



NARRATOLOGY AND FORM: THE RHETORIC OF WAR IN NOVELS AND MEMOIRS

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Abstract: War literature, as it is a descendant of the epic and heroic modes of earlier literature, tries to fulfill a function of installing national love and patriotism and develop a belligerent attitude. Many genres of literature, namely chronicle, histories, philosophical treatises, military and other archival records have treated war, but it is considered only marginally literary. It is the subjective element which makes it different from other writings like histories. The writer through the literary language appeals to the imagination of the reader through identification of characters and their emotions. This paper attempts to trace out the narrative language used in war literature.

Index Terms: Poetic language, subjective element, narratives, memoirs

I. INTRODUCTION

Different Genres like epic poetry, drama and historical accounts have been inspired by war. Literary texts play an important factor among the young to create love of the military and enthusiasm to fight for their countries. In the modern world, these ideas are incorporated into the school curriculum as students read Caesar's *Gallic War*, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, Biblical view of history and other anthologies. The image of war fought heroically envisages growth in the mind of the youth which in turn brings a personal and gender identity within such groups as family and then society at large. War fiction has also made use of war as a test of sexual vigor, a situation of personal rivalries, identity crisis within national context. There was also a deglamorization of war, 'the Grande Illusion' - a profound statement against war - in Jean Renoir, a French film director's, phrase, when the U.S action war in Vietnam dragged on for many reasons like the military, political and sociological. The idea of pacifism though not intentionally or unintentionally has crept into modern war literature. Erich Maria Remarque's *In Western Nichts Neues* (1929), Emile Zola's *La De'ba'cle* (1892), Roger Martin Du Gard's *L'Ete' 1914* (1936), Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839) have tried to give a deglamorized or realistic portrayal of war and advocates pacifism. E.E Cumming's *The Enormous Room* (1922) and Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* (1929) too deal with the insanity of war.

According to Paul Ricoeur, "Poetic language also speaks of reality, but it does so at another level than does scientific language. ... poetry imitates reality only by recreating it at a mythical level of discourse. Poetic language doesn't say literally what things are, but what they are like. It is in the oblique fashion that it says what they are" (70). In the novel, loss of belief in historic purpose and the power of traditional structures to deal with reality came gradually from the 18th century to the present age. Narratives are essential to human understanding and human beings are surrounded by narratives even about our daily life. Narrative and war are joined together from the earliest sacred books and literature of Mediterranean and India which talks about arms and men and sometimes war with Gods. The modern war novels are structured in the way in epic and heroic texts were written before. The readers of war fiction include those who read out of desire to experience a vicarious experience and deal with finality. Joseph Remenyi writes, "Man is exposed in his tireless integrity and in his selfish pettiness, in his enormous unimportance and in his important self. In epics of ancient times there is, of course, less rationalization than in modern fiction or plays; but good war literature impresses upon the reader the magnificence and wastefulness of human energies. (147)

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II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both history and story are closely connected. What constitutes fiction is the manner of interpretation. History can be said to be a projection of ideology into the past and wars are extension of ideology, another means of politics. It is the novelist who succeeds to the sacred office of historians. It is through poetic language that the writer communicates the nuances of ideas and arouses meanings into the mind of the reader. War novels are based on so called plot, a story line with characters, the historical event and the subjectivity or how it shapes events or how events are experienced from the inside. As James Olney puts it, "the writers of history organize the events of which they write according to, and out of, their own private necessities and the state of their own selves" (64). War narratives usually have a basic pattern of opposition, a dualism between two forces.

In some instances, wars are seen as acts of God- which gives the fighting a divine area. This quasi-religion tone can be felt in many modern narratives relating to wars like World War I, World War II, the state of Israel, wars including Iraq and Iran, Franco-Prussian war. George Lukacs in *The Theory of Novel* (1974) has stated that novel is "the way towards a man's recognition of himself ... The novel tells the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence" (152). There can also be a fusion of the collective and individual elements of fight. As Catherine Savage Brosman notes in "Reading Behind the Lines the Interpretation of War", "The interfering functions can include subsets of opposing forces, such as rivalries among men in the same army, or between enlisted men and officers, or among large fighting groups, or political forces shaping the war; in modern literature the struggles are often psychological, and the self becomes the ultimate battleground" (82).

In some novels, the function of subject is subverted as the identity between the soldiers and the collective subject- the army or the nation - breaks down and the identification between the subject and object is incomplete or rejected. When the former ideological centers like King, faith or nation lose their force, the character of modern-day warfare reduces personal contracts between enemies, and it makes battle distant and impersonal. Many novels about World War I tend towards a state without any definite shape because modern warfare overwhelmed men's ability for moral understanding. For instance, *Under Fire* (1916) by Barbusse has lot of clusters of scenes, where setting and situation are as important as characters and whose order is also interchangeable. In Cooperman's words,

No longer one subordinate element among many contributing to a total aesthetic structure . . . , the war itself became the chief protagonist. Thus, from protagonist, the subject, object, and opponent have become identical - the war itself - whence moral confusion, illustrated by fraternization with the enemy, similarly crushed by a system of forces that dehumanize the soldier. (qtd in Brosman 85)

War narratives are mostly built on identifiable patterns like clichés, symbols, myth or historical precedents. Roland Barthes has called codes: "a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structure... reflections of that something which has always been *already* read, seen, done lived; the code is the furrow of this already" (31). War like love is one of the oldest enterprises of men. We depend on the basic images and patterns or mystify the causes and the enemy or recognize the central structure of human reality. Historic precedents like brave figures of Joan of Arc or rhetoric of chivalric image of a modern knight are a staple of young men doing military service. There is also a universal theme of initiation or "baptism by fire", a psychological growth of the principal character. It can be positive outcome or a negative of failed initiation like the death of comrades, treachery or transformation of ideals from romantic to pessimistic.

Other recurring patterns are the theme of sacrifice and the descent is seen as purgation. Some writers have also portrayed modern warfare as a sport. The ideas of fair play, combat, sportsmanship etc. are also extended to the game of life. War fiction also tends to place importance on problems of personality. It can be opposition between your comrades, enemies or oneself. There is a 'loss of self' in modern war novels when the character is not able to justify by his war experience alluding to general values or a collective ideology. Fiction is always recounted backward when life is lived forwards as Jean-Paul Sartre had pointed out in *Neusea* (1938).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

. In lieu of the thought that language was an arbitrary system of sounds with the signifiers and signified, brought about a re-thinking on the power of language in war fiction. In modern war novel or history, the linear order is disrupted. The self is shown as fleeting, precarious, vacant or contradictory. There is temporal time and space which corresponds to the psychological level not the physical level. Brosman in "Reading Behind the Lines the Interpretation of War explains, "The rationality of time and space gives way to an irrational psychological time and space, consisting in overlays of moments, places, and scenes that undercut the fixed identity of each, and conveyed by very flexible tense use, the dominant use of the present participle without a finite verb, and unmarked scene and date switching" (94). Modern war narratives play against the notion of rational and linguistic foundation and language can have enormous political effect. It is a modernist paradox that we are trying to communicate the uncommunicable, try to destroy some of its art's assumption through fiction. So, literature as deconstruction, the undoing of usual norms and representation of men and action in a novel way can be seen in war novels too. Through linguistic freedom and deconstruction, war novel still tries to show the struggle of will against fatalism of outcome.

There has been a spike in the popularity of memoirs in the mid-1990s. Robert Atwan states that two engaging questions are asked about memoirs, "the degree of an author's truthfulness and the extent of his or her self-absorption, a complaint normally referred to pejoratively as narcissism... The more we know about memory—from psychological, philosophical, and scientific perspectives—the better we can understand the complex art of memoir" (3-4). Childhood memories which are fragmentary and inexplicable may be different from the actual incident to recollected incident and the whole incident appear as a reenactment. It took so many decades to shatter the romantic image of war created by the conspiracy of princes, priests and poets to seduce people into a war and heroism. It was by the latter half of the twentieth century that the true aspect of war started to emerge. Maybe by 1916, there was a change in the nature of war and writers like Wilfred Owen and Erich Maria Remarque gave a new form to the soldiers which treated them as victims. Though the Renaissance Age writers do not glorify war like previous age writers, they too did not show much interest in the horrors and tension that fell on the warriors. The wars fought in Middle Ages and Renaissance had all the horror factors like misuse, hunger, extreme weather conditions, continuous lighting without break, atrocities committed in war towards the civilians, the captive enemy soldiers and brutalities committed by their superiors.

The civilians and the soldiers who had been brought up in the right mental and cultural trends were able to produce the real face of wars in their military memoirs. It is not only apocalyptic wars like two World Wars that are discussed in this light in the military memoirs, but also the smaller wars like Six-Day War 1967 and Falklands War 1982 are also discussed in the same vein. The soldiers entered the war with a different set of ideals and cultural baggage than the previous age soldiers. The idea that it was an honour to fight and win and perform, regardless of any other values soon lost ground for twentieth-century soldiers. Modern Age memoirists gave importance to the development of inner self rather than pride and honor. The soldiers who narrated their life in the memoir have managed to escape a complete breakdown and it is a type of catharsis they had undergone while writing. So according to Yuval Noah Harari in the military memoirs one can find “the changing expectations of people in general and soldiers in particular from life” (70). In twentieth century war memoirs, mostly the soldiers have become disillusioned with war, and they are portrayed as victims rather than heroes. Paul Fussell’s remark that “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected” (7) is applicable in today’s scenario. Tobey C Herzog claims that the main topic of modern-day war memoirs are “[t]he tension between the soldier’s romantic expectations of war and the harsh realities of the battlefield” (13) and the soldiers’ loss at their youthful naivete as they acquire a battlefield education” (33).

In the twentieth century, we have many writers who were war veterans and war veterans who later became writers, who had borne the true facts about war in their writings. There is a mountain of literary works including memoirs, war poems, war fiction and war paintings and war films. Jean Norton Cru had given a true analysis of war as “War is the never-ending monotony of pure misery, broken by intense and bitter dramas” (19). Catherine Savage Brosman in “The Functions of War Literature” states:

What distinguishes literary expressions of war from these, at least in the modern period, is first of all the emphasis upon the experimental dimension. Fiction, drama, and poetry concerning war tend toward recording not simply the causes and conduct conflict or individual battles but the manner in which they are lived, felt, used, and transformed by participants. The subjective element is what readers seek in works in the imaginative mode, as opposed to histories, they bring a type of satisfaction different from that of simply knowing the facts and carry a mark of authenticity and truth that, paradoxically, more objective histories rarely attain. (86-87)

The plot in fiction, even if it is a loose plot, through the interpretation and shaping of the material, creates a fictional reality that sanctions the experience. Along with the aesthetic function of war literature, psychological, moral and social functions are all also important.

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