

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Trauma of the Vietnam War: A Discursive Analysis of *The Things They Carried* and Myers' *Walking Point*

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This thesis titled **Trauma of the Vietnam War: A Discursive Analysis of *The Things They Carried* and Myers' *Walking Point*** submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Lila Dhar Mahat, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This thesis examines two works – Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* and Thomas Myers’ *Walking Point* -- to explore reality of the Vietnam War. The researcher attempts to present both of these narratives as the best example of literary representation of the trauma of violence of the Vietnam War. O’Brien problematizes the trauma of the violence through retelling the stories of the war and Myers attempts to deconstruct the myth of cultural history of the Vietnam War. Their major intention is to avoid the misreading, misunderstandings and misremembering of the Vietnam War. These narratives not only represent the fact but also construct a meaning about the violence of the Vietnam War. O’Brien’s focusing on the aesthetic of trauma and morality, captures the specificity of the violence of war. Its narrativization brings to the fore the human dimension. The authenticity and validity of the war, which find no room in the official documents and recorded history, is captured in these narratives. The usual absence not only finds sufficient space in the texts of O’Brien and Myers but also the narrativization of the trauma of war is aesthetically of a superior order.

Chapter One

Introduction: Literature of Violence, Trauma and the Vietnam War

This dissertation looks at the representation of trauma in *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien and *Walking Point* by Thomas Myers. It examines the aesthetics of the narrativization of trauma in these two texts. So the dissertation first of all attempts an overview of trauma theory from the perspective of its applicability to the two texts about the Vietnam War. Trauma as a cultural theory forces us to re-think our historical knowledge and experience and raises questions about the literary representation of trauma of violence. The current valorization of trauma theory not only explores the political, cultural and historical contours of the trauma but also links itself to the issue of class, subaltern, violence and victimhood. The changing nature of traumatic experience has increased the interest in witnessing, memory and narrative testimony that determine a new direction to the aesthetics of trauma. The aesthetics of trauma encourage a spotlight on the human dimension while capturing the specificity of violence in a way that does not incite reprisal but dramatizes the sense of victimhood.

Amitav Ghosh, in "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi", bears witness to the violence of 1984 in India; he tries to theorize the violence of Hindus against Sikhs in a way that crystallizes into the aesthetic of trauma of violence. In recounting the events, he focuses on the need for acting out the trauma of violence:

And until now I have never really written about what I saw in November of 1984. I am not alone; several other who took part in that march went on publish books, yet nobody, so far as I know, has ever written about it except in passing. ... It is when we think of the world aesthetic of indifference might bring into being that we recognize the urgency of remembering the stories we have not written. (60- 62)

Ghosh focuses on the urgency of remembering or retelling the story as the therapeutic need to bring about normalcy between the Hindus Sikhs through an acknowledgement of the traumatic event.

The acknowledgement of trauma of literary representations is important for him. He believes that a writer should not join crowds “before I could set down a word, I had to solve dilemma between being a writer and a citizen. As a writer, I had only one obvious subject: the Violence” (61). He, as a writer does not attempt to elide and accommodate the trauma of violence of Hindus against Sikhs. He is cognizant of the fact that the guiding principle for a writer of violence should not be the accommodation of trauma “but the affirmation of humanity” (61). He believes that a writer of violence must “find a form -- or style or violence or a plot -- that could accommodate both violence and the civilized willed response to it” (62). Ghosh clearly calls for a humanistic rather than a political response to a traumatic event.

Writers of violence and trauma should avoid the ethical notion of representation; instead they should focus on morality because “morality encompasses all humanity, it is long on geography and short on memory. Ethics is typically short on geography and long on memory” (Margalit 8). It remains confined within the narrow groove of the community interests. Ethics does not encourage a wider human dimension. In this respect Saadat Hasan Manto is an exception; he captures the specificity of partition violence from the perspective of morality -- a viewpoint which helps him interrogate the existing state-centered national histories. Beerendra Pandey commends Manto’s aesthetic of trauma in these words:

Manto, as a moral witness, experiences the trauma inflicted on the victims of the partition violence and transmits it through the use of metairony in

order to shock his readers into a responsive awareness so that an actual moral community that arises through vicarious retraumatization demonstrates cathartic empathy with the victims -- an identification which morally guards them against perpetrating a horrendous act parallel to the ghastly 1947. Manto underscores the moral need to use the violent past as a warning to others about future survival. (131)

Manto's aesthetic of trauma, as Pandey sees it, relies on a moral rather than an ethical worldview. The problem with the ethical representation is that it gets configured after the notions of community and nationhood. A moral representation, on the other hand, does not side with any thick relations such as family, community and nation.

The literary work of trauma should not represent the identity politics. Identity politics creates a cultural boundary that encourages geographical boundaries which eventually results in violence. Some dominant theorists as Alexander and Eyerman veer around cultural trauma or collective memory which overwhelmingly focuses on the identity of certain groups. The identity politics and ethical notion of trauma representation does not condemn violence and cannot create sympathy for victims. A writer of trauma should establish a sense of the condemnation of war and violence in the mind of readers. This will be possible only when a writer takes the moral line on the basis of universal human values rather than depending on ethical notions. In this connection, Domink LaCapara's view about the literary representation of traumatic experience of violence comes to our mind. His work is geared towards overcoming binaries between absence/loss and victims/aggressor that "extends identity formation and underscores the "middle voice" (Barenscoff 478). The middle voice helps avoid a fetishistic narrative which lends clearly political edge to the rendition of trauma. A writer who is able to

follow the notion of the aesthetic of trauma like those of Saadat Hasan Manto and Amitav Ghosh can represent the specificity of the traumatic violence by focusing on the human dimension that is inflected with morality at the same time.

This thesis examines two works – Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* and Thomas Myers’ *Walking Point* -- and it finds both books in the line with the aesthetic of trauma, but it suggests that the former excels the latter. Though the second book – *Walking Point* – is also a commendable delineation of trauma of Vietnam War, it crosses over into the discourse of cultural trauma at places. However, launching a full-fledged exploration into the language of trauma and the trauma of Vietnam veterans in these narratives, it is important to track the theory of trauma in terms of memory politics associated with it.

Memory is an act of imagination, a creative and constructive process that is continually shaped and reshaped – a process through which the past is brought into present. Julia Bleakney says that “all conscious experience requires memory” (19). The experience of trauma is central to the memory formation: “trauma is at the hidden core of all memory” (Huyssen 8). Trauma theorists argue that trauma is an overwhelming experience that produces such responses as denial, repression, repetition or dislocation. Meike Bal, in *Acts of Memory*, clearly argues that “trauma is private and memory is culturally produced, the expression traumatic memory is an oxymoron” (viii).

Trauma and memory are not the same but nor are they opposites; they function mutually. An individual might experience one or more traumas through his life and each trauma will be shaped by memories:

... a survivor might suppress a trauma only to have it surface through association with an unrelated memory initially formed around the same

time as traumatic experience. Thus, difficult memories may include traces of trauma just as traumatic elisions will disrupt memories. A more productive reading of the relationship between trauma and memory, then, does not see trauma as the core of all memory, trauma and memory in opposition or trauma as memory's failure but appreciated how their relationship, like the relationship between vernacular and official memory is symbiotic. (Bleakney 25)

All memory is socially and culturally produced, so the memory shaped by Vietnam veterans might not be very different from the memory of US government. Individual voices of veteran are constructed in the political space and cultural memory that is shaped by the on-going dialogue between individual, culture and history. In other words, the meaning comes through the symbiotic relationship between memory, trauma and history of Vietnam War.

In the book *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit talks about the concept of memory. He begins with a question: "Is there an ethics of memory?" (6), and concludes that the "ethics of memory is the ethics of collective memory" (48). He argues that human beings have an ethical obligation to remember the past events. He explores the way we rely on memory to give meaning and substance to the thick and thin ethical relationship. Thick relation is associated with family, friends and community but thin relation with total strangers and people with whom we have nothing in common except common humanity. Margalit further states that ethics guides our thick relation whereas morality guides our thin relations. He says that ethics tells how we should regulate our thick relation, and morality tells us how we should regulate our thin relation:

The primary concern of both ethics and morality is with certain aspect of human relation. Morality is greatly concerned, for example, with respect and humiliation; these are attitudes that manifest themselves among those who have thin relation. Ethics, on the other hand, is greatly concerned with loyalty and betrayal, manifested among those who have thick relation. (Margalit 8)

According to him, as it encompasses all humanity, morality is long on geography and short on memory whereas ethics is typically short on geography and long on memory. Vietnam Veterans write in an attempt to revisit Vietnam for re-correcting the misunderstanding, misreading and misreporting of Vietnam War through the line of morality rather than the line of ethics.

In this research the researcher will examine how the Vietnam War is remembered by American veterans. It was declared that the United States won the war in Vietnam but in reality the declaration is ironic. Bleakney argues that it has lots of misunderstanding, misreporting and misremembering of Vietnam War. Misinformation and misreporting have constructed popular myths and official history for the appropriation of violence. The U.S. governments' exaggeration and Vietnams' erasure reminds us of the fact that of Vietnam War is more complex. Many popular writings and scholars have constructed an accurate history of the war. The great danger of the linear history of war lies in misunderstanding, misreporting and misremembering. Vietnam War writers like O'Brien, Myers, Herr, Kovic and Balaban constantly search for the fact in order to record and teach about the legacies of war history. Why and how the war was misreported, misunderstood and misremembered is the major concern of this research work in reference to the two narratives -- *The Things* and *Walking Point*.

The narrative of Vietnam does not only represent the fact but also constructs a meaning in the society. In this sense, the history of the war is not past but “the war is continually reconstructed and reimagined in the present” (Bleakney 3). Various groups and persons narrate different stories of the war for their own purpose but only a few of them tell the story of the war for the humanity and the representation of violence. Many veterans believe that no metanarrative of the war exists. This refusal of a metanarrative has become, in fact, a new master narrative of the war which gives the official view of the war. As a counter to it, many veterans have produced the meaning of the war by rejecting its larger political or historical truth. To understand the fact of the Vietnam War, it’s significant to study the new meaning of the war through the focus on the impact of the violence on the soldiers and the victims.

Cultural memory of the Vietnam War has become more individualized, privatized, commodified and materialized since the end of the war in 1975. Cultural memory has shaped a social understanding of the war which is more than the published history and may be authentic representation of the war “because memories shape ways of knowing the war” (Bleakney 3). The veterans’ memorializing practices attempt to make sense of the war by negotiating the connections between individual and cultural memory and between memory and history through the process of remembering and forgetting. The nature of memory of U.S. Veterans is very different from the official version:

Since the 1980s, the war has been imagined around two cultural themes: one of “nostalgia, healing, and forgiveness.” As Marita Sturken points out; the other around the war as a noble cause and its veterans as heroes. During the war, the most prominent veterans were those who spoke out

against the war as they challenged official narratives about the United States purpose in Vietnam. (qtd. in Belakney 4)

The nature of the memory of the veterans changes in the post-war period from national to individual, from the center to the margin and from the smoothness of the linear history to labyrinth of cultural history. The veteran's attitude toward the representation of the war experience verges on the authentic. For understanding the authenticity of the war, it's beneficial to map a development of the war memorials.

National Mall started in 1982 with the National Vietnam Veteran memorials from where U.S. veterans attempt to search authentic responses about Vietnam War but they were not satisfied. Then, they were inspired to reflect on their Vietnam memories which gave an alternative version which is personal and true to the experience. So memoirs create an opportunity to memorialize the war in sustained and personal ways. Returning to Vietnam is the final and most important step to recover from their traumas of the war. So the practice of memorializing moves from Washington to Vietnam. Bleakney observes that "all veteran's practices -- the making of alternative memorial most obvious but even the creation of museum or memoirs and the return to Vietnam created dialogue with the wall that shapes new ways of memorializing is the central to the process of healing, of confronting difficult past experiences" (8). Veterans' memory and memoir produce different forms of narratives of the war. They produce these narratives by negotiating a path through the memorials, museum, memoirs and a returning trip to Vietnam. By constructing alternative to the wall, veterans embrace the master narrative of patriotism that circulates at the National Mall and yet they counter it.

Revisiting can be physical or psychological, literal or symbolic, real or imagined that constructs knowledge, idea and memories of the war. Revisiting illustrates how

knowledge of war is produced through individual, cultural, institutional memory and memoir. Bleakney argues that “memories are actively and collectively constructed in the present through communication and interaction with others. Personal memories are made meaningful through acts of memorizing and, at the same time, memorizing shapes individual and cultural memory” (9). When veterans visit the wall they bring memories shaped during and after the war that helps to construct new memories.

Theorists of cultural memory must account for the forms of memorializing that have become increasingly private and individual through material artifacts such as photographs, book or online memorial / websites. But how writers construct meaning in their discourse of war is an important issue for the researcher. One approach focuses more on the meaning in the text and images, another framework places spotlight on the issues of power and regimes of truth. So, the way constructing meaning in the narrative is the central importance.

It is not the goal of this thesis to find out truth in Veterans’ narratives of the war; instead it describes how narratives are produced through various sites of memories. For the memory of Vietnam War it might be possible to select many memorial, museums and memories but the general pattern of memorializing of American veteran of the Vietnam War is more effective for the representation of violence of war because they create different memories of the war than the United States. The meaning of the war emerges from the way an American Vietnam war veteran’s memory attempts to reimagine the war as worthy or unworthy cause. Military and political discourses erase details of war in order to craft a more homogeneous and patriotic narrative of it. So, Marita Sturken argues that “memories are not recollected they are reenacted” (132). The act of revisiting is

pastiche of memory that focuses how earlier memories are distorted to mimic the experience of trauma erased for certain political purpose.

The discourse of Vietnam War between official and vernacular cultures is not necessarily equal because the meaning of an event is continually shaped and reshaped according to contemporary attitudes and ideologies. Thus, the specific complexities of their war experiences and the divisiveness of the war demand that veterans must participate in the on-going negotiations for the meaning and significance of the war and the representations of it. Vietnam veterans who faced many symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder found great difficulty adjusting to home life because many civilians did not perceive the Vietnam War as noble cause. Vietnam veterans remember the war in a cultural milieu in which information about the war is available in representational form. But many specific details of the war have been forgotten, erased and revised in the representation as well as in individual and institutional memories of the war. Those veterans struggle between remembering and forgetting that blurs the boundaries between their own memories and the various representation and narratives of the war. This struggle has psychological as well as social and historical implication that “individual veterans need to forget while both individually and collectively they feel the pressure to remember” (Herman 1). As individuals, they may be overwhelmed with traumatic effect that makes them involuntarily recall and repress the memory of painful events. Community veterans are concerned with their experiences that they will be forgotten by themselves, their fellow veterans and the post- war generation. Others completely may imagine war from different perspective.

Veterans in their various memory practices may reject official forms of history and produce another narrative that may be more specific and experiential. They try to

establish coherence in the narrative but at the same time they represent the incoherent aspect of war by which they try to make us understand how history can be based on subjective memory and individual experience:

...how experience is privileged, for many veterans personal experience becomes the unquestionable perceived truth, the evidence that is used to justify the validity of their subjective memory –narratives about war. It is difficult for someone who did not serve in Vietnam to question a Veteran’s claim to authenticity... but as observers of the war’s memory practice, we must try and understand how knowledge shaped through experience and pervasive discourse. (Bleakney 25)

The authentic or final truth of war is not possible because the history of war depends on the subjective memory of individuals. Veterans do not literally visit the past nor do they visit for the re-creation of past; rather they visit a site which existed in the past but it requires reinterpretation from the lens of the contemporary society.

The study of Vietnam veterans’ memory has become more important due to the event of 9/11 and the response to it. Vietnam Veterans attempt to show that the memory is not static; it is being; it is constantly imagined and reimagined in the present. The practice of memory is not limited to Vietnam veterans’ memory; it changes as per the changes in social attitudes and ideologies. The forms of memory practice are increasingly heterogeneous. Every individual feels greater pressure to record, preserve and collect because memory practices are simultaneously “more global and more local” (Bleakney 30). The National Vietnam veterans’ memorials are exemplary of the changes in memory practices occurring in the contemporary society. Its construction is described as the most significant turning point in American memorizing of the 20th/21st century. Sturken argues

the Vietnam veteran memorial has become “a cultural icon in the process of heading, of confronting difficult past experiences and it has played a significant role in the rehistoricization of Vietnam war” (45).

Within the context of the increasing globalization, materialization and commodification of memory has become increasingly individualized. Commodification occurs both in the production and distribution of filmic and literary representation of the war as well in particular practices of prisoner of war or missing in action. Moreover, significant sites of memory of the Vietnam War are the key paradigm of post modern memory. The recent practice of memorizing has become increasingly entangled not only with history but also with commodification, individualism and patriotism:

While it may be difficult to directly link the loss of the Vietnam War to the current wave of Vietnam patriotism, certainly the current zeal an opportunity to reimagine the Vietnam War through a patriotic lens that downplays oppositional perspective in order to present the war as noble cause worthy of unquestioningly patriotic commemoration. (Bleakney 35)

Actually Vietnam veterans are not worried about the loss and patriotism of a nation but the commodification of memory inspire reimagining Vietnam War through patriotic lens that downplays oppositional perspective.

The veterans’ personal narratives reveal and change the national perception of the traumatic experience of war and the post- war traumatic experience. The veterans’ wounded body attests to war experiences and speaks out against the war. Those veterans challenge the dominant myths about the war manifesting in the practice of memory in their works, and they use metaphor to present their traumatic experiences. Metaphors become important tool for individual recovery, for the communication of memory and

experience in ways that potentially build truthful cultural memory of the war. Bleakney argues that “metaphors and memories both work through a process of association; metaphors help survivors communicate and experience and images” (42).

The critique of war is sustained while the war experience might be romanticized in some cases in the development of veterans’ memories. To present war as danger or adventure is only a traditional conception of war that does not reduce trauma of veterans. The important issue is how individual veterans and institution interact to produce new meaning and memories of the war through aesthetics point of view. In public resources, elements of war are erased for political purpose or to rewrite the war as a noble cause or to present veteran as a victim. Memories erase details of the war that highlight a key difference between memory and other forms of memorializing. In memories, the erasure of specific details of the war may be explained by the aesthetic experience of trauma. A memoir deliberately leaves out or alters elements of story in order to mimic the effect of trauma. Vietnam War writers not only perform trauma in their works but also present themselves as survivors of trauma.

Veterans’ search for a perceived authentic memorializing brings them back to Vietnam. This returning is the final and most important step toward recovery from the traumas of the war. Unlike other forms of memorializing, the narrative of war entails individual remembering and cultural reimagining. When veterans return to the Vietnam War in their narratives, they encounter many physical, social and political changes that challenge their perception and memories of the war. The literary writing of Tim O’Brien, Thomas Myers, William Broyles, and W.D. Erhart have come up with such narrative which show little inflection with American political agendas but an overtone of universal humanity.

This chapter has focused on the theoretical concept of the aesthetics of trauma and memory in relation to the Vietnam War. The second chapter will concentrate on the general understanding of the two authors under consideration and their artistic craftsmanship in the narrativization of the trauma of the Vietnam War. The third chapter will analyze the narratives --*The Things They Carried* and *Walking Point* -- in the light of the above theoretical modality. O'Brien romanticizes the trauma of violence through retelling the story but Myers deconstructs the myth of cultural history of war. The last chapter concludes that the traditional literary and historical writing of trauma, actually, is not able to represent the specificity of violence of Vietnam War. It also will be discussed how these two trauma writers open a new discourse about the trauma of the Vietnam War. More or less both of these writers are succeed to represent the cultural trauma and sense of violence that helps to establish reconciliation between Vietnam victimhood and Americans.

Chapter Two

Narrativization and Aesthetics of Trauma

Tim O'Brien was born at the beginning of the post-World War II in the USA. His childhood was much like that of his characters marked by an all American kindness. During the course of his college career, O'Brien comes to oppose the war not as a radical activist but as a campaign supporter. But he was drafted for military service in 1968, two weeks after completing his undergraduate degree at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. At that time, the war in Vietnam had reached its bloodiest points in terms of American casualties. The time of his birth and early adulthood is an era of prosperity and conformity in American history. It is the period when the Americans conformed to the dictates of the establishment, particularly with regard to the communists. But again returning from his service in 1970, he did graduate in government and political science at

Harvard University. Before involving in fictional writing he used to work for “The Washington Post” and various newspapers.

O’Brien is not simply a Vietnam Veteran but also a well-known and admired novelist of the war. He remembers how his comrades were killed on the same ground during his year in the war that he reflects in his narratives. In other words, his narratives present him as a traumatized survivor of the war. The writer himself is the victim of Vietnam trauma. O’Brien is presenting himself a deeply troubled figure who had suffered for more than two decades from the bad dreams that he had been reawakened to the point of self- destruction by the return to Vietnam. His reawakening and revisiting terrible memories of battlefield displays the trauma combat, the death of former comrades, homicidal fear, destruction of their village, small brutalities and larger atrocities presented by American soldiers. He, as a Vietnam writer, takes experiences of deadly combat and its attendant fear, guilt, sense of helplessness as the source of writing but he does not elide or overwhelm the trauma of war.

O’Brien not as soldier but as a writer passed his nights pouring out the anxiety and grief of victims of war. His early works signals the reflection of self reference and through interior probing of character that become the hallmark of his style. His first published work was memoir and account of year as a grunt in Vietnam, *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box me up and Ship me Home* (1973). He also published his autobiographical account with debut novel entitled *Northern Light* (1975) which posits two brothers against one another’ as foils – one brother went to Vietnam and the other did not. His next novel departs from the more traditional form. *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and *Nuclear Age* (1985) are O’Brien’s other novels that present server paranoia over the possibility of nuclear war. In the novel he demonstrates his depth in creating a comic look

at serious subject, the real fear and threat of the bond. *In the Lake of the Wood* (1994) has concerned with guilt, complicity, culpability and moral courage. *Tom Cat in Love* is a comic novel about a sexiest, politically uncorrected hero, one that readers love to hate. O'Brien's narrative *The Things They Carried* is not certainly a therapy in the normal sense because the community to whom he reveals himself is a dispersed audience of reader. Nor does his memoir or personal testimony simply recall events that occurred in the past in a particular place. His fictional world is generated by the trauma of Vietnam violence which he presents in an artistic manner. He intensifies the American as a psychic reality within his memory and imagination.

O'Brien's narratives both represent and have been generated by Vietnam trauma. But he does not simply reproduce or recollect his own experiences, the trauma rather becomes a resource for further writing that both replaces and elaborates with imaginative refabrication. "O'Brien uses Vietnam itself as resource to refigure trauma as a domestic and private wounding that leaves the war behind" (Heberle 23). He recollects horrible battlefield events from different sources as the deaths and brutalities of his comrades, the suffering of the Vietnamese, the personal guilt and sense of dislocation. His personal crisis reinvokes the larger national trauma, since 'My lai' has become a metonym for all that was shameful and criminal in America's Vietnam intervention.

Tim O'Brien became America's most celebrated Vietnam novelist. His resistance to being labelled and even canonized so has become stronger with time even as *The Things They Carried* has enabled that reputation. He uses Vietnam as a synecdoche for U. S. war in Vietnam and its effects on the Americans. He uses it metaphorically as psychic condition characterized by the traumatized condition derived from his own experiences that are variously rewritten in his work extending beyond the war to include its political,

historical and cultural ramifications for the nation and all of its citizens. Vietnam is not only a war or a book but also an arena of psychic wounding and its post traumatic aftermath --“we have been all there”. According to O’Brien Vietnam is figure for something else that he associates with traumatic experience, and his writing is a fictional representation of such experiences and often mimics its symptoms. His concern with the issue of courage in his earlier works reflect the tradition of male violence in warfare but also he moves beyond it by considering the unhealed psychic wounds that we come to associate with traumatization in the 20th century that are not limited to conventional warfare.

Vietnam is being used as a synecdoche, a signifier for one of the most significant public policy catastrophes in American history but also extending beyond the war to include its political, historical and cultural ramifications for the nation and its entire citizen. In this context Herr says:

you could not use standard methods to date the doom, might as well say that Vietnam was where the trail of tears was headed all along, the turn round point where it would touch and come back to form containing perimeter; might just as well lay it on the protagonist who found the New England woods too raw and empty for their peace and filled them up with their own imported devils. (qtd. in Heberle xiv)

Defining it as cultural and historical tragedy, the American will always have been to recognize the Vietnam fiasco as a national tragedy. O’Brien’s narrative is a more conscious- shaping product as if Vietnam were an inspiration that threatened the author with suffocation. His narratives as psychosomatic recovery of earlier experience of the location “Vietnam” within his own memory and imagination give a posttraumatic release

to the victims of the Vietnam War. His works make site of the traumatization that variously links him to the war, and he has parceled Vietnam out over seven books. Any American book about the war can satisfactorily represent Vietnam has been rightly questioned by recent cultural and literary critics and His narratives also foreground the linear war history and the violence of victimhood.

Thomas Myers, another leading American writer on Vietnam War, deconstructs the traditional notion of narrativization and literary writing. He argues that history is socially constructed and “myth making within legitimized seats of political power within American society” (7). Popular culture, campaign speech, press conference, television and political platform are powerful political tools. American myth may subvert, edit, rewrite, or cosmetically treat to make it not only acceptable but also usable as a creative narrative for future foreign policy and future history to the Vietnam War:

Popular culture and official history share two vital aspects: the tendency to ignore the deeper, disquieting elements within the mythic history they write; and the likelihood of finding an enthusiastic mass audience for the finished texts. Vietnam was a political torch passed through several administrations from trauma to Nixon, but the Reagan administration has written a history of the war as potent as any penned while Americans still fought and died in the jungle, a history that invents a past as it suggests future. (7)

Vietnam turns out to be an essential metaphor for inescapability in life. Vietnam is regarded as an essential metaphor that provides a way for discovering history of the Vietnam War. In Thomas Myers’ work Vietnam is a figure for something else whereas O’Brien associates it with traumatic experiences. Myers says “geographical battlefield

have become symbolic memorial” (6). The battle for public memory has little to do with the faithful recording of objective realities.

However, the threat of violence, for O’Brien, is not just a psychic phenomenon but also a reality of American political, social and cultural phenomenon. His life and his work have moved beyond the war in Vietnam. Heberle comments: “whatever write personally serving in a war or not, have gone through the threat of war, the threat of annihilation, the threat of human violence which is around us” (xix). The trauma generates an awareness of human mortality, which may be exacerbated by such threats as well as the actual experience of rape, child abuse, natural or manmade catastrophe. Therefore, O’Brien’s narratives are among the richest and most complex expressions of the tenuousness of human identity and integrity.

Trauma is also an ethical crisis, an agonizing power decision in O’Brien’s narratives. He fears dying and killing in what he regards as an immoral war, which is the most pervasive and recurrent source of his trauma. In fact as his life and his works have moved beyond the war in Vietnam; traumatic conditions have become more widespread and explicit. Warfare is not just physically and psychologically traumatizing but morally devastating for combatants – a fact which is at the heart of O’Brien’s trauma writing. Although the war and its ramifications may be the effective cause of his writing, they constitute only part of what we can now identify as a traumatic triad. Although both of them has scrupulously avoided over political engagement, their traumatic fiction serves as both figures and as symptoms of public as well as psychic breakdown. As Farrel asserts in his analysis of fearless, Peter Weir’s airplane disaster of 1993: “Trauma expose not only the ultimate nothingness of the self, but also the sickening falseness of the social world” (qtd. in Heberle ix). O’Brien’s great Vietnam War narrative *The Things They*

Carried include overwhelming psychic burden. His fictional narratives are organized as retrospective meditations or reflections by deeply traumatized figures trying to revisit the resources of their breakdowns so that they can recover themselves. His narratives of trauma function as a therapy for their subjects and provide some redemption for what has been suffered. In short, they replicate trauma therapy which relies on an attempt to communicate to others an unspeakable wounding so that the post traumatic survivor's life can be repaired and resumed. Recovery is realized as psychological catharsis for the protagonist, but as the closure of a fiction for the trauma artist.

The posttraumatic slippage between authentic self and fiction is at the heart of Tim O'Brien's life as writer. The border between these two faculties is strikingly connected. O'Brien believes that narration saves lives, constructs identity and refabricates the trauma of victimhood. This experience has been described in *The Things They Carried*. In the end of the narrative it seems to be an autobiographical confession "one story I've never told before. Not anyone, Not my parents, not my brother or sisters, not even to my wife" (141). He narrates the unspoken and unwritten fact of the Vietnam War. The boundaries between personal traumatization and retrospective narrative, authorial and fictional identity, actual experience and literal figuration are dissolved reflecting an enigmatic remark by O'Brien, "I am not even sure that my own life happen anymore" (qtd. in Heberle, xxiii).

O'Brien's narratives are the representations of aesthetic of trauma of violence even though the Vietnam is a deliberate fiction in O'Brien, one artist's imagination, re-creation of reality that always remains 'other' and escapes final realization. His works do not even attempt the arrogant and impossible task of presenting the final truth about the war of Vietnam. The United States misread Vietnam with devastating consequences for

the people of both nations. *Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried* are the records of such misreading. The double trauma of victimizing and victimization of both the Americans and the Vietnamese is turned into something terribly beautiful. Magic, mystery, ghosts and incense, whispers in the dark, strange tongues and strange smells, uncertainties never articulated in war stories. They did not know good from evil. The fictional redemption of trauma of Vietnam including such deadly ignorance has presented in his narratives. Vietnam has metamorphosed into an imaginative site in O'Brien. His narratives do not present Vietnam War as a terrible adventure. He just retells the story of war to revisit the past.

Like O'Brien, Myers also has tension about the literary representation of violence and reinterpretation of the recorded history of Vietnam War. Traditional novels/narratives create a boundary between historical and imaginative writing that could not represent the essence of violence according to him. In his narrative, Myers develops a concept of metahistory where is the reciprocal relation between history and imaginative creation. In other words, historical interpretation and aesthetic creation have reciprocal bound. Talking about the relation between history and aesthetic creation Myers remarks in *The Walking Point*:

No, the difficulty is that history is interior, no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely the point where experience is significantly emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historic inquiry. (9)

An account of O'Brien's return to Vietnam in February 1994 depicts a fabricating trauma in Vietnam. His return to Vietnam is a deeply unsettling reawakening of terrible memory as he revisits former battlefield in Quang Ngai province, where he visualizes the terror of combat, the deaths of former comrades, homicidal fear and dread directed at the Vietnamese, the destruction of their villages, small brutalities and large atrocities perpetrated by American soldiers. He writes in an attempt to unburden himself of the trauma:

But here O'Brien was presenting himself as a deeply troubled figure who had suffered for more than two decades from the bad dream that had been reawakened to the point of self-destruction by the return to Vietnam, nor is the near – breakdown simple a result of the war. The loss of the woman he loves also seems to be a self-threatening experience: It is unclear whether he is tempted to kill himself because he can't have Vietnam behind or because the woman he loves has left him. And O'Brien's double trauma is darkened further by guilt; I have done bad things for love, bad things to stay loved. Kate is one case; Vietnam is another.

(Heberle 3)

O'Brien is more interested in seeing the place of his memories than the contemporary realities of Vietnam. He agrees that contemporary Vietnam influences how he remembers the war. His revisit of Vietnam changes his perception of the war.

In O'Brien's work we may observe how memories of war are continually renewed and reshaped as veterans move towards some semblance of reconciliation with their trauma. The veterans' memoirs are the personal and public sites of memory. Although the memory of the war is not available to him through the Vietnamese landscape, the land

still bears the many scars and traces of the American involvement. The veteran soldier-writer realizes that viewing the sites of war is less important than remembering them. He not only witnesses the death of soldiers but he also explores the trauma of them and addresses his own guilt about participating in the war. He also confronts the anxiety about getting the story right.

O'Brien's self-revelation is a form of confession that functions as personal therapy. To facilitate recovery, trauma survivors are normally encouraged to tell their story to fellow survivors, therapists, or other sympathetic audiences. His narratives have a goal of cathartic re-creation of the original scene or scene of horror. This narrative is certainly not therapy in the normal sense because the community to whom he reveals himself is a dispersed audience of readers. Nor does his memoir or personal testimony simply recall events that occur in the past in a particular place. He talks about two different locations and times that links past and present; Vietnam and America; the writer as victimizer and the writers as victim; trauma of war and trauma of love, and American and Vietnamese casualties, etc. So, he centers on the revelation of double trauma that creates a massive identity crisis. Heberle remarks in this regard: "The alternation of the two interwoven chronologies of Vietnam and Cambridge is itself carefully fabricated to reflect traumatization" (4). Despite his personal details, *The Things They Carried* is a self-conscious fabrication of traumatic phenomena. The progressively greater emphasis on traumatic experiences in his works suggests an attempt to work through the trauma through imaginative fabrication. Each of his narratives has its own form and purpose, and the author's revision of himself in his protagonist. In a sense, his most important source is his own writing which has created a fictional world of compelling integrity that reflects the self-absorbed anxiety of the generation passed through Vietnam.

Both of O'Brien and Myers' fictional world is generated by Vietnam War that functions as psychological ailment itself. Their narratives receive the much-needed ballast from the traumatic experience. In a sense, it is their personal recovery from their own traumatization. Their narration may be compensation or therapy for unresolved guilt, fear, anger and shame. They raise some important issues in the novel as female hysteria, domestic (violence) abuse which has link with political movement. But today posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is recognized as a disorder not limited to those who have survived combat only to the psychologically harmed by it. It also includes victim of industrial accidents, natural and manmade disaster of rape, incest and spousal abuse and of violent crime; survivors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Holocaust, former political prisoners and victims of torture. Heberle claims:

PTSD seems as a characteristic product of life in the century was diagnosed with great war and continued with concentration camps, gulags, and nuclear terror and has ended with genocide in East Africa, ethnic cleaning in central Europe and the bombing of Siberia"(5).

O'Brien personally expresses his guilt and grief for long suffering Vietnamese people recounting his first return to Vietnam since the end of war. Vietnam War was more complex than the general assumption of the people. Koki Nomura argues in this connection:

Vietnam War fiction and films thus tend to highlight the war's chaos and soldier's violence while soldier's moral pain has rarely been presented. In over three decades since the end of the war, Tim O'Brien is the only American novelist who has dealt with soldier's combat and postwar trauma. A master at portraying the American soldier – veteran's haunted

mind, he usually does so with such blend of realism, imagery and symbolism. (88)

O' Brien not only expresses his guilt and grief but also his writing is the best representative art of symbolism, imagism and realism that he presents in his narratives.

Traumatization is both immediate and long-term. Faced with sudden threatening and unbearable stress is the immediate trauma where is possibility to have the back out of victims but delay response is regarded as unusual human experience from where nobody can escape. Heberle says "the symptom of long-term traumatization are complex, various and multiple, and their clinical personality disorder as well as schizophrenia has led to frequent misdiagnosis'" (12). Trauma artists like O'Brien and Myers encompass psychic humbling, apathy, repressed anger, rage, hostility, anxiety and fear associated with combat. They present their sense of alienation, suicidal thought, destruction, negative self- image and meaninglessness in their narrative. The chronic nervousness, irritation and sleeplessness produce the state of self-protective vigilance associated with the original trauma. Both of them explore an unspeakable horror, unresolved feeling of grief, anger, guilt, shame and disgust of the victims of Vietnam War. Traumatization cannot be treated simply as an individual pathology, it is moral and social, so the central treatment must be moral and social.

Trauma does not include every overwhelmingly distressful human experience; it presents a treat of victim's physical or psychological state, which brings painful change in one's self-identity. Traumatic events destroy the victims' fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of self and meaningful order of creation. Kali Tal notes that "trauma is a transformative experience, and those who are

transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence” (qtd. in Heberle 13). Traumatic event never can be completely erased but can be reduced.

Although traumatization has intensified in O’Brien’s narratives, each of his protagonists is characterized by specific traumatic symptoms. His fiction does not simply represent traumatized characters; it mimics traumatization through style, organization of narrative and point of view. Among the characteristics devices are repetition, fragmentation, violation of temporal sequences, understatement, irony, images and unspeakable violence. A figurative manifestation of trauma is recurrent in his narrative. All of O’Brien’s characters are survivors of trauma and all of the works are generated through first person or intimate third person points of view. The narrators are both products of trauma and vehicles of recovery. Although each character is a persona of the author, we cannot simply identify their traumatization with O’Brien’s own. Heberle argues in this connection:

... while trauma produce and individual existential crisis; it also raises large questions about the ultimate responsibility for victimization and the lethal indifference to violence and injustice that may characterize social and political institution. (14)

O’Brien’s narrative is full of repression, amnesia and displacement that characterize traumatization. But in trauma therapy, recovery of the primary experiences precedes and makes possible recovery of the damaged self and psychological reintegration. These narratives mimic such therapeutic revelation of the truth. The traumatic experience of deadly combat and its attendant fear, grief, guilt and sense of helplessness is the source of Vietnam War literature. O’Brien and Myer’s analysis links Vietnam combat writing to account the other personal trauma: the holocaust, the atomic bombings, rape, incest. Their

narratives share all these common elements. Trauma on the battlefields of Vietnam was not simply a solitary violation of self like rape or incest but a shared experience of grief and terror by men whose lives and deaths depended on each other. Vietnam veterans may have shared guilt for their own actions that went beyond the guilt of survival itself.

The trauma of Vietnam veterans takes the form of both personal and national trauma. The returning combat survivors got a satisfactory resolution to their own trauma. Because of the production of personal and national trauma, the reaction and resolution of Vietnam War also has been both private and public. These trauma have expressed themselves in various cultural forms -- some of them redemptive and other pathological. Myers' narrative attempts to express and to heal both forms of the trauma. The symptoms of unresolved trauma were evident in post war American political mythmaking. The American failure to recognize Vietnam was not simply a political gesture or economic punishment but it was a delusional continuation of the war that refused to accept either her defeat or peace. As Heberle says, "The collective paranoia that characterize the era of American history ... [is] the Vietnam continuing as unresolved national trauma" (20).

O'Brien and Myers' narratives do not intend to valorize the identity of victims of Vietnam War creating a sense of revenge against America and American soldiers but they revisit Vietnam War to capture the specificity of trauma of violence so that they can create negative attitude towards war and violence by expressing sympathy to victims of the Vietnam War. O'Brien and Myers' texts on trauma achieve a neutral representation of violence with sense of the human dimensions through a moral responsibility that functions as a therapy to the victims of the Vietnam war.

Chapter Three

Trauma, Vietnam War: A Discursive Analysis of the Narratives

O'Brien, in *The Things They Carried*, problematizes the issue of literary representation of trauma of violence of the Vietnam War. He attempts to avoid notion of misrepresentation of violence focusing universal humanity through telling and retelling the stories of victimhood and war veteran. As a Vietnam War veteran writer he completely dismantles misreading, misreporting and misremembering of the Vietnam war. Lots of misinformation and myths have been constructed about the discourse of the Vietnam War but he uses retelling stories through memory or revisiting past for a neutral representation of violence of the war and its trauma.

Thomas Myers, *Walking Point: American Narratives of Vietnam*, problematizes the history of Vietnam War foregrounding the sense of victimhood. Breaking the traditional notion of recording history, he observes the cultural history, of the Vietnam War from the perspective of point men, veterans and victimhood rather than just the Americans. In the narrative, he attempts to explore the traumatic experience of Vietnam victims to establish reconciliation between the Vietnamese and the Americans. He problematizes the American history by connecting it with the cultural history of Vietnam War which deconstructs the U. S. Government's myth for the collective self-image. It means the American narratives intend to create an identity that does not address the sense of victimhood. Myers involved himself in the Vietnam War and its history not in a scholarly way but with a personal one. The faithful presentation and acceptance of history is always a matter of debate. He claims that American cultural history is superficial that is

constructed for the certain political purpose. His interest is not in linear history but in symbolic history: “what they, however, are the war stories , those immediate account in the novel and personal memoir that offer them what Americans felt, thought and did in Vietnam, the symbolic history that the subject of this book”. (ix)

Both of their (O’Brien’s and Myers’) narratives have concern with the representation of trauma of violence of the Vietnam War. O’Brien, as a trauma artist attempts to explore the trauma of violence of Vietnam War retelling the stories of the victims. Myers’ *Walking Point* is not only a faithful account of war but it also reconstructs the existing history of Vietnam War. The core project of narration -- moral exploration and neutral representation of violence and reinterpretation of war history has the similar perspective. Both of these narratives *The Things* and *walking point* are the true work of imagination that goes into the making of contemporary history. Myers observes the Vietnam War from historical and larger cultural framework whereas O’Brien attempts an aesthetic breakthrough in war narratives. Myers breaks the boundary between history and imagination for the presentation of reliable history while O’Brien blurs demarcation between fact and fiction critiquing on the epistemological responsibility of literary writing that supports for the memory of Vietnam War.

The faithful portrayal trauma of violence of the Vietnam War is the main concern of O’Brien’s narrative, *The Things*. Various groups and writers are not able to reflect the essence of war because they are guided by identity of specific community or nationhood rather than total humanity and victimhood. O’Brien exercises the sense of memory for retelling stories of Vietnam War veterans that is “the intersection of past and present” (33). Memory is an act of imagination, a creative process that produces the

responses of the trauma of the violence of war. Connecting between memories and retelling stories of Vietnam War, O'Brien states:

You take your material where you find it, which is in your life, at the intersection of past and present. The memory – traffic feels into rotary up in your head, where it goes in circles for a while, then pretty soon imagination flows in and the traffic merges and shoots off down a thousand different streets. As a writer, all you can do is pick a street and go for the ride, putting things down as they come at you. That's the real obsession. All those stories. (33)

For retelling the stories and revisiting the past, trivial subject matter also can play vital role. The real story is represented by the local materials and things rather than official documents, recorded history, according to O'Brien.

Revisiting the past and retelling the stories of war is a complex business because war has no single order, history and form. The trauma of violence depends on individual perception and experience because it might be multiple truths of war. A narrative rendition is an integral component of war because a story is the exposition of a special kind of violence that requires collective fictive interpretation. A single plot of the Vietnam War and violence is not possible, so O'Brien presents the story in fragmentation: "What sticks to memory, often, are those odd little fragments that have no beginning and end. ... You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end. Not then, not ever" (34). The story of the Vietnam war is fragmented which has no beginning and end as the individual veterans and victims of war have no beginning and end of their story.

The Things They Carried is a powerful meditation on the experience of foot soldiers in Vietnam and often the war. In a sense, it is a war autobiography, writer's memoir in the form of fictional short stories. O'Brien deliberately blurs the line between fact and fiction. Blurring the line between fact and fiction, O'Brien creates a protagonist, a Vietnam Veteran named 'O'Brien'. "Tim O'Brien" (narrator) and "O'Brien" (writer) share a number of similarities. The readers should remember that the work is a fiction and not an autobiography of the writer who wrote it. The work is presented as the autobiography of the fictional character. The act of telling and retelling story is the central focus of his fictional work. Story telling becomes an expression of memory and catharsis of the past. The act of storytelling becomes more important than the stories told. So, all characters in the narrative seek some kind of resolution.

Telling story or revisiting Vietnam is a powerful means of representing the Vietnam War and its trauma. Myers observes Vietnam War not as "story" but as "stories" with a series of commentary, often competing narratives. It is impossible to have single account of war or single narrative. Some are based on popular culture; others are based on official quarters or based on day to day stories. Myers claims:

The soldier's own testimony was story waiting for a story teller, a tale whose ultimate message would reside in its tone and style as much as its content. If the Vietnam War was a dark monument to the powers of American imagination, so would imagination be the most necessary tool for its faithful recording. (4)

The role of telling stories and revising Vietnam is not to find out the truth of war in veterans' narrative but he explores how narratives are produced through various sites of memory. O'Brien in his narrative attempts to develop reconciliation between Vietnam

and United States through story telling. O'Brien seeks to produce works that illustrate human response to war and articulate the strain associated with veterans, thereby reconciling what they saw and did during the Vietnam War. O'Brien maintains that retelling story means the man's yearning for peace. He dramatizes the theme of courage, duty, memory, guilt, witness and storytelling in his literary works. He does not exaggerate the violence of war: populism of violence does not reduce the trauma of victimhood. His stories always attempt to mitigate the trauma of veterans, so he says "not blood stories necessarily. Happy stories, too, and even a few peace stories" (33). Talking about the significance of storytelling, O'Brien argues:

I feel guilty sometimes. Forty-three years old and I'm still writing stories. ... Forty-three years old, and the war occurred half of lifetime ago, and yet the remembering it now. And sometimes remembering will lend to a story, which makes it forever. That's what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story. (33)

O'Brien's objective is to create an aesthetic that highlights the traumatic experience of the soldiers in the stories.

O'Brien's narrative, *The Thing* is not only a collection of stories but it could be understood as a means of understanding history. History is not always in linear order or form. He breaks the traditional notion of understanding history in official documents. He explores such things in the story which are never seen or written by any official documents or written history:

This is one story I've never told before. Not to anyone. Not to my parents, not to my brother or sister, not to my wife. To go into it, I've always thought, would only cause embarrassment for all of us, which is natural response to a confession ... and so by this act of remembrance, by putting the acts down on paper, I'm hoping to relieve it least some of the pressure on my dreams, still, it's hard story to tell. (39)

In an attempt to relieve some shame and guilt about his involvement in the war and to explore truth of history, O'Brien relates story about himself that he has never told anyone before.

Like O'Brien, Myers argues that the primary purpose of telling story is a faithful presentation of the trauma of violence through rendering the existing history of the Vietnam War. His narrative is an account of Vietnam War based on a spontaneous testimony rather than a strategic summary of war. He claims that the collective imagination which has correlation with emotional, psychological and spiritual data within large mythic narrative but limited/official historiographical perspective is less trustworthy:

The battle for public memory has little to do with the faithful recording of objective realities, the verification of body counts. Well after geographical battlefield have become symbolic memorials, the postbellum creators of harmonious narrative of national experience in war – two dimensional ones within popular culture or within the official quarters of national policymaker- invariably edit, revise or ignore the aspects of the new experience that threaten the preexisting national history, the bright master narrative of collective self-image. (6)

Popular myth is inherently conservative. The power of the popular myth is the location within the very narrowness and consistency of its narrative rendering. The often ignored ideological power of popular culture is only enhanced by the myth-making energies within the legitimized seats of political power within the American society.

The literary representation of trauma of violence is not possible through elitism or populism of events/war, according to O'Brien. Myers also shares the belief that popular culture does subvert the reality for certain interest. Harmonious artifacts of popular culture, campaign speech, and press conference, state of the union address or televised summary of a party are powerful historical tools which help to divert the national mythic stories of Vietnam War which do not represent the trauma of violence:

An event as subversive of national mythic stories as the Vietnam War may be edited, rewritten or cosmetically treated to make it not only acceptable, but also usable as a creative narrative for future foreign policy, future history. Popular culture and official history share two vital aspects: the tendency to ignore the deeper, disquieting elements within the mythic history they write and the likelihood of finding an enthusiastic mass audience for the finished text. (7)

Myers attempts to solve the problems of such readers who have new consciousness of American stories/history of Vietnam War. According to him, such readers may have an ambiguity for understanding the history of Vietnam War; in such a situation narratives and war accounts can be more than any factual writing. The linear history does not provide any space to the untold events, so conscious readers of the war story lack important recent cultural knowledge.

The Things opens a new discourse about the Vietnam War. O'Brien avoids the traditional stance to observe the trauma of the Vietnam War. He does not attempt to inflect the trauma with identity politics. His major focus lies in the suffering of the victims. 'O'Brien' confesses what he considers a failure of his conviction: he was a coward because he went to participate in war. The United States had not clearly won or lost the war that led to the suffering of the veterans. Throughout the late 70s and early 80s, the veterans struggled to receive recognition as patients of post-traumatic stress disorder. A Vietnam veteran as Tim O'Brien helps to spark an interest in a public discourse on the Vietnam War.

O'Brien constantly analyses and comments on the stories how are told and why they are told. For example, he tells the story of Curt Lemon's death and proceeds to analyze and explain why it holds an element of truth. He says that truth in a story is not necessarily due to factual accuracy. Instead, if the story affects the readers or listener in personal or meaningful way then that emotion is the truth of the story. The veterans who hear the story doubt its truth and exercise their emotional involvement than believing in truth of story. A true story should be given focus to the specificity of violence and poor state of victimhood but truths, as O'Brien insists on, "are contradictory" (77).

In public discourses, elements of war are erased for political purpose – to rewrite the war as a noble cause or to reconstruct the Vietnam as victim. O'Brien and Myers in their narrative try to present the specific details of war which are erased from the official documents. The memoirs deliberately leave out or alter elements of the violence of war in order to mimic the effect of the trauma. But O'Brien and Myers, as Vietnam veterans, not only perform the trauma of violence of war but also deconstruct the American history of the Vietnam War. Their narratives describe how a writer writes and what the conditions

are – mental and emotional - that surround the production of some literary or journalistic work. O'Brien's stories establish a confessional tone and create empathy between the reader and O'Brien's character. The readers know that this is an unresolved story, fragmented story and that it is being created into a story as a means for understanding the events of the past. These stories are fragmented but not disconnected, they are moving between the memories which create a sense of the awareness against war and empathy with the victims.

O'Brien reflects the traumatic experience of Vietnam War's victimhood. He not only represents the trauma of violence of veterans but also gives expression to the suffering from vicarious trauma caused by his witnessing of the victim's trauma. He is traumatized because of his empathetic engagement with the victimhood. He feels moral responsibility towards the Vietnam War veterans or victims. O'Brien projects the sympathetic condition of veterans: "I imagined myself dead, I imagined myself doing things; I could not do – charging an enemy position, taking aim at another human being" (43). The end of morality and humanity completely avoided during the war period. The sense of fear and displacement of victimhood has been very strongly presented by O'Brien:

It was a kind of schizophrenia. A moral split I could not make it to my mind. I feared the war, but I also feared exile. I was afraid of walking away from my own life, my friends and any family, my whole history, everything that mattered to me. I feared losing the respect of my presents.

I feared the law. I feared ridicule and censure. (43)

It is the real story of Vietnam War victims with which O'Brien engages due to a sense of morality because veterans always had the sense of displacement in their mind that "was

bitter. But it was much more than that. The emotions went from outrage to terror to bewilderment to guilt to sorrow. ... I felt sick inside me. Real disease” (44).

O’ Brien’s *The Things* and Myer’s *Walking Point* about the trauma of the Vietnam War Violence is not a realistic depiction or definitive accounts of war because “a true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth” (O’Brien 79). The business of representation of Vietnam War in a literary work is challenging. Many writers either elide the reality or exaggerate the violence of war but O’Brien’s aesthetics of trauma attempts to capture the specificity of violence of war through retelling and memorializing the stories of victimhood. O’Brien dismantles binary notion of happening -- truth and story -- truth, “a thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth” (79). His war stories, which are ultimately “never about war. ... There is not clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are so longer binding, the old truths no longer truth. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery.” (88)

O’Brien’s narrative, *The Things*, problematizes personal memory and official history. Official history is linear whereas memory is a labyrinth. Memory helps for telling and retelling the labyrinthine stories. Officially constructed history is unreliable that creates sense of loneliness, exile and displacement from his own nation, family and community and himself. *The Things* in a sense reflects the rootless existence of an exile. In other words, the stories demonstrate a preoccupation with the nature of displacement and alienation. Vietnam veterans feel exiled from America, from their orientation in storytelling. Alienation becomes a state of desire producing the stories. Vietnam exists as both place of estrangement and ironic homeland, a fictive geography acting synchronically as point of return and lineation. The concept of O’Brien’s exile differs

from the traditional definition of exile. O'Brien, as a writer, is not displaced in the traditional sense. In *The Things* displacement explodes in a doubled movement. The combined impulses of dislocation and reinsertion create the story telling process. The place as a focus of identity is figured both geographically and meteorically. Vietnam as imagined and imaginary homeland produces a synchronic process of alienation and return.

Exile as associate with the nation of displacement is the idea of home. Home for the exile is the place of origin or belonging. O'Brien as a displaced writer has no native place to return that creates the sense of dislocation. Home becomes shifting and ambiguous location, simultaneously situated in Minnesota and in Vietnam that constantly mediates in the language of his retelling stories. The imagined space of Vietnam acts as a metaphor for home and origin rather re-creation. O'Brien uses the stories in *The Things They Carried* to examine the various houses and acts of alienation that shape a consciousness of displacement. Violence perpetrated on the bodies metonymically to the destruction caused to the geography of the battlefield arenas. In *The Things* Vietnam is figured as metonymically by the bodies in the text as well as stories themselves. Both bodies and stories act as substitute terms for Vietnam. O'Brien's consciousness of displacement and its orientation toward Vietnam reveals itself as an organic and integral part of the book.

In the story titled 'The Things they carried' redesignating home as generative location collides with figuration of the metonymic relationship between body and place which traces lieutenant Jimmy Cross's crush on Martha. Jimmy Cross cultivates within himself on exile consciousness that continually returns to the idea and image of home as it embodies in Martha. Martha represents more than the idea of home. She figures as a

metonym for home and all its attendant images. When Lieutenant Cross receives a good luck charm from her, it is a pebble:

Smooth to the touch, it was a milky white color with flecks of orange and violet, oval – shaped that she had found the pebble on the Jersey shoreline, precisely where the land touched water at high tide, where things came together but also separated. It was this separate but together quality, she wrote, that had inspired her to pick up the pebble and carry it in her breast pocket for several days, where it seemed weightless, and then to send it through the mile by air, as a token of her truest feeling for him. (9)

Martha's explanation of how she carries the pebble with her and finally sends it to Lieutenant Cross as a "token of her truest feeling" works to figure the pebble as metonym for her. Cross actualizes this figural relationship when he "carries the pebble in his mouth" (12) and imagines that it is her tongue. Cross's imaginative return home to Martha and the Jersey shoreline, to America always result in the same story.

In the story titled "How to Tell a True War Story", the story like the body, becomes metonyms for Vietnam. When Mitchell Sanders talks about the eerie experience six-man patrol undergoes during a listening post operation, he observes Vietnam with different perspective that generates his own story. According to Sanders the men on patrol hear:

All these different voices. Not human voices, though. Because it's the mountain. Follow me? The sock – it's talking. And the fog, too and the gross and the goddamn mongooses. Everything talks. The trees talk politics, the monkey talk religion. The whole country. Vietnam. The place talks. It talks understand? Nam- it truly talks. (82)

Sanders finds him at a loss to come up with a single, definitive moral for his own story. It focuses on the way in which Vietnam articulates itself transcends the distinctions made between the animate and inanimate, the stories and storyteller. The invocation of the body, immediately conjures up an attendant vision: the potential of Vietnam to produce acts of storytelling that will orient O'Brien's displacement and enable him to tell a true war story.

O'Brien's post-Vietnam world is confusing, ambiguous place. No hard and fast rule exists; truth is always provisional, waiting to adapt itself to the next story, the next reality. The careful observation of metonymic and metaphoric relationship between the bodies, the stories, home and Vietnam uncovers O'Brien own moral:

In a true war story, if there's a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes the cloth. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in end, really, there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except maybe 'oh'. (84)

The figural relationship in the text makes it unintangible to talk about anything in isolation. O'Brien's war stories, the figuration of home, body, Vietnam and stories produce an awareness how no single idea can be unravelled from the cloth woven by the connection between each of them.

The narratives, *The Things* and *Walking Point* focus on the issue of politics of cultural history and the violence of war. It is believed that Vietnam War was in many ways a wild and terrible work of fiction told by dangerous and frightening storyteller. The issue of good and evil, right and wrong, civilized and uncivilized, freedom and oppression is important for the study of Vietnam War but nothing was certain, "uncertainty never articulated in war stories" (qtd. in Kaplan 44). In *The Things* O'Brien

is trying to reveal and understand the uncertainties about the war looking at it through the imagination or memory. He completely destroys the line dividing fact and fiction and the fiction can often be truer than the fact. He introduces some of the things that the imaginary soldiers had to carry through the jungles of Vietnam. All of the things are depicted in a style that is almost scientific in its precision. He even mentions the weight of things, psychologically or physically:

As PFCS or Spec 45, most of them were common grunts and carried the standard, M-16 gas operated assault rifle. The weapon weighed 7.5 pounds, 8.2 pounds with its full 20 round magazine. Depending on numerous factors, such as topography and psychology, the rifle man carried anywhere from 12 to 20 magazines, usually in cloth bandoliers, adding on another 8.4 pounds at minimum, 14 pounds at maximum. (6)

Such a detailing of things does not available in official documents. In this sense fiction/narration of O'Brien is more factual than the facts. In the narrative most insignificant details also seem meaningful that easily convince us of the reality.

The retelling of story develops through uncertain facts which emerge as a new set of facts about the same subject that is again called into question without end. O'Brien catalogues the things and the weapons that the soldier carried. The most important thing that first Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried was some letters from a girlfriend he loved. The narrator Tim O'Brien, one of Cross's friends in the war tells that the girl does not love him but Cross constantly indulged in "hoping and pretending" in an effort to turn her love into fact(2). The uncertainty comes in mind either "She was a virgin, ... Watch the night and wonder if Martha was virgin" (1) because he knew she had boyfriend" (4) but it

explores only end of narration that “mostly it was for Martha, and for himself, because she belong to another world, and because she was a poet and a virgin and involved” (20).

That O’Brien deals with the things that they carried psychologically also has great significance in exploring the trauma of the violence of the Vietnam War. He focuses on the neutral representation of trauma of violence through the spotlight on the details:

They carried all emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing – these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own cross and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried to common secret of cowardice barely restrained; the instinct to run or freeze or hide and in many respect this was the heaviest burden of all. ... They carried their reputations. They carried the soldier’s great fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory nor honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. (18)

The Vietnam War is judged from the perspective of defeat and victory but the real trauma of it remains beyond it. O’Brien tries to project such trauma of the violence of the Vietnam War through the aesthetic way of telling stories of victimhood. Those victimhood and veterans carry their grief, terror, love, fear and longing together which does not reflect in the official documents and in all literary writings.

O’Brien opens up a free discourse about the Vietnam War that requires multiplicity in approaches and reinterpretation of war history in the narratives. War is itself a puzzling mixture of new developments and preexisting myth. If somebody is able to combine these features can construct a myth and history of multiplicity in perspective

and approaches. It is that the full truth is not possible; it is in itself something ambiguous. O'Brien concludes that "the truth of war is contradictory" (97); we are being to force to "believe" that is only certainty, "overwhelming ambiguity" (78):

The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. You sure out at tracer rounds unwinding through the dark like brilliant red ribbons. ... And a true war story will tell the truth about this, through the truth ugly. ... The same stories being retold with new facts and from a new prospective, we come to realize that there is no such thing as the full and exact truth. The only thing that can "be determined at the end of the story is its own indeterminacy". (qtd. in Kaplan 47)

O'Brien changes the definition of telling the truth of war. He gives comment about the war stories blurring the division between truth and fiction, history and imagination that "a war story is never moral. It does not instruct, not encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral do not believe it.... There is no virtue" (68). O'Brien's post-Vietnam world is confusing and ambiguous place. No hard and fast rule exists; the truth is provisional; it has only the next story and the next reality:

There is no clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are no longer binding, the told truths no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery. The vapors suck you in. you can't tell where you are, or why you're there and the only certainty is overwhelming ambiguity. (78)

O'Brien notes the scar on the hill is America's absent and presence, a reminder of both Americans and Vietnamese of the suffering on both sides cannot ever be completely healed, erased or commodified because it has no final truth; everything is ambiguous.

For understanding and knowing the truth of Vietnam War O'Brien retells the story of veterans and victimhood but his narrative does not tell the truth, it provides a way for exploring the truth of it. He remembers war from a different perspective:

In a true war story, if there is a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes the cloths. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in the end, really, there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except may be 'oh'. True war story do not generalize. They do not indulge in abstraction or analysis. For example, War is hell. As moral declaration the old truism seems perfectly true, and because it abstracts, because it generalizes, I can't believe it with my stomach. Nothing turns inside. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe. (75)

A war story should be written from moral point of view without generalizing it. A true war story does not attempt to generalize the specificity of war and violence, and does not try to attain the full truth unraveling the deeper meaning of it.

Myers, in *Walking Point*, observes the Vietnam War from a broader sense. War is not only story of nations at arms. It is invariably a signifier of violent shift within culture and within individual sensibility. War applies variety of pressures to culture beyond the expenditure of national, industrial and human resources. It demands not only definition but also implementation of religions, racial, economic, social and philosophical beliefs and practices that in the peace remain uncorrelated but in war become the intertwined

threads of national policy. He attempts to deconstruct traditional definition of war. Traditionally, war has been defined within the “national consciousness as crusade, tragic inevitability and destruction or they judge war as virtue or goodness” (12). Such black and white interpretation of war is not possible; it’s an aberration within American society. Now the consciousness towards war has been changed and long history of collective revisions attempt to correlate harmoniously new national experience in war with larger American narratives and counter narratives.

O’Brien takes skepticism as a positive thing in the analysis of war stories. The telling story is a complex job because sometimes a true war story is beyond telling. O’Brien claims that old truths are no longer true that changes according to the perception of individual. He does not agree with the traditional notions of representation of war because they generalize war:

War is hell, but that’s not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; War is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead. (77)

O’Brien comments on the traditional notion of projecting war stories because it focuses to generalization of war and full truth. In a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true. In other words, a true war story doesn’t depend on any kind of truth. In a true war story it is difficult to separate “What happened from what seems to happen. What seems to happen become its own happening and has to be told that way” (O’Brien 70).

O’Brien focuses on post-modern morality that changes the excitement of traditional portrayal of the trauma of violence. Morality has been taken as a- means to represent the violent events of war. O’Brien’s contradictory depiction of violence

produces a thematic assertion of the moral confusion imposed by war. His portrayal cancels out the traditional deception of war as test of courage, a marker of heroism or as an idealization of martyrdom. He does not intend to present the Vietnam War as danger or adventure or a great loss, but he creates a sense of aesthetic to display trauma of violence in a different perspective -- morality.

Morality encompasses all humanity because ethics guides our thick relations and morality guides our thin relation. O'Brien's storytelling reveals the use of ethics – the thick relations. His intention is not to visualize the heroism of veterans and victory against Vietnam. O'Brien says that “in a true war story, if there is a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes their cloths. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unrevealing the deeper meaning. And in the end, really, there is nothing much to say about the true war story, except maybe oh” (240). Morality is the essence of telling story that avoids ethical notion of representation and insists for universal humanity.

O'Brien's story titled “The Things They Carried” introduces the moral burden of war, “How to Tell True Story” insists on the provisional nature of the process of moral inquiry and “Sweetheart of the Song Tara Bong” deconstructs the categories through which such judgments are conventionally assigned: guilt and innocence, self and other, male and female. The moral evaluation is the central issue of *The Things*. The moral certainty assigns absolute righteousness to “us” and completes culpability to “them”. According to him, the telling and retelling the story of violence of war is the responsibility of veterans, witnesses. In such recounting, the thrust is not on truth but on moral accountability. Truth is not just of texture but of accountability. Final truth of war story is not possible; the reality explores through retelling stories from moral perspective.

O'Brien, in the story "Good Form", says that telling story is a good form because "story is made up" (79). The stories are truer than the actual things that happened in Vietnam because they contain some higher, metaphysical truth: "True war stories do not generalize. They do not indulge in abstractions or analysis" (75). Rather, these stories are truer because the characters and events within them are being given a new life each time they are told and retold. O'Brien critiquing on truth, constantly make new attempts to conceptualize new life and uncover true identity. Representing events in narratives is an attempt to understand them by detaching them from the "real world and placing them in a world that is being staged" (Kaplan 48). In *The Things* representation includes staging what might have happened in Vietnam while questioning the accuracy and credibility of the narrative act itself.

The titled story "How to Tell a True War Story" opens with telling "THIS IS TRUE" where O'Brien takes readers through a series of variations of the story about how Kurt Lemon stepped on a mine and was blown into a tree. The only thing true or certain about the story is that it is being constructed and deconstructed and reconstructed before the readers. The readers are given different versions of death of Kurt Lemon, and each version is so discomfoting that it is difficult to come up with a more accurate statement to describe his senseless death than there is. O'Brien says that "in the end, really there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except may be 'oh'" (75). O'Brien summarizes that the facts about what actually happened or whether anything happened at all are not important. They are not important because they are uncertain. A true war story cannot be believed. Skepticism paves the way for credibility.

For O'Brien it is not the fact that a story happened that makes it true and worth remembering. The truth is clearly not something that can be distinguished or separated or

that can be determined from a perspective outside of the story. The important thing is that a story becomes so much a part of the present because “stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story” (85). So, he encourages telling and retelling of numerous variations “you can tell a true war story if you just keep on telling it” (80).

The narrative strategy that O’Brien uses in the book *The Things They Carried* portrays the uncertainty of truth what happened in Vietnam is not restricted to depicting war and he does not limit it to the war alone. He concludes *The Things They Carried* with a chapter titled “The Lives of The Dead” in which he moves from his experiences in Vietnam back to when he was nine years old. The story is about his first love with named Linda who died of a brain tumor a few month after he had taken her to see a movie, *The Man Who Never Was*. In the story, O’Brien tells that “memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head. There is the illusion of aliveness” (260). Like the man who never was in the film of that title, the people that never were expect in memories and imagination can become real or alive through act of storytelling.

O’Brien’s claims that: “you objectify your experience. You separate yourself” (178). By doing this you are able to externalize “a swirl of memories that might otherwise have ended in paralysis or worse” (179). The storyteller does not just escape from the events and people in the story by placing them in paper but justifies the act of telling story as an on-going and never-ending process. O’Brien claims that “almost everything is true, almost nothing is true” (87) for the act of telling war story. According to him, in “a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true” (78), “that’s a true story that never happened” (75).

The storyteller does not just escape from the events and people but it's a way of exploring hidden truth that helps to establish reconciliation between Vietnam and United States reducing trauma of them. O'Brien saves himself from the fate of his character Norman Bowker, in the chapter called "Speaking of Courage", who kills himself because he cannot find some lasting meaning in the horrible things he experienced in Vietnam. O'Brien saves himself by demonstrating that the most important thing is to be able to recognize and accept that events have no final meaning that changes each time that the event comes alive as they are remembered or portrayed.

The character Norman Bowker hangs himself in the locker room of the local YMCA after playing basketball with some friend. He has a story locked up inside of himself that he feels he can't tell it because no one would want to hear it. It is the story how he failed to save his friend, Kiowa, from drowning in a field of human excrement: "A good war story, he thought, but it was not a war story, not for talk of valor, and nobody in town wanted to know about the stink. They wanted good intention and good deeds." (O'Brien 169). Bowker's dilemma resolves in his death. O'Brien explains in the narrative that it is impossible to know exactly what had happened. He wants to know all of the things he/we/they did not know about Vietnam and probably will never know. He wants us to feel the sense of uncertainty that his narrator Tim O'Brien experiences twenty years after the war when he returns to the place where his friend Kiowa sank into a field of shit and tries to find "something meaningful and right" (212). The readers of *The Things They Carried* return to Vietnam through O'Brien's labyrinth of stories so that we become more and more aware of truth, underlying uncertainty and trauma of Vietnam War.

O'Brien's extensive focus on storytelling indicates, *The Things They Carried* is a work of contemporary metafiction, what Robert Scholes first termed "fabulation or

ethically controlled fantasy” (qtd. in Calloway 250). His writing not only focuses the thing what happen but emphasizes how they happened. By examining imagination and memory, two main components that O’Brien feels are important for writing fiction. In focusing on what war story is or not, O’Brien writes a war story as he examines the process of writing one. Most of his stories, in the process of writing include obvious metafictional devices. In certain sections of the book, entire chapters are devoted to discussing form and technique. A good example is “Note” which elaborates on “Speaking of Courage”. In “Speaking of Courage” vision of protagonist, Norman Bowker, who wishes he had the courage to save Kiowa, a soldier who dies in a field of excrement during a motor attack.

Such a shift in character and event tempts the reader into textual participation leading to a question of ambiguous nature of reality. The multiple version of story raises the question of accuracy. In the metafictional chapter there is no definite answer and resolution. Norman Bowker, who eventually commits suicide, asks the narrator to compose the story and the author, has revised the story as a post-war story in “The Things They Carried”. O’Brien’s strategy of telling stories are still compels reader to wonder about truth. The epistemological uncertainty in the stories is mirrored by the fact that O’Brien presents event that take place in a fragmented form rather than in a straightforward, linear fashion.

The issue of the representation of the Vietnam War is a complex task for a literary writer due to its ambiguous nature. O’Brien’s narrative *The Things* and Myer’s *Walking Point* tend to highlight the war's chaos and soldiers' violence while the soldier's moral pain has rarely been presented. O’Brien is only American novelist who has dealt with the soldier's combat and postwar trauma. He is regarded as master at portraying the

American soldier-veteran's haunted mind symbolically. A chapter, "The Man I Killed", of the novel, *The Things They Carried* is the best representative of his art of symbolism. He expresses his guilt and grief for the long-suffering Vietnamese people in the writing. In the chapter he discusses the physical characteristics of the dead Vietnamese soldiers, natural objects around the body and O'Brien's two comrades at the site.

O'Brien's presentation of the victim's body has symbolic meaning. Throughout the story Tim is sitting on the ground and staring at the body of a young Vietnamese soldier lying on the trail, a soldier he has just ambushed and killed with a hand grenade. The Vietnamese soldier had been patrolling and had not noticed Tim and his comrades in the ambush. O'Brien opens the story with a detailed description of the dead man's face: "His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a star-shaped hole ... red and yellow" (124). The description of the eye as one shut, the other open, star shaped, hole-like, red-yellow, is repeated in six times in the story which are the O'Brien's central symbol of this story. Contrast, irony and even surrealism can be seen in the description of the man's face and it might raise question why the wound has to be star-shaped. Jill Colella argues that the star as "hope, like a stars than upon his situation in war and the stars betrayed him and him bright future" (qtd. in Nomura (88). It has irony in the symbolic juxtaposition of the star and the man's fate is persuasive, considering O'Brien's six time repetition of the eyes and the shape.

O'Brien likes to bring ambivalent body- part symbolism into his work. The closed eye may refer death and oblivion, the opened eyes refer life and memory, the star and hole refer universe and uncertainty, and God's vision and sexual implication and red-yellow refer the dead man's rage or god's rage. The opened eyes' shape and colours can be read as reminders of the killer's action and their consequences. O'Brien is trying to

make himself, Tim, and the reader feel guilty about the war and its casualties by imprinting the image of death on them and giving them the idea that the dead man will forever gaze at them.

O'Brien attempts to inspect the man's whole body and recreate his life history as well. From the man's being "Thin", deliberately boned and his eyebrows being arched like women, he comes to believe that he was not a soldier but a scholar who was drafted against his will:

He liked books. He wanted someday to be teacher of mathematics. He hoped the American would go away soon, he hoped. He kept hoping and hoping ... He had no stomach for violence. The man's body symbolizes of body is "narcissistic and homoerotic fixation" (qtd. in Nomura 89).

O'Brien's body has feminine quality but his feminine is rather realistic. It would be very surreal if the dead man had the muscle-hardened body. An average Vietnamese man is much smaller and less muscular than the average North American men. But it was very slightness of the Vietnamese that contributed the effectiveness of their guerilla-warfare and allowed them to take command of the jungles. O'Brien's feminization of the body might have stemmed from his sense of America's overpowering and victimizing less muscular, lighter-bodied, and almost frail-looking Vietnamese men. Tim's imaginary recreation of the man's whole life can be taken as an indicator of O'Brien's moral pain and compensation.

O'Brien talks about the two natural objects surrounding the man's body: the butterfly and the small, blue, bell-shaped flowers. In the story, the butterfly flies around and sometimes lands on the man's disfigured face while the flowers are in bloom along the trail. The butterfly and flowers give the story a visual symbolism. The butterfly is a

universal symbol of beauty but in Vietnamese world it is a symbol of long life and the flower is associated with the soul of dead. Thus, the butterfly together with flowers, stands for the young Vietnamese man's lost soul or wishes. Not Only the objects used in the narrative have symbolic meaning but the novel, *The Things* is itself a symbol of Vietnam War which is artistically represented O'Brien's narrative.

Concerning with the issue of symbolic aesthetic, in the chapter "The Man I Killed" it is meaningful to discuss Tim's two friends, Kiowa and Azar. The contrast between these two characters is clearly visible. Kiowa, a Native American Baptist and Tim's closest friend in Vietnam plays role of Tim's sympathizer. Azar, the war lover, seems more amazed than scarred by the grotesque nature of war. What Kiowa is trying to achieve at the Kill site is to remind Tim of his soldierly duties and to rationalize his actions. In fact, Kiowa was sleeping at the time of the ambush, so, there is no way for him to know Tim's true motive in killing the man. The story "Ambush" reveals that Tim's killing was unnecessary:

It was entirely automatic. I did not hate the young man. ... It was not a matter of live or dies. There was no real peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way. Later, I remember Kiowa tried to tell me that the man would have died anyway. He told me that it was a good kill that I was a soldier and this was a war, that I should shape up and stop staring and ask myself what the dead man would've done if things were reversed. (123 -133)

O'Brien killed the man out of his own fear and impatience, not out of patriotism or soldierly duty. He focused only on body, on the physical damage done, not the moral implications. The full story having been told, reader is aware that Tim's anxiety ridden

kill makes him embarrassed, speechless and traumatized. The comforter, Kiwa and war lover, Azar, act as symbol of highlight comrade, O'Brien as the self-blamer.

All of these symbols in the story attempt to highlight the combat soldiers underlying guilt and trauma of violence. The dead man's physical characteristics and belongings as strange pair of eyes, frail body, a gold ring and photos of girlfriend symbolizes men rang. Two natural objects around the body-the butterfly and the bell-shaped flowers symbolize the man's last wishes. The contrasting characters and Tim's Comrades, Kiowa and Azar mirror two main types of O'Brien's readership which make the self-blamer's state of shock stand out in the story. It is true that O'Brien has brought his political and personal traumatic experience into his writing. But what seems more important is that he is making the dead live again in his writing and also treating the Vietnam War as horrible and ridiculous and reprehensible as any other war. The memory of the horrors of killing and getting killed depicts the trauma of violence and Vietnam has been presented as a trope of war; and in war everybody dies and what is left is a story that can resurrect man's life, wishes and pain.

Vietnam is being used as synecdoche, a signifier for one of the most significant public policy catastrophes in American history that include its political, historical and cultural ramification as well as suffering of victimhood which extended beyond Vietnam war. O'Brien presents Vietnam as a book or symbol of war that he associates with traumatic experiences and their writing is a fictional representation of such experiences.

The debate of symbolic history of war is unresolved because it has post modernist composition. Myers claims that "narrative strands led everywhere and nowhere, intertwined and separated as official mythologies not only succeeded but also contradicted themselves" (23). Journalistic consistency is a difficult task but without

having it, the competing version of truth loses. Both of official truth and journalistic clarity resulted from the wars not being single narrative. Numbers of narrative loose the collection of political, ideological and military vignettes. According to Myers, the Vietnam novelist was faced with the task of representing not only the nature of the fighting, but also the larger cultural and political developments. He concerns with representation of violence of war in a novel suggests being conscious about some basic questions:

Which war or wars do you hope to represent? What stage of confidence, commitment, disillusionment, or vitriolic debate influenced your narrative choice? Will your novel support to be an inclusive interpretive statement, or will it define itself as a partial reading? Is a full statement possible?
(23).

Avoiding these basic elements of novel/ narrative a literary writing cannot represent faithful history of trauma of violence of war. Myers argues that credible public memory may originate not in painless fabulation but in a hazardous imaginative journey into the dark interior regions of the soldier's personal experience. The finest literary point men of Vietnam share a key narrative project to recreate fully and imaginatively how the American soldier become both agent and victim of the narrow interpretive spectrum of war.

Myers also has similar perception with O'Brien about American Vietnam war veterans and its cultural history. Those veterans did not get celebration as the veterans of the World War I & II. The country could not correlate the historical data of Vietnam with traditional mythic pattern and celebrate the hero's return, "rather than the garlanded symbol of national goodness, the Vietnam veteran often become the despised and feared

other, the scapegoat for the variety of ills, the greatest of which was the failure to secure familiar, unambiguous historical closure that is called victory” (Myers 189). Such avoidance of veterans does not help reduce their trauma of violence of Vietnam War. The veterans were regarded as damaged goods:

The veteran cannot be celebrated as the crowning symbol of a successful national commitment; he is condemned to carry his new knowledge in silence. He is not perceived as the bearer of great historical boon; instead, he is both participant in and witness to a national accident that few are interested in assessing or reliving after its apparent end. Rather than a conduit of insight, or even wisdom, he is the catalyst for embarrassment, anger, frustration, recrimination, and apology. (Myers 195)

The post-war experience is the radical experience in sensibility between who experienced the war and those who have not. The intensity of experience makes difference to the literary representation of trauma of violence of the Vietnam War. Myers says that the primary narrative structure of war writers from the first world war to the Vietnam war focus on self-image and identity politics: “The solitary soldier becomes the emblem and prism of historical statement”. (16)

The Vietnam War was fought by disproportionate numbers of the poor, the minorities and the uneducated, soldiers whose grasp of history, politics and culture was intuitive rather than formal. The question of survival is important for them in the post-war period. They have their own culture, language, rituals, politics and social practices which are not encompassed by the cultural history and literary writings. Such culture and public voice is unrecorded in American history which is the heart of the finest Vietnam War writing and contemporary labyrinthine history. It was the foot soldier whose

testimony, imaginative and symbolically rendered by the literary pointman that would be the most telling historical text:

The imaginative products of the newest point men are necessarily incomplete, inherently unstable, and deeply challenging, texts that do not invite imaginative, creative readership but demand it with the shared claim that what is in hand is new and volatile material bearing an ancient and deadly message. Graphic realism, psychological horror and poetic meditation – the literature of Vietnam in mode and theme offers itself as both the apparent terminus of a tradition and a fulfilled historical prophecy of what mythic excess had always threatened to produce. (32)

From the official American standpoint, Myers believes that the war was always an immediate military and political project but in contrast to it, for him, war should be studied in relation to historical and cultural issues. The failure of American leadership to respond and to represent the historical and cultural origins of the war produced the most tragic bulldozing effect in Vietnam for both the victims and the American officials:

Americans ignore history, for thing has always seemed new under the sun. The national myth is that of creativity and progress, of a steady climbing upward into power and prosperity, both for the individual and for the country as whole. Americans see history as a straight line and themselves standing at the cutting edge of it as representative for all mankind. They believe in the future as if it were a religion; they believe that there is nothing they cannot accomplish, that solutions wait somewhere for all problems like brides. (Myers 27)

The failure to understand Vietnamese cultural history raises question in the representation of violence which is the most important issue of Vietnam War novelists to confront.

Vietnam War history and Vietnam War myth occupy the same imaginative terrain when the history of war is defined as the network of beliefs, interpretation and narration so the notions of “secret history evaporates” (7). Myers asserts that there is no secret history of the war. According to him when the Vietnam War novelists begin to explore the accumulative and imprinting process within both personal and collective imagination, he becomes a historical being. O’Brien and Myers attempt to use the realistic mode much like a neutral camera equipped with both zoom and wide-angle lenses, to offer minute recreation and sweeping photographic mural. The nature of war seemed to encourage recourse to such aesthetic strategies “to recommend that the writer give in to the impulse toward documentary realism while forgetting that even the most carefully rendered texture of realism demands selection, arrangement and finally, deeper judgments”(39). O’Brien and Myers are such literary figures who are able to select and arrange the events by giving their personal judgment about the cultural history of Vietnam War. But many writers seem to abdicate the responsibility of larger historical, cultural and literary representation of Vietnam War who avoids the necessary historical and cultural closure from their writing that is regarded as limited document of war.

Myers associates the issue of aesthetic enterprise and historical issue together as well as O’Brien. The war novels have always a special value among historical novels because “the origin of its aesthetic representation is a historical configuration of maximum crisis, disruption of the apparent harmony or congruity of a culture, the war novel incorporates within its historical and aesthetic project unique problems and advantage” (Myers 10). In short, the war novel makes enormous to the national cultural

paradigm's sound and surface. As a meaningful social ritual, the novel/narrative announces its value in two ways: It is significant record of immediate history as it renders all aspects of experiences that focus on varieties of historical writing and it is a lasting cultural document as it responds to the rendering and reconstituting of national mythos:

Every war has two histories in literature: it has its own internal history in which literature may record a particularity of circumstance; and it has another history, its place in that wider history of events and nations that transcends the immediate and interprets situations more comprehensively in time. The most effective war writers are generally those who manage to live long enough after their military service to unite both kind of history.

(qtd. in Myers 10)

Myers brings in *Walking Point* the reference of Norman Mailer to charge the traditional form of literary representation of trauma of violence of war. He attempts to show the difference between history and novel/narratives: "The novel must replace history at precisely the point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, physical, moral, existential or supernatural to expose the fact" (9). His intention is to challenge any historical novelist but it could not speak more directly to the literary point men of the Vietnam War, those imaginative records of an event whose interior history always threatened.

Inclusiveness is another feature of their narratives. Linear history and non-inclusive writing do not encompass the voice of marginalized and the victims of Vietnam War. Tim O'Brien in the narrative, *The Things They Carried* focuses to the issue of gender where he redefines the concept of gender concerning with war and violence that is completely avoided by war history. He remarkably includes the story of women in the

narrative where female characters Martha, Marry Ann, Lemon's Sister, Linda have active role. O'Brien in an interview, talking about role in Vietnam War, says that:

There were lots of civilians and women in Vietnam. So the story did not seem quite as possible to me when I began thinking about it seriously. The only thing that really stops a person from believing the story is gender. Could women be sucked into war the way that a man could be? Then issue of gender began to interest me. If I weren't for the conventions of our society where men, by and large, fill combatant roles, the same thing happened to me could happen to a woman. There have been societies where woman have combat roles. (65)

Women also have involvement in war and violence as well as male. His story of women changes traditional conception that women do not involve in war. As a story-teller, he provides equal justice to both male and female.

War fictions are usually less concerned with women than with rituals and culture politics. They focus on firstly, the separation of women or their civilizing process. Secondly, the performance of masculinity is judged according to bravery, physical powers and verity and thirdly, male is imagined as father figure. *The Things* departs radically from these conversions. In the narrative Mary Ann, in Vietnam, not only fails to civilize but is she reduced by the war. It is not to a company of men that O'Brien's characters perform, rather to ideal readers in the form of Lemon's sister and the woman at the reading. Instead of an act of uncompromised masculinity signaling the boy is now a man. O'Brien's character appropriates the feminine, becoming an androgynous fusion of preadolescent Timmy and Linda. Were women less warlike than men due to their breast and giving birth to children? O'Brien claims that is false image about women. As Rat

Killey, a character, speaks: “You got these blinders on about women. How gentle and peaceful they are. All that crap about how if we had a pussy for president there would be more wars. Pure garbage. You got to get rid of that sexist attitude”. (O’Brien 117).

Women who never go to war are not innocent so much as they are ignorant of their own capacity for violence. Mary Ann comes to Vietnam as equivalent of Jimmy Cross, Curt Lemon, Kiowa and the narrator.

The mystery of land tantalizes Mary Anne that causes for her transformation. Physical changed parallel Mary Ann’s shift away from America and her embrace of Vietnam. Her body seems foreign somehow. When she disappears with greenies and meets into a small, soft shadow. But “She wasn’t even the same person more” (O’Brien 17). She becomes other unidentifiable entity who simultaneously registers displacement and substitution through her physical transformation into the imaginative landscape of Vietnam.

Marry Ann’s metamorphosis stems directly from her relationship with the land; her fascination with “the mountains, the mean little village, the trails and trees and rivers and deep misted – over valley” (O’Brien 121) penetrates her system until being figures of Vietnam, the land. She explains her own awakening in terms of appetite and carnal excitement being absolutely in the body:

Sometimes I want to eat this place. I want to swallow the whole country- the dirt, the death – I just want to it and have their inside me. That’s how I fell. It’s like ... this appetite... when I’m out there at night, I feel close to my own body, I can feel my blood moving, my skin and my fingernails, everything, It’s like I’m full of electricity and I’m glowing in the dark

–I’m on fire almost- I’m burning away into nothing – but it does not matter because I know exactly who I am. (O’Brien121)

Mary Ann’s desire to incorporate Vietnam, through ingestion, into herself is ironically contingent upon her own willingness to be consumed, burning away into nothing. Her internalization of the land and the subordination of the geography to her appetite records O’Brien constructs between the figure of the body and the figuration of Vietnam as homeland, the place from where the stories emerge.

The conception about the female and the truth, during the war, is completely different. Mary Ann very strongly claims that ‘I want to eat this place. Vietnam’, ‘I feel close to my own body’, ‘I’m full of electricity’, ‘I’m glowing in the dark, I know exactly who I am’ (121) Which presents the actual position of female. Without telling the story of female and their strong position, the war story becomes incomplete. Females’ story is deeply rooted with the story of Vietnam War, according to O’Brien:

For Mary Ann Bell, it seemed, Vietnam had the effect of a powerful drug: That mix unnamed terror and unnamed pleasure that comes as the needle slips in an you know you’re risking something ... you become intimate with danger; you’re in touch with the far side of yourself, as though it’s another hemisphere, and you want to string it out and go wherever the trip takes you and be host to all the possibilities inside yourself. (123-24)

It becomes impossible to distinguish between Mary Anne and Vietnam. As woman and land merge, their fusion complicates easy categorical distinction. Both are alive with possibilities and imbued with the capacity to signify beyond themselves. Mary Anne becomes more than a simple high schooler Cleveland height, Vietnam infinitely more than a small country at the margins of American consciousness.

The female body originally invested with the responsibility of signifying the comfort and ease associated with romanticized and nostalgic construction of domesticity and home, becomes a way of talking about the disorienting power of Vietnam. The darker element of war bleed across boundaries between home and exile generates their story.

The last image of Mary Anne constructs new formation:

When the Greenies were out n ambush, the whole rain forest seemed to stare in at them a watched feeling – and a couple of time they almost saw her sliding through the shadow. Not quite, but almost. She had crossed to the other side. She was part of the land. She was wearing her clothes, her pink sweater, and a necklace of human tongues. She was dangerous. She was ready for the Kill. (O'Brien 125)

In the fusion of the land and the woman, Vietnam is figured as the home to which the displaced consciousness of the text returns. The spiritual and emotional terrain of Vietnam begets the story telling. The attention to her bodily representation of Vietnam shows a type of female consciousness but “the story did not end there ... Mary Anne was still somewhere out there in the dark” (O'Brien 107).

In the story “How to Tell a True War Story”, how the male narrator describes his reaction to war is also important to understand gender relationship. He does not digest the natural relation and role of male and female; he does not lose his sense of himself as subject and feels:

After a firefight, there is always an immense pleasure of aliveness. The trees are alive. The grass and the soil everything. All around you things are purely living and you among them. And the aliveness makes you tremble. You feel an intense, out – of – the skin awareness of your living

self – your truest, the human you want to be and then become of force of wanting it. (87)

He claims that firefight has association with pleasure of aliveness but one should aware of own living self for gender position. While it is interesting that O'Brien has his female character taking the world inside her and his male characters expending out to become the world. War destroys order, subverts higher processes such as reason and comparison, and returns us to instinct and our bodies. Such an explosive release allows men and women to be what they might have been without cultural restraints. In this connection O'Brien notes:

A true war is never moral. It does not instruct nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behaviors, nor always done. If a story seems moral, does not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted or if you feel that someone small bit of rectitude have been salvaged from the larger waster, then you have been made victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no virtue. (76)

Mary Ann illustrates not just the release war brings, but also how women are freed when they travel outside their culture and its definitions of what it means to be woman. Marry Ann confesses to an appetite so she “could swallow the whole country” (O'Brien 121). O'Brien's defuses such an equation by couching Mary Ann's appetite in terms of heterosexual sex and pregnancy. Even her necklace of human tongues does not carry the horror it could; rather as it consistent with the rest of *The Things*, its violence is seen at slant. Killing destruction, rape is the basic element of war but O'Brien tries to highlight serious unspeaking violence of gender issue. Marry Ann demonstrates that women, by virtue of her female body, is not immense to “that mix of unnamed terror and

unnamed pleasure that comes as the needle slips in and you know you're risking something" (125). The post-Vietnam America, masculinity released from the constraints of feminine civilization that reflects in the character of Mary.

O'Brien does not deny the subtext of sexual violence. In the re-telling of the trick-or-treat story, Kiley makes explicit the previously implicit female victim. O'Brien presents the violence of Jimmy Cross. Jimmy Cross "holding a pebble under his tongue. The sunlight lifting lemon into the canopy of trees. The buzz of the mountains coming alive at sunset"(178). These are the details of reduction. The older woman, like the dumb cooze, is a fictionalized act of reading whereby O'Brien fashions his ideal readers. Jimmy cross wants Martha to hear his stories and accept them. Rat Kiley wants lemon's sister to read and understand. O'Brien wants old women to hear his love story. Mitchell sanders generalize beyond the female reader. Such details and the interest of male characters shows the gender relationship during Vietnam War.

In the story "Lives of the Dead" a chapter of *The Things*, O'Brien explains that stories can bring the dead back to life through the act of remembering. He describes the first dead body he saw in Vietnam that of an old Vietnamese man and recollects the death of his girlfriend, Linda. O'Brien's narrative is not only success in representing to usual elements of war – killing, rape and destruction but also reflects the thing which was never seen women's position to stand between man and death. O'Brien remains Timmy and his innocent childhood self, "I was Timmy then; now I'm Tim" (229). Manhood is a return to the boy he was. And that boy contains Linda, the girl he loved when he was nine. Now, at forty-three, he speaks to her in dreams, tells her story, imagines her alive:

And then it becomes 1990. I'm forty – three years old, and a writer now, still dreaming Linda alive in exactly the same way. She's not embodied

Linda; she's mostly made up, with a new identity and a new name, like the man who never was in the spell of memory and imagination, I can still see her as if through ice, as if I'm gazing into some other world, a place where there was no bodies at all. I can see Kiowar, too, and Ted Lavender and Curt Lemon and sometimes I can ever see Timmy skating with Linda under the yellow floodlights. (236)

O'Brien evokes the moment at which the boy enters the secret circle of manhood. Through the line O'Brien composes a protective circle of manhood. O'Brien from the dead on whose lives he writes in order to protect Timmy:

I'm young and I'll never die. I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades doing loops and spins, and when I take high leaps into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize its Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story. (236)

In this final paragraph, Linda lies frozen beneath the ice on which O'Brien "loops and spins" his stories. Linda is not dead, he explains, "I don't know, I guess it's like being inside a book nobody is reading" (236). He breaks the distance with her while re-creates her. She is created as his art, his soul; he feels that he saves his life in her recreation. It is assumed that her presence provides meaning to his life so O'Brien writes "It was not a war story, it was a love story" (90).

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Capturing the Realism of the Vietnam War

Tim O'Brien and Thomas Myers strongly resist against the traditional way of literary representation of the trauma of violence and the history of Vietnam War in their narratives, *The Things They Carried* and *Walking Point: American Narratives of Vietnam*. They attempt to discuss the epistemological functions of literary work and literary representation of trauma of violence of Vietnam War and open a discourse about Vietnam War to establish reconciliation between America and Vietnam victimhood reinterpreting the recorded history of it through retelling stories. The question of literary representation of trauma of violence is important to them. Almost all of literature on war is characterized by the identity politics and sense of reprisal but they attempt to reflect the specificity of violence through narrativization that provides a new direction towards the perception of the truth of Vietnam War. The narrative of O'Brien creates a sense of ambiguity about Vietnam War that reduces the sense of revenge which eventually helps to resolve trauma.

The narratives of O'Brien and Myers are based on memory of the Vietnam War that attempt to re-correct the misreading, misreporting and misinformation about the War. Without understanding actual cultural history of the Vietnam War, it is not possible to explore the reality of it. These writers try to explore unwritten and unspoken history of the Vietnam War and its victimhood so that they break the linear and non-inclusive history of Vietnam War. A number of myths have been constructed concerning with Vietnam War but O'Brien opens a fresh discourse on the Vietnam War through retelling fragmented stories which are nothing but the neutral representations of trauma of violence of the Vietnam War. Cross, Norman Booker, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders,

Henry Dobbins and Kiowa, if the men of Alpha Company are real or imaginary. Blurring the gap between fact and fiction, O'Brien focuses on the act of telling stories, so the act of telling becomes more important than the stories told. The act of telling stories not only attempts to act out the trauma of Victimhood but also deconstructs the constructed myth about Vietnam War.

Myers in the narrative, *Walking Point*, also strongly resists against the misreading, misinterpretation and misinformation of Vietnam War. The significant writing on the Vietnam War has suffered from some historical misconception. Numbers of writers have removed some of the events intentionally due to certain purpose and sometimes they have removed events regarding them insignificant. Myers charges that such novelists of the Vietnam War are not serious about the "historical events and their significance" (35). He emphasizes that the responsibility of a trauma artist is not to "collect historical data but [represent] Vietnam war ... [as] a cultural crisis that require [...] an ever expanding glossary" (4).

The Things They Carried is a powerful meditation on the experiences of foot soldiers in Vietnam War. The role of revisiting Vietnam is not to find out the truth, because "the truth of war is contradictory" (O'Brien 77). His objective is to create an aesthetic that accumulates the traumatic experience of soldiers and the victims in the story-telling. The same story being told with new facts from a new perspective; we come to realize that there is no such thing as the full and exact truth. Myers and O'Brien's post-Vietnam world is a confusing and ambiguous place where no hard and fast rule exists because truth is provisional. They constantly question the accuracy and credibility of the narrative itself during the time of narration. O'Brien retells the different version of stories of the same person, and the characters also have different perception to understand

stories. O'Brien argues that the important thing during telling war stories is to "objectify your experience and to separate it from yourself" (O'Brien 178). Both of them try to discover hidden truth and untold cultural history through retelling stories to display the trauma of violence of the Vietnam War.

The narratives -- *The Things* and *Walking Point* -- up open a new discourse of the Vietnam War which deconstructs the existing myth of it. Both of these texts do not provide the details of war from the perspective of victory or defeat but they judge war on the basis of aesthetic feature of trauma. Elitism and populism do not reflect the trauma of violence, according to them. The elements of war are erased for the political purpose from the literary works and official documents. These two writers intend to present specific details of war which are erased from the official/historical documents. They constantly analyze and comment upon how stories are told and why they are told. For example, O'Brien tells the story of Cart Lemon's death and proceeds to analyze and explain why it holds an element of truth. He argues that truth in a story is not necessarily due to factual accuracy. Instead, if the story affects the reader or listener in personal or meaningful way, then, that emotion is the truth of story. The emotional involvement is the major element for a true story.

O'Brien retells the story of many characters focusing on the multiple issues to present Vietnam as a trope for war and its trauma of violence. He observes the impact of war in multiple factors of the society as well as Myers. For the discovery of trauma of violence he applies different literary strategies such as symbolism, realism, metaphor as well as metafiction. His presentation of victim's body has symbolic meaning. He gives detail description of war and even reflection of dead face. Irony and surrealism can be seen in the description of the man's face. But he presents the things in an aesthetic

manner that deconstructs the traditional notion of symbolism. The story “The Man I Killed” is a powerful story for the discussion of symbolic aesthetic where O’Brien talks about his two friends, Kiowa and Azar. Tim kills the man out of his own fear and impatience rather out of patriotism or soldierly duty. In the process of telling story, O’Brien creates a sense of awareness against war and sense of sympathy towards war victimhood. The comforter Kiowa, war lover, Azar act as symbol of highlight comrade, Tim as the self- blamer. All these symbols in the story try to highlight the combat soldiers underlying guilt and trauma of violence including author/character Tim O’Brien. Vietnam is being used as synecdoche, a signifier for one of the most significant public policy catastrophes in American history that include its political, historical and cultural ramification as well epistemological function of literary work.

O’Brien’s extensive focus on storytelling indicates that *The Things* is a work of contemporary metafiction in which he stresses the things how they happened rather than what happened. The story of stories helps to reach the depth of reality of trauma of violence that depends on moral witness. In this context, O’Brien says that “in a true war story, if there’s moral at all, it’s like the thread that makes the cloths. You can’t tease it out. You can’t extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in the end, there’s nothing match about a true war story, except may be oh” (84). Morality avoids the personal relation focusing universal humanity that plays the role to reflect trauma of violence. Retelling story or exploring the violence of Vietnam War is the responsibility of veteran (himself) that is artistically fulfilled by O’Brien in his narrative.

O’Brien associates the issue of gender in his narrative where he redefines the concept of gender. He thinks that without mentioning the story of women, the war story can not be completed. He describes the story of female character as Marry Ann, Lemon’s

sister and Linda as well as male characters. Almost all narrative and memoirs avoid or separate women from the war stories. His war story of women changes the traditional conception, and provides equal justice to male and female. O'Brien presents a mysterious relation between Vietnam/ land and Marry Ann. Her transformation and the transformation of Vietnam in post – war period is parallel. Her shift away from America and embrace of Vietnam shows her foreign somehow. Her metamorphosis stems directly from her relationship with the land; her fascination with the “mountains, the mean little village, the trails and trees and rivers and deep instead–ever valley” (121) penetrates her system until she not only figures Vietnam but actually becomes Vietnam but ironically it might be willingness to be consumed.

O'Brien constructs story from the relation between the figure of the body and the figuration of Vietnam as homeland. O'Brien equally focuses the subtext of sexual violence in the story. Jimmy cross wants Martha to hear his stories and accept them. Rat Kiley wants Lemon's sister to read and understand love letter. O'Brien wants old woman to hear his love story. Such details explain the sexual exploitation of women. O'Brien presents such serious issues in an aesthetic manner “It was not a war story. It was a love story” (90). Symbolically, O'Brien in *The Things* presents some stories of veterans and victimhood in aesthetic manner that represent the trauma of violence of Vietnam War, still, numbers of stories might be untold and unexplored. O'Brien focuses on the aesthetic of trauma that insists the neutral representation trauma of violence of the Vietnam War but Myers attempts to develop a new perspective to describe the Vietnam War which challenges the linear cultural history of it and dismantles the populist and elitist literary representations of the trauma of violence of the Vietnam War.

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