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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Fictionalizing Wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind***

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**| ABSTRACT**

This paper scrutinizes some novels that fictionalize wars that broke out during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study argues that the negative impacts of war are comprehended better when intertwined with fiction. The study is implemented through a qualitative descriptive approach. The paper focuses on many novels, including John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946), Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* (1945), Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The objective of the paper is to caution against war and unveiling its barbarities. The paper is significant because it is a far cry not to reiterate the black pages of history. The paper tackles the following themes: wars, agony, and colonialism.

**| KEYWORDS**

WWI, Civil War, Nakba, History, Fiction.

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### **1. Introduction**

War fiction includes history woven into the tapestry of fiction. War fiction reveals what happened in the past and creates an accurate perception of the past's tunnels. War novels are among the necessary doors that protect against the mistakes that man made in the past, which caused destruction and ruin to him. In addition, they provide us with lessons that will help us plan for the future. War fiction familiarizes the reader with the history of previous eras, the factors behind the rise of some wars, and the causes of the destruction and the demise of some civilizations. War novels enable us to summarize many of the experiences and mistakes that humans have made in the past. By regenerating characters, events, movements, and the spirit of an antiquated era, war fiction aims to provoke the spirit of a bygone era:

The historical military fiction novel is often considered the most common type of novel within this genre. In this type of novel, the author selects a real historical conflict, such as the American Revolutionary War or Great Britain's war in the Falklands. The main characters in these novels are often soldiers, and the author recreates battle from the historical conflict through the characters' eyes. History buffs often know the conclusion of this type of novel, because these books are usually based on famous battles. While the battle scenes are usually fairly accurate, the author will often weave an adventure story through the plot, based on the actions of the central characters. Examples of popular authors in this genre include Bernard Cornwell and Jeff Shaara. (What Are the Different Types of Military Fiction?, 2023)

War novels, which involve an intersection between history and literature, chronicle events dramatically with more dynamism and emotion than a purely historical account, keeping all the important intricacies of the subject. They can also rekindle the past, breathe new life into the subject, or reawaken the spirit of the past. In war novels, history and literature are synchronized; history is based on preciseness, facts, and veracity, while literature is based on limitless imagination (*Brief Definition and Characterization of a Historical Novel*, n.d).

War and conflict, which prevailed in the 20th century, enormously caused an imbalance in the global powers. During the 20th century, world wars, like World War I and World War II, broke out, and armies used all kinds of weapons to win. These wars were so cataclysmic in which millions of people perished. The twentieth century was the bloodiest in history.

The paper focuses on three novels; each one of them reflects a different war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Civil War has been the subject of many novels. None of them indulges readers as deeply into the sizzling cities and plantations of the American South as *Gone With the Wind* does, providing vivid settings and invigorating scenes of people who are so vividly remembered in their words and feelings (*Gone With the Wind* by Mitchell, Margaret, n.d.). Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *Return to Haifa*, focuses on Israel's Colonialism of Palestine during the 1948 war in Haifa (Wikipedia contributors, 2023). *The 1946 novel* John Hersey 's *Hiroshima* recounts the experiences of six Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors (Reporter, 2018).

### **1.1 Study Questions**

1. How do the novels reflect the historical times and the bloodiest wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What are the impacts of wars depicted in the chosen novels?

### **1.2 Study objectives**

- 1- To chronicle wartime acts of ferocity.
- 2- To impart wisdom behind each historical event reflected in each novel.

## **2. Methodology**

The paper is based on a qualitative descriptive approach. There are two kinds of resources in this paper specifically: primary resources and secondary resources. The primary resources are the novels examined in this paper, while the secondary sources are references that can be assets to analyze the primary resources.

### **2.1 Main Text**

Since the first literary works were penned, there has been literature revolving around war. There are many examples of literary works describing different wars, such as the American Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, the Nakba, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In its attempt to perceive the war experience, the literature of war utilizes a wide spectrum of different genres, including poetry, drama, short stories, novels, journals, diaries, oral histories, memoirs, and letters (*War in Literature and Drama*, n.d.).

The war itself generated a plethora of poems, novels, short stories, and memoirs, which pictured a weary and absurd existence. The literary works about war, which are suffused with a sense of tribulation, the ghastliness of tremulous presence, and a desire for tranquility and spiritual life, are at once a revelation of the melancholy of the best minds at the upheaval and paranoia during the war times. ( *The Atlantic*, 2022)

War literature embodies the spirit of courageousness, sacrifice, and persistence that characterizes soldiers: Traditional military values of bravery, sacrifice, sense of duty, and camaraderie are emphasized, and the action is usually described from the point of view of a soldier or officer" (*Autumn*, 2015).

*Gone with the Wind* is replete with reminiscences of the severity of the Civil War. The setting of the novel is in Atlanta during the Civil War of the 1860's. However, a considerable part also occurs in Tara, the O'Hara family's plantation home. *Gone with the Wind* presents how the South was drastically transformed by the Civil War and Reconstruction. On plantations like Tara, rich Southerners enjoyed prosperous lives prewar. Nonetheless, the war invalidates this way of life, even though most Southerners won't acknowledge it. Instead, Southerners have shown a relentless refusal of the Confederacy. As the conflict extends throughout this region, plantations blaze, Southerners become bankrupt, and eventually, Black slaves are released, depriving plantation owners of their workforce (*The Civil War and Reconstruction Theme in Gone With the Wind | LitCharts*, n.d.-b) :

The literature of war dates from The Iliad or stories told in the epic of Gilgamesh to last year's National Book Award winner Phil Klay for his short-story collection, *Redeployment*. War- and the people and nations who wage it- have long captivated both writers and readers. Poetry and prose alike have garnered a following , along with memoir, documentary films, and now even literary blogs. (Illinois Library Association, n.d.)

The story of Palestinians who had escaped the 1948 war and then returned back in 1967 is the subject of *Return to Haifa*. In *Return to Haifa*, a Palestinian wife and husband returned to Haifa in 1967 to visit the home in which they lived and know what happened with their five-month-old son Khaldun after they fled in 1948 to escape the turmoil and insecurity caused by Britain's sudden departure and the entrance of the Jewish troops. Khaldun's house was granted to a Jewish husband and his wife, Iphrat and Miriam Koshen, on the condition they adopt the left Palestinian child (*Anglistiku, n.d.*).

*Return to Haifa* describes Said X and his wife's traumatic forced departure from Haifa and 20-year returning back during one of the tortuous Jewish expulsion of Palestinians and the Jewish occupation of Palestine: "Morning, Wednesday, April 21, 1948. Haifa, the city, was not expecting anything in spite of the fact it was filled with dark tension. Thunder came abruptly from the east, from the heights of Mount Carmel. Mortar shells flew across the city's center, pelting the Arab quarters" (Journal, 2018).

Without a chance to take their child, they were compelled to leave. When they rebound after twenty years, they realize that a Jewish family had adopted their son and occupied their home. The recognition that Khaldun had become Dov, who is appointed in the Jewish army, astonished Said X. and Safiyya. Dov/Khaldun denied them, accusing them of being backwards because their only achievement to return him back had been 'crying' for twenty years:

Yes, sure. We shouldn't have left anything. Not Khaldun. Not the house, not Haifa! Didn't the same frightening feeling come over you that came over me while I was driving through the streets of Haifa, yet the city refused to acknowledge me. I had the same feeling in this house. Can you imagine that? That our house would refuse to acknowledge us? Don't you feel it? I believe the same thing will happen with Khaldun. You'll see. (PIJ.ORG: *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani, n.d.)

*Hiroshima* narrates the events that happened on August 6, 1945, mainly the explosion of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The narrative focuses on six survivors and their lives after the explosion, even though most of the town's residents passed away in the blast. At the end of World War II, which was fought between the Allied powers (France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union) and the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan), American bombing took place; the atomic bomb exploded in Hiroshima. The United States released atomic bombs on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, after futile requests for Japan's surrender. After a short period, Japan surrendered to the United States, and the war came to a halt.

The dreadful devastation done to Hiroshima, the thousands of perished, the fruitless endeavors at medical care and rescue, the subsequent ailments and radiation contaminating, and the resilient psychological and physical ramifications of this tragic event are all delineated in these collected accounts. The repercussion of total war on civilians is the predominant theme of this novel, which was penned one year after dropping the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima. In a total war, no one is saved. This is emphasized

by the fact that, in spite of being dropped to beat the Japanese, non-Japanese people were also badly influenced by the atomic bomb:

He was the only person making his way into the city; he met hundreds and hundreds who were fleeing, and every one of them seemed to be hurt in some way. The eyebrows of some were burned off and skin hung from their faces and hands. Others, because of pain, held their arms up as if carrying something in both hands. Some were vomiting as they walked. Many were naked or in shreds of clothing. On some undressed bodies, the burns had made patterns- of undershirt straps and suspenders and, on the skin of some women( since white repelled the heat from the bomb and dark clothes absorbed it and conducted it to the skin), the shapes of flowers they had had on their kimonos. Many, although injured themselves, supported relatives who were worse off. Almost all had their heads bowed, looked straight ahead, were silent, and showed no expression whatsoever. (Hiroshima: Important Quotes Explained | SparkNotes. n.d.)

Most characters actually demonstrate how the bomb altered and impacted their lives for decades before their passing. As the first chapter of the book demonstrates, the influence of war on civilians is an incessant and formidable fear of the ensuing attack. Because of the continuous state of vigilance for air raids, people are incapable of leading peaceful lives. The night before dropping the atomic bomb, for example, in order to save her three small children from a prospect air raid, Mrs. Nakamura is compelled to take them to an evacuation site after midnight. When the atomic bomb was dropped, family homes and work institutions were ruined. Normal civilian life is excessively impacted, and those who manage to stay alive encounter immense obstacles in their struggle for continuance. An entire city is drastically changed into accumulations of broken stones and brutally bruised and thousands of impoverished refugees:

Dr. Fujii hardly had time to think that he was dying before he realized that he was alive, squeezed tightly by two long timbers in a V across his chest, like a morsel suspended between two huge chopsticks held upright, so that he could not move, with his head miraculously above water and his torso and legs in it (Hiroshima /Fate /Chance, Shmoop, n.d).

The three novels impart wisdom and hidden messages. The wisdom behind *Gone with the Wind* is to lament the past and to set slavery and discrimination as determinants of halting peace. The American Civil War is a deep-rooted theme throughout the novel and provides a background for its events. Characters' lives are inverted by the war, which brings hardships, adversity, and loss. In addition to demise and annihilation, wars leave their victims with long-lasting physical and psychological scars, such as Gerald O'Hara. *Return to Haifa* covers numerous crucial lessons, including thorough torment stamped unforgettably on memory, exile and the yearning to go back in time and space to a former self-fancied free, the eagerness for a new future without war, and the core of individual identity. These themes are all obdurately associated with one another and are postulated within the schema of the Israel-Palestine conflict. *Return to Haifa* captures the viscera of Palestinian trauma. *Hiroshima* gives readers a credible and genuine depiction of the bomb's effects, pointing out the calamitous possibility of nuclear battle and the importance of peace. In the face of present-day challenges, the novel indirectly calls to promote diplomatic talks, demilitarization, and dispute settlement. The novel calls to epitomize the leadership characteristics that can change rigor into prospects for peace and tranquility. We can avoid vicissitude and establish a world based on peace through diplomacy.

### 3. Conclusion

Poetry, prose, and drama have all displayed portrayals of war for a long time. There is a clear reciprocity between literature and war, as revealed by the enormous body of literary works that have been inspired by major wars. In addition to being one of the most shedding- blood centuries in human history, the twentieth century was also one of the most proliferative for writers. Due to their extreme havoc, wars like World Wars I and II stirred a lot of authors to respond:

The literature of war dates from The Iliad or stories told in the epic of Gilgamesh to last year's National Book Award winner Phil Klay for his short-story collection, *Redeployment*. War- and the people and nations who wage it- have long captivated both writers and readers. Poetry and prose alike have garnered a following , along with memoir, documentary films, and now even literary blogs. (Illinois Library Association, n.d.)

The evolution of human history is synchronized with war literature. According to Woodward, " As long as there has been war, there have been writers trying to understand it" (Maja-Isabella, 2021). Military fiction has always pursued to magnetize readers by showing galvanic action and provocative stories, often getting inspiration from actual wars. But after experiencing several wars as a society, war literature's portrait of war changed; rather than enshrining soldiers' deaths, it started triggering philosophical questions about the rightfulness of brutality and uncovering the realities of facing death in battle.

This paper focuses on a few novels that fictionalize wars that occurred in the 20th century. The paper implies that fiction helps people perceive the pernicious reverberations of war. The research is being implemented using a qualitative descriptive methodology. The study covers a wide spectrum of novels, such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* (1945), and John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946). The paper aims to reveal the war's acts of savagery and issue a warning against it. The significance of the paper lies in its sharp rejection of repeating the dark chapters of history. The following topics are addressed in the paper: colonialism, suffering, and war. Many of the characters examine war from various perspectives, asserting its worthlessness, whether it could have been averted, and most importantly, whether it was imperative.

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