)

This is the clear indulgence in adventurous warfare and surreal excitement typical of American cultural ideals. Simultaneously, it is the incarnation of the human's darkest side and his blood thirst. These marines are trained to kill; their training textbooks teach it; their trainers repeat the word day and night until it becomes a chant, or rather a savage war call and a déjà vu of barbaric epochs. As the war breaks, they are encouraged to embrace this 'kill' doctrine for 'at the end of team briefings, Marines put their hands together and shout, '"Kill!"' (P. 24). In ironic analogy with sports and games, the team of trained killers makes a joint pledge. The only difference is that their vow translates into cold-blooded virility that seals its proof in bloodshed. The marines anticipate their death harvest in erotic ecstasy, relishing every little detail. One marine who jumps at the sight of jet fighters would speculate 'They kill hundreds of people, those pilots. I would have loved to have flown the plane that dropped the bomb on Japan. A couple dudes killed hundreds of thousands' (P. 47). They take pride in any rise in death tolls and the mention of the uranium bomb is by no means casual. While American civilians and human rights watchers might condemn wiping Hiroshima and Nagasaki off the map in 1945, the military hold a totally different view, seeing it as a triumph and achievement.

Most of the towns they encountered were friendly; in other words, too disappointing to the blood-thirsty marines. One of the marines, Trombley who is ecstatic to fire his gun, has his chance finally in this new town shouting '"I got one, Sergeant!"' every time he has a kill (p. 4). The team of killing machines is not altogether oblivious to the brutality and excessive, even, unjustifiable violence that they are implementing. Self-realization impinges on them for they are aware that their corps will 'roll across 580 kilometers to Baghdad. It will knock down buildings, smash cars and tanks, put holes in people, shred limbs, cut children apart' (p. 30). The last words of the commanders are conjuration of killing and violence '"You're being called on to kill," he says. You're going to be shot at… Be suspicious. Be aggressive"' (p. 32). Innocent casualties are waved aside as insignificant: 'It doesn't matter if later on we find out you wiped out a family of unarmed civilians' (p. 33). They are haunted by a killing fantasia '"The bad news is, we won't get much sleep tonight,"' one of the marines exalts, '"The good news is, we get to kill people"' (p. 337).

Final Remarks

In reaction to the Iraqi war, there is definitely a fair body of fictional, documentary, and autobiographical writings. The problem does not lie in the lack of prolificacy. but has a lot to do with the absence of significant visionary and far-reaching treatments that plumb the depth of the war question and offer a insights into what really matters. Most of these works have at heart the

ingredients of a good thriller where the narrative either stoops to lackadaisical sentimentality or remains superficial and incapable of offering a true and inscrutable representation. Therefore, the overall outcome is rather anemic and unimpressive.

Evan Wright's *Generation Kill*, the work studied here gives assumingly an honest account of the first days of the war. There hangs around it and between the lines and due to the characters and incidents it documents a questionable atmosphere that is too difficult to resolve. The offhand and objective air this narrative is anxious to establish is sometimes confusing not to mention hypnotizing. Therefore, while the author claims that he wrote a parody of romantic war adventures, his book is no less romantic or adventurous.

Perhaps, it is too early for Evan Wright to truly transfer his war experience with its diversity, peculiarities, pains and setbacks. Donadio (in Milletti, 2008: 19) insightfully argues that 'nonfiction can keep up with the instant messenger culture; fiction takes its own sweet time.' Or else, it could be equally too early to provide a proper evaluation of the merits or demerits of the war narrative.

References

Berry, R. M. & Jeffrey R. Di Leo (2008). '12 Theses on Fiction's Present.' In In R. M. Berry and Jeffrey R. Di Leo (eds.). ***Fiction's Present: Situating Contemporary Narrative Innovation***. New York: State University of New York Press.

Clark, James (2016). 'Generation Kill' Author Evan Wright On The Thrill Of Combat. *Task & Purpose*. https://taskandpurpose.com/generation-kill-author-evan-wright-thrill-combat. Accessed: 15/3/2019.

Federman, Raymond (2008). 'Critifictional Reflections on the Pathetic Condition of the Novel in Our Time.' In R. M. Berry and Jeffrey R. Di Leo (eds.). *Fiction's Present: Situating Contemporary Narrative Innovation*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Freeman, John (2007). "J'accuse George W Bush': why are we relying on a sports commentator to attack the US president - where's our modern-day Emile Zola?'. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2007/jul/16/jaccuse. Accessed: 18/2/2011.

Hanley, Lynne (1991). ***Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory***. Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Harvie Christopher (1991). *The Centre of Things Political Fiction in Britain*

from Disraeli to the Present. London: Unwin Hyman & Boston Sydney Wellington.

Hull, Tom (2007). 'Evan Wright: "Generation Kill"'. http://www.tomhull.com/ocston/books/wright-generation.php. Accessed 30/1/2011.

Jacobs, Ron (2006). 'Optimism of the will. A Review of Tony Christini's *Homefront'*. http://www.counterpunch.org/jacobs05232006.html. Accessed 30/1/2011.

Kleinbard, Leily (2012). 'Writing the Iraq War: The Notes, Photos, and Audio for *Generation Kill'*. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/12/writing-the-iraq-war-the-notes-photos-and-audio-for-generation-kill/266375/. Accessed 23/4/2019.

Ludden, Jennifer (2004). 'Evan Wright: Reporting on "The Killer Elite"'. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4123158. Accessed 26/3/2019.

Maas, Peter (2018). America's war narrative focuses on its soldiers. Afghans and Iraqis are Brushed aside. The Intercept. https://theintercept.com/2018/09/02/americas-war-narrative-focuses-on-its-heroes-and-victims-afghans-and-iraqis-are-brushed-aside/. Accessed 11/4/2019.

Massing, Michael (2007). 'Iraq: the hidden human costs.' *The New York Reviews of Books*. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/dec/Iraq-the-hidden-human-cost/. Accessed 26/3/2019.

Matera, Angelo (2005). Into Iraq with 'Generation Kill': an Interview with Evan Wright. *Godspy Magazine*. https://oldarchive.godspy.com/reviews/Into-Iraq-With-Generation-Kill-An-Interview-with-Evan-Wright-by-Angelo-Matera.cfm.htm. Accessed 25-3-2019.

Milletti, Christina (2008). 'Innovative Fiction and the Poetics of Power Gertrude Stein and Christine Brooke-Rose "Do" Language.' In R. M. Berry and Jeffrey R. Di Leo (eds.). *Fiction's Present: Situating Contemporary Narrative Innovation*. New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 17-28.

Rose, Adam (2017) . 'Kill: Our Interview With Author Evan Wright And First Recon Marine Eric Kocher'. *Huffington Post*. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/07/25/generation-kill-our-inter_n_114533.html . Accessed 15/3/2019.

Seck, Hope Hodge (2016). After Iraq, the Marines of 'Generation Kill' Regret

Nothing. *Military. com.*https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/12/22/13-years-iraq-marines-generation-kill-regret-nothing.html. Accessed 15-3-2019.

Vernon, Alex (2004). *Soldiers Once and Still*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press.

Wright, Evans. (2004). *Generation Kill.* New York: Penguin books.

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences No .: 4C Vol.: 44 Yr. 2019