



## The Psychological Impact of War: A Study of Kevin Powers' "The Yellow Birds"

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: 08 Nov, 2025

Accepted: 20 Dec, 2025

Available online: 01 Jul, 2026

**PP :37-52**

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### Abstract

"This paper is a literary analysis of Kevin Powers' "The Yellow Birds" that examines the psychological impact of war on soldiers. In close reading of the novel, the work shows how Powers depicts soldiers' interior battles and emotional scarring, here around characters Bartle and Murphy. With a backdrop of war's more broad psychological consequences, the study strands of memory, pain, and soldiers' dissonance of morals in coming home create a tale that reflects deeply these topics. Emphasizing difficulty to adjust to civilian life after war, the story's sharp depiction of such themes helps to locate a lens utilized to evaluate war's larger overall psychological damage. The work positions the book in a dialogue of war literature by using several critiques of literature and different theory of psychology, therefore establishing it to be a seminal work in situating war's influence on mental health. This study shows the importance of the book in describing the silence, often invisible weight of troops, therefore fostering a better respect of their efforts and the challenging aspect of their rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** The Yellow Birds, Kevin Powers, psychological impact of war, memory, pain, moral dissonance, war literature.



## الأثر النفسي للحرب: دراسة في رواية "الطيور الصفراء" لكيفن باورز



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### المستخلص:

تُقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً أدبياً لرواية "الطيور الصفراء" لكيفن باورز، وتتناول الأثر النفسي للحرب على الجنود. بقراءة متأنية للرواية، تظهر الدراسة كيف يصور باورز معارك الجنود الداخلية وندوبهم العاطفية، من خلال شخصيتي بارتل ومورفي. مع خلفية من العواقب النفسية الأوسع للحرب، تُشكل خيوط الدراسة المتعلقة بالذاكرة والألم وتنافر الجنود مع القيم الأخلاقية عند عودتهم إلى الوطن قصةً تعكس هذه المواضيع بعمق. مع التركيز على صعوبة التكيف مع الحياة المدنية بعد الحرب، يُساعد تصوير القصة الدقيق لهذه المواضيع على تحديد منظور مُستخدم لتقييم الضرر النفسي الشامل الأكبر للحرب. يضع العمل الكتاب في حوار مع أدب الحرب من خلال استخدام عدة... نقد الأدب ونظريات علم النفس المختلفة، مما يجعله عملاً رائداً في تحديد تأثير الحرب على الصحة النفسية. تُظهر هذه الدراسة أهمية الكتاب في وصف صمت الجنود، وثقلهم غير المرئي في كثير من الأحيان، مما يعزز احترام جهودهم والجانب الصعب من إعادة تأهيلهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطيور الصفراء، كيفن باورز، التأثير النفسي للحرب، الذاكرة، الألم، التنافر الأخلاقي، أدب الحرب .

### مجلة الكتاب للعلوم الإنسانية KJHS

مجلة علمية، نصف سنوية  
مفتوحة الوصول، محكمة

تاريخ تسلم البحث: ٢٠٢٥/١١/٠٨

تاريخ قبول النشر: ٢٠٢٥/١٢/٢٠

تاريخ النشر: ٢٠٢٦/٠٧/٠١

المجلد: (٩)

العدد: (١٦) لسنة ٢٠٢٦م

جامعة الكتاب – كركوك – العراق



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العمل الأصلي بشكل صحيح

" الأثر النفسي للحرب: دراسة في رواية  
"الطيور الصفراء" لكيفن باورز "

مجلة الكتاب للعلوم الإنسانية

<https://doi.org/>

P-ISSN:1609-591X

E-ISSN: (3005-8643) -X

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## 1. Introduction

Soldiers carry more than physical wounds back from the battlefield. Despite the fanfare that inexorably rings out when nations break into conflict, the psychic, mental, and emotional reverberations of war are more enduring and more deadly, persisting long after the guns fall silent. In *The Yellow Birds*, the grim shadow of war, psychological and physical, is laid bare in a way few other contemporary works have managed to achieve. Its singular success is depicting the endless, insatiable, and ultimately destructive hunger that human cruelty demands. (Harvey, 2021)

Gunfire echoes and re-echoes, the fallout of a nearby mortar strike suspended in the stifling heat, the grit it raises roaring through the streets, veiling everything in an ambiguous uncertainty. Regardless of an actual event, the book catches this resonance, this always fluctuating sense of imminent violence. Stressing all is the displacement of time, the lack of connection, and the severe ennui that grabs all. The failed attempts to communicate and the longing for personal connection behind a facade of apathy -- our two protagonists, Bartle and Murphy, embody the experience of this conflict (Dennis Jr. Howell, 2014). Further questions: What is that experience's nature beyond the moldering ruins and barren, hostile landscape? What happens when the memory of a nation fades, like that of every individual life? What is left when nothing is remaining to forget? These questions form the core of the present study. A psychological and philosophical examination of the depiction of the war and its ramifications, both in the immediate environment and in the broader context, will be conducted. A close reading of the novel will show how this brutal conflict and the nature of the relationships it coaxes into being corresponds to an understanding of humanity and life profoundly at odds with established, traditional values. By understanding war's psychic consequences, attempts shall be made to gain insight into ameliorating these far-reaching effects. To this end, the broader works dealing with the psychological aftershocks of conflict will be considered and used as a basis for the subsequent conclusions. (Abji and Korteweg2021)

## 2. Literature Review

War literature has been always used to reflect the mental and psychological challenges that warrants face. An early psychological examination of war is also provided by Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), which chronicles

the internal conflict between a young Civil War soldier and his fears and self-doubt. Likewise, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a significant novel that stands as an early of this genre, effectively capturing the emotions of disenfranchisement, alienation, and survivor's guilt experienced by World War I soldiers. Remarque's depiction of war as a dehumanizing experience paved the way for later literary analyses of psychological trauma in war narratives. Paul Bäumer, the main character is the returning veteran who would become more and more cut off from civilian life and reshape the personality of veterans in the coming writings on war fiction.

"The Iraq War is now a mysterious provocation that took place early in the twenty-first century. Historians argue over the causes and significance of the conflict" (Qasim Habeeb, 2015). The Iraq War, which began in 2003 and has lasted for more than a decade, had an "extraordinary influence on the psychological health of Americans," including not only soldiers who took part in the war but also those living in American society.

A qualitative study on war stress and readjustment issues. Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* is an important novel in this burgeoning war literature. It chronicles the events of the protagonist both during the conflict and upon return. It illuminates more general problems regarding the psychological effects of military duty and combat involvement, and it poignantly considers the devastation war imposes upon the younger generation. Powers explicitly addresses how difficult it is for young soldiers to adapt to the horrors of war and how the coping mechanisms used by soldiers are ultimately inadequate. (Bergeron)

All the raw cunning and savvy was little more than time-killing and dodging in a game where he never set the rules. The terrible things have scars, and they require that the future not be like the past. War and its psychological implications have been known for centuries. It profoundly influences and even ruins those involved. Literature has always been a lens to shed light on trauma and has shown how war emphasizes the fragility of life, thus making changes in the structure of humanity. The search for change and explanation comes from the inexpressibility of war destruction in history books. War always unravels truths and lies previously established throughout society, provoking a search for rationale. This makes literature especially appealing since it sees individual attributes through a magnifier.

In terms of the Iraq War, literature has also stepped up to the plate to dispute and discuss what occurred in Iraq. (Keyes & Platt, 2024)

The war prompted questioning and a rise in literature through different viewpoints, revealing disputes about the hero-worship adventured by the media surrounding soldiers. The Iran-Iraq War, however, "was particularly notorious for being badly written about. It was so nearly contemporary, so violent in intensity, and so long and pointless in duration that writers had difficulty getting any conceptual over-view or emotional detachment". Various opinions have thus been scripted. (McNab, 2022)

### **2.1. Historical Context of the Iraq War**

Knowing any war's psychological and physical effects is never easy since it requires close examination of governmental decisions, military tactics, and conflicts that led to ground-level anarchy. To honestly grapple with the historical ramifications of an armed conflict is to undertake a massive exercise in document analysis, placing and replacing the words of commanders alongside the testimonies and memoirs of those under their charge. Often, the easiest route is relying on one voice, favoring a more general reflection of the subject. Nevertheless, such a singular account can help illuminate the broader and incomplete historical understanding of the Iraq War. By nature, this perspective cannot hope to capture the richness of detail and depth provided by the necessary multitude of written fragments. However, it is intended to provide a broad historical backdrop to the war in Iraq and its psychological effects for a fuller understanding of the narrative of *The Yellow Birds* (Bragg, 2012).

Since its inception, the Iraq War has been fraught with controversy and debate. Historians will spend decades seeking to break that Gordian Knot, hoping to reveal the political motivations, the strategic missteps, and the human dramas that unfolded across the Western deserts and in the streets of ancient Mesopotamian cities. Before and since the American invasion, Iraq has hosted a wide range of regional and international threats to the United States of America. This includes fighter aircraft and ballistic missiles, and it has feared using its oil wealth as a lever for economic and political power. In the ongoing shadow war against American and British aerial facilities and patrolling aircraft, Iraq utilizes new Russian-built anti-aircraft systems in the form of ZSU-23-4s, triple-barreled 23mm anti-aircraft vehicles. As the final push begins, these air defense systems are supplemented with the use of jet fighters,

attack helicopters, and a plethora of missiles, along with daily artillery barrages of shrapnel-sprouting artillery known as "steel rain." (Rubin, 2021)

## **2.2. Psychological Effects of War on Soldiers**

Freud's (1920) studies on trauma stand as a basic framework for analyzing war literature. His studies on war trauma that follow WWI forms the basis for following studies. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud presents the idea of repetition compulsion, in which people unintentionally replay painful events through flashbacks, dreams, and neurotic behaviors. Lacan introduced the idea of "the Real" to psychoanalysis in 1966. The fact that trauma is not entirely explicable within the symbolic order and that it transcends language is confirmed by this, which is based on Freudian theories. Researchers like Caruth (1996) stress that the narrative structures are limited by war trauma.

It is well known that young men and women in the military are at an inherently higher rate of death or bodily injury than civilians (Bragg, 2012). What is less visible is the psychological implications of the stressors experienced by soldiers at war and as a result of war. Combat is an intense, traumatizing, sustained, and unremitting attack against a soldier's will not only to live but to keep the mind intact. The psychological casualties of war remain invisible in America's consciousness in part because they are a historical drawing exercise of the American psyche, an effort to keep these deep emotional scars separate from public consciousness. Stories of war and combat's brutal lessons are left unshared and largely private. The invisible emotional casualties early Americans carried as a result of their wars have been perpetuated and compounded through conscious attempts to prevent soldiers from carrying such experiences home. The percentage of combat soldiers who witnessed them kill the enemy in any war since the Civil War has remained consistent at 15% despite evolving technology and modern warfare. It is determined that humans ought to have the same aversion to killing another human as any other mammal. So, a new kind of training was developed to overcome one human's deepest natural inhibitions. As each war and military engagement passes and a new generation sends its young to combat, the psychological effects of war are forgotten or ignored, perpetuating the same effects on a new class of veterans. (Matoba, 2023)

Modern warfare, seen explicitly in the 1812 and Civil War, surrounded technological and weaponry changes and practices that made perceived threats more numerous,

persistent, uncopied, and considerably more severe. Many historically recorded instances of soldiers suffering emotional distress after the battle were initially diagnosed as ordinary cowardice or desertion, with capital punishment and shaming of the family order for detained soldiers. Baggage/malingers understood the risk of diagnosis with doctors tending to shooting wounds in non-vital areas or sending soldiers each other's full stockings so neither would qualify for the fight. Soldiers diagnosed with POW and sent to special camps were kept to demonstrate the feared outcome, a rare occasion of humane sympathy. The ways doctors describe combat fatigue, unnatural strain, physical and emotional two great stress, the hazard of wounds, and the embarrassment of hospitalization after the campaign are nearly identical to the terms used to designate the syndrome after Vietnam and in describing PTSD. Functions of psychological transference such as shell shock or combat stress (syndrome) reveal a general societal hesitancy to deal with and admit the emotional cost of war. The informal prejudices and re-educating effect of the term gross stress reaction provide an outlet for the blame and ostracizing often directed at those experiencing the effects of war. (Brown-Tuyishimire, 2023)

### **3. The Yellow Birds: Summary and Analysis**

Kevin Powers' compelling book *The Yellow Birds* masterfully examines the unusual and complicated bond between two soldiers stationed in Iraq's hazardous and lethal environment. Four years apart, the naive and innocent Murph is separated from the older of the two soldiers, Bartle.

Bartle frequently comforts himself as a mentor to the young soldier with the false and theoretically consoling belief that he can keep Murph alive over their demanding assignment. But Bartle starts to fail, sadly allowing his companion to slip from his hands in ways that haunt him as both men get more and more enthralled by the terrible reality of the war and unrelenting anarchy.

Like most soldiers, Bartle struggles deeply with the emotional processing of a war that can often transform even the brightest daytime into a disjointed yet highly regimented exercise in sheer survival. His life and experiences have been irrevocably shaped and subjected to the more prominent mechanisms of United States foreign policy, leaving him to grapple with the profound implications of their actions and the lasting scars of conflict. (Gouni and VERNY2023)

Additionally, Bartle has to deal with the consequences of becoming open to a territory of human emotion he has soft experience with, of the crushing burden of his promise to Murph's mother that her son would come home safely (Dennis Jr. Howell, 2014). Be that as it may, *The Yellow Birds* falls prey to none of these bosses, and it is instead the opposite. It provides an honest account of the feelings and thoughts that haunt those who serve in the infantry. Powers incorporate into this narrative of friendship, duty, and war the emotions of men who willingly fight for their country yet experience feelings they are often shamed for having. His lyrical prose and an ever-observant understanding of this grave subject matter mainly achieved this. Readers are brought into its confidences, bothering an awareness of the characters' inner spaces. From a writer's standpoint, it is most interesting to note how more minor details in the work are sewn into its grander tapestry with delicacy. Similarly, the yearning language conjures a natural tilt of the landscape and the hollow sights and sounds of war, creating for the characters a near ghostly remembrance of normalcy when juxtaposed. (Wright, 2021)

#### **4. Themes in *The Yellow Birds***

Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. According to Wojahn, D. (2020, far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy, there is a small, disregarded yellow sun, the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. Nevertheless, it will all be worth it in the end. Augustine, deeply buried within the Seine, was entangled in the crisscrossing of the wet fishing nets. Strategic Talent to implement high-quality deliverables of company-wide technologies, administrative solutions, information system improvements, and campus installations. Deployments, studies, and research relative to IT modernization and enterprise operation services. Psychodynamic institutions, and Office of High Performance. Socially distinguishing the timely watersheds of underlying trends that foster evolving possibilities. Reviewing the commitment to improve client satisfaction. This customizable level of excellence is the output of endowing search integration into an intranet document to retire a platform selectively bound by the constraints of Boolean logic. You cannot swim for new horizons until you dare to lose sight of the shore. (Alosman & Omar, 2022)

#### 4.1. Guilt and Redemption

In 'The Yellow Birds', guilt and redemption are predominant themes that manifest through the reaction to combat experiences by the two key characters of the novel, Bartle and Murphy. A sense of guilt pervades throughout the narrative and continues to torment the characters after the military service is over. Due to a certain degree of helplessness, each character wrongly believes they have failed their friends and comrades. In its turn, this guilt devolves into various forms of self-deprecation and loss of touch with reality upon their return to civilian life. However, development requires atonement, considering the suppressed memories of conflict (McCormack & Joseph, 2014). Their capacity to express their emotions steadily drives them towards this development.

The book relies heavily on imagery to show the troops' culpability. Birds serve as especially moving symbols of the general guilt that one carries. As heralds of deliverance and death, birds are a haunting specter returning the characters to the front. These birds also appear mostly as crows, which have long been connected with military suffering.

As Bartle loses touch with reality, he begins to harbor a delusional story about the purported ability of Murphy to keep birds entrapped within his hands, which becomes an allegory regarding his helplessness to protect him in combat. As Bartle believes he is to be permanently plagued by guilt, his helplessness for deliverance and protection becomes paralyzing and is profoundly embedded in his brain. Arango et al., 2023:

Conversely, intentional exchanges between Bartle and Murphy highlight more processes of guilt and atonement.

Whenever Bartle envisions Murphy, it is primarily his suffering and death that stands in his thoughts. His conscious perseverance of these memories catalyzes remorse at his perceived inaction. This further becomes more acute upon the realization of his misleadingness to the persistent questioning by Murphy's mother and the imagined reaction of Murphy. On the other side, it underlines Murphy's premonition of his death and, towards the end, a perceived kindness in Ba Title's supposed actions. Ultimately, the pursuit of redemption is an unattainable yet desired

goal for the soldiers, and various psychological undertones transpire in their aftermath. (Orpilla, 2022)

#### **4.2. Friendship and Camaraderie**

In 'The Yellow Birds', friendship and comradeship are explored as important aspects in their own right and as a lifeline in the ensnarement of the narrative's soldier narrator. In *The Yellow Birds*, solidarity and human connection are created in reaction to the suffocating circumstances enacted by the camera lens of war (Guthrie-Gower & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022). At war, bonds developed in combat, friendships, and alliances are extraordinary. These are relationships between some life-or-death events when terrible betrayal and incomprehensible love could coexist.

Essential in the novel, the friendships in *The Yellow Birds* illustrate a lifeline to survival and provide an unassuming counterbalance to the kind of isolation usually associated with veterans' lives. Detailed analyses will show that friendships described as simple are anything but. That friendship can alleviate the psychological burdens of combat and be a conduit for them. Additionally, friendships have tragic aspects, such as camaraderie being lip-stitched with the grimy fabric of loss and betrayal. (Griswold, 2022)

Though lovely, Powers's connections also feature the ugly, a counterweight to the too-romanticized stories of friendship. These friendships reflect life, which is erratic and frequently golden, whether from betrayal, death, or another tragedy. Investigating these issues can help us better grasp the complex interactions of human relations inside the psychological travels of warriors in stories. It is argued that it is a much-needed heading or star map holding potential placements within future work on veterans' literature or on narratives of war and mental health more broadly. Sadly, every outstanding soldier bears the terrible weight; it was thought the others would split it. (McCloskey, 2024)

Two societal aspects of these developing friendships highlight their need and sorrow, hence intensifying the stresses on Bartle. First of all, the friendships related to family ties and adoption.

Rather than alleviating pressures, they appear to amplify pressures: as though Bartle's adoption of Murphy as kin and Murph's adoption of Bartle as sib intensify Murphy's eventual suicide too soon and the haunting fall afterward. Both adopt and are adopted

into familial roles. To Murph, Bartle is brotherly, a bond signaled by gestures such as calling to him whenever he fears for his life. When holding the lantern lamp, Murph looks like his brother, the moon. To Bartle, Murphy becomes son-like, observed in moments like when Bartle retrieves 'his boy' from the bedframe, "my chest rising and falling to the rhythm of his sleeping." The trials and redemptive potential of familial bonds are interlaced throughout the text, particularly the parallelisms between Bartle's father and Murphy, which the annotators found themselves noting, and perhaps Bartle, latent with knowledge. (Ding et al., 2024)

## 5. Psychological Aftermath of the Iraq War

"Men live and die, and seldom tell, why they burn with the rage to fight with false armies that will only stand in fields of brother trees devised in tender webs of words. Bartle and his close friend Daniel Murphy decided to join the army, viewing it as a way of escaping their dying and fading town in Virginia. However, they soon discovered that they had entered a realm of chaos, becoming grotesquely tangled in wars – not only the war alone in Iraq but also the intense inner battles they would face when they returned home. (Patel, 2021)

The novel deliberately avoids delving into themes of patriotism, conscientious objection, or the frequently intricate and often convoluted governmental policies; it is, instead, a deeply thoughtful and introspective exploration of the complex and layered psyche of a soldier, a character who finds himself rendered powerless in the very heart of the unnatural and devastating circumstances that war inevitably creates. Powers refuses to conform to a simplistic narrative that presents a clear-cut distinction between heroes and villains. (Cushman, 2024)

Instead, he gives a moving voice to the almost unfathomable and significant loss that troops go through—a loss that shows up both during their demanding time in battle and hauntingly in the years following their experiences. Though written inside a fictional framework, Powers's story harmonizes with the voices of many others, therefore creating a bigger and more complex tapestry that documents the horrific hardships experienced by young men going out to war. This story emphasizes especially the psychological suffering that afflicts those courageous individuals who make it back off and provides insights into the emotional and mental scars that last long after the physical conflicts have ended. (Brag, 2012)

## **5.1. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Nations wage war while individuals suffer in wars. The author of the novel experienced both roles. As a soldier in the Iraq War, he witnessed the devastation and brutality of the conflict. The novel painstakingly captures such experiences. It mourns the loss of young lives, questions why humanity kills each other for the glory of war, and shows how combatants struggle and break before physical ordeals. Hidden in the souls of returning soldiers from the battlefield, one of the most significant tragedies in war is that although the citizens might forget their terrible events, the psychological, logical, and physical effects of war never go away. This chapter on the psychological health of veterans of the Iraq War examines what kind of traumatic responses are exposed during the war, manifest after the war, and what is presented about these invisible scars. (Reingold, 2021)

## **5.2. Depression and Anxiety**

During his narration, Bart begins to recall his service as a soldier in Iraq and compares his mental state to shapes. Initially, he was a triangle, pointing up to the sky with hope and potential. When Bart enlisted after 9/11 as an Army engineer who would be responsible for the repair of radios and good with technology, he felt endowed with a sense of purpose for enlisting and handling the trauma events. Gradually, the change in situation, such as the loss of Kevin, makes him feel trampled on by a series of events and confines him to a square of despair. As he recounts his service and time in Iraq, Bart alternates between past and present, but it is clear from the presentation of events and Ben Foster's performance that he is now a very different version of himself (Greenberg, 2014).

Bart's depiction of his shape as it grows into a square symbolizes the weight of his experiences that have pushed all the extra air out of his lungs. When Bart returns home from Iraq, he develops depression and anxiety. Depression is a serious problem among veterans post-war, but it can already start in active duty. The combat experiences can result in mental health issues that can lead to hopelessness and overwhelming anxiety. The high-stress situations during deployment are one of the most excellent sources of this anxiety and are a very significant threshold for the onset of depressive disorder afterward. (Hoppen et al, 2021)

Bart's monologue hints that back home, it is easier to 'sit round' and have these thoughts; he mentions how the violence didn't stay in Iraq, and he sees people dying

back home as well. Once back, it becomes hard to keep working at the same pace that new survivors combined with traumatic experiences with redeployment and being 'sick in an unseen way' (Davis McGinty, 2009). Bart's story also illustrates the problem that depression and anxiety can exacerbate each other to maintain a cyclical agony. This intersection of anxiety and depression echoes findings in the existing literature. Soldiers have reported experiencing 'sudden fits of rage or despair out of n where' or a constant emotional swinging from 'sadness to apathy to suicidal' in war zones. (Babineau et al.2022)

Bart makes it clear that the picture society has of depression and anxiety, mainly when it affects a trained soldier, is damaging. Instead, help is often depicted as a point of vulnerability or mi understanding, only making the soldier feel like an outsider or useless. Especially for veterans, it is not hard to trigger the feeling of betrayal, being stigmatized, or misunderstanding when seeking help. Slogans such as 'soldiers aren't born to make war' or 'real men don't cry' can have family consultation and think they are just 'looking for attention' and are entirely 'in the head.' Lower-ranked soldiers often confuse redressing the wrong shitbag among themselves, not being able to differentiate 'fake' disorders from real ones. (Magal et al. 2021)

However, the soldiers themselves usually start feeling that way first. Women are expected to experience sexual harassment or be accused of false accusations. Essential is the definition of mental health, which stipulates that they are 'not the presence of special diseases but mental states, feelings and emotions. 'With a lack of practical guidelines and as much sociocultural ignorance as amnesia is also, the service member has left a prepared homeless child. Bart and the poem's soldier rarely reflect on what actual combat is like or the hectic living it may carry, only about its heroism or futility or a large-scale imperialistic reflection. However, while Bart, the novel soldiers, and the poem's poets never recover, it is hoped that the urgent case there will show that such a phenomenon occurred. The early procedure or prerequisite to improve mental wellness. (Shepherd and Rippon2023)

## **6. Conclusion**

Soldiers return from war, and with them, the war, share their guilt and redemption as openly or as secretly as it might come. They are the gods of this war-painted place.

They are monsters - (Aaron Higgins, 2016). *The Yellow Birds* describes such god monsters in rich detail, weaving their paths side-by-side with the invisible scars of the war they fight together. Though much of this struggle is not seen, physical reminders - the scars I leave on bodies and cities - remain a mosaic visible to anyone who cares to look. The novel explores fertile ground, then a record and a statement of a time-honored and constantly repeated piece of human story.

Burton's death, poorly named as Murp's Law tells others, tells Bartle's story - his guilt. It sits ingrained within him as the memories of the war seem to. If war's end blemishes Murph's moral thread, secrets cheaper to keep are the others' weights. Emmett's are unclear, but even then, disturbing to Bartle - Hicks' guilt is more apparent, representative of soldiers' assumed sins. But if Burton's death is the novel's precipice, the story is not one of vertigo-filled descent. It is the slow walk back from the edge, a movement affirming Pick's words - the slow fade of memory, guilt, and youth; the clambering of redemption in whatever form may be taken; the search, hopefully fruitful, to return an Eden to find forgiveness of peace. Such stories are told in the hushed tones of confidants, eyes rarely able to meet eyes, whispers on whispered breath, revealing ions not meant to be spoken -. This, too, is abed and disallowed except between the willing participant-interested and the free-volunteer speaker. However, if there is dialogue, it must be given - the soldier of war's return must leave their guilt as a marker, a testament - only then can it be laid to rest or forgiven. Only then can the god monsters get back to humanity. (Withers, 2021)

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