



The Turmoil Of War In Charles Yale Harrison's Generals Die In Bed

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APA Citation:

Mohamad, N.D., (2021). The Turmoil Of War In Charles Yale Harrison's Generals Die In Bed, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3140-3144; 2021.

Submission Date: 18/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 25/12/2021

Abstract

The two World Wars had shaken the world and changed the notion of soldiers in War. War novels portray the nature and atrocities of war and make the reader feel proud and sympathy for the victims of war. Canada matured as a country in the crucible of war. Canadian ingenuity, fighting spirit, and sacrifice enabled Canadians to demand a stronger, more authoritative voice in war and world affairs. The only subject of early Canadian writing was the insistence on a Canadian voice that retained strong colonial ties. The Canadian War fiction hopes to achieve the Canadian Identity and plea for the emergence of Canada as a united nation. This paper focuses on the dark sides of the war and the futile effect of Canadian soldiers who have questioned the reality of war in the trenches.

Key Words: Turmoil, Futility, Cannon-fodder, Trauma, Frontier-identity.

Introduction

War is considered to be the biggest crime by Human beings against them. Though the world witnessed the two Great Wars a century ago, it still reflects in minds the shadow of the victims' pain, sufferings, and voices. In response to the two Great Wars, Canadian war fiction witnesses many Jingoists as the protagonist of their novels, constructed with a varied convoluted narrative structure. Each Canadian novelist pours out the patriotic view of the young Canadian, exhibits the realities in the war field, questions their role as a Canadian soldier, and enunciates the vitality of the purpose of war as a nation builder. This paper traverses the turmoil of war and the futile attempt of Canadian soldiers who have questioned the reality of war in the trenches.

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War novels have one thing in common: They never fail to portray the atrocities of war and make the reader feel sympathy for the victims of war. Canada matured as a country in the crucible of war. Canadian ingenuity, fighting spirit, and sacrifice enabled Canadians to demand a stronger, more authoritative voice in war and world affairs. The early writings of Canada were crafting a definite Canadian voice but one that retained strong colonial ties. But in the case of Canadian War novels, the novelists hope to achieve the Canadian Identity through their writings, and they expect to see the emergence of Canada as a united nation. Canada emerged as a nation through many's sufferings, sacrifices, and dedications and attained 'indigenous' through its participation in the conflict. Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* pours out the European views on the futility of war. Though it is labeled as an anti-war novel, it examines the atrocities of war and its consequences.

Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* emphasizes the ordeal of fear and killing, the unbelievable squalor of trenches, and echoes the roar of bombardments. Charles Yale Harrison's heroes are Plebeian but not soul-less; not jingoist; not coward but concerned about self-preservation. The Canadian soldiers in *Generals Die in Bed* hope to attain a lot, but they get nothing for their identity. When the young men are recruited to join the army, many young boys are enlisted without realizing the intention of war and their own. They are Canadians who fought for the British against Germany. Anyhow the soldier is a soldier in the war. When the country welcomes the soldiers, they have many distractions. They never concentrate on the brave deeds, great models, and art of killing, but they flirt with women, drink heavily, and sing the mock song of not to be dead. They see themselves as a soldier being young soldiers between the ages of 17 to 20 years. They are soldiers in appearance but young boys in actions. The unnamed narrator of *Generals Die in Bed* does not like to go to march but keeps the company of the charming girls. Harrison treats the soldiers' boyish attitude candidly and reflects them through his narration:

I feel lonely. I do not want to go to war. She marches along by my side. The battalion is no longer marching. It straggles, disorganized, down the street the leading to the station. I am only eighteen and I have not had any experiences with women like this. I like this girl's brazenness. "Kiss me, Honey" she commands, I obey. I like all the confusion now. (Harrison 4)

In 'Out of Rest,' the soldiers conversed with Brown, who advocated his marital bliss with his wife, Martha. They forget their duties, the trauma of war, and the foul noise in the trenches during the war by imagining Martha as their own. Here it is easy to witness the boyish attitude of young Canadian soldiers. This is the case of not one or two but the whole common young Canadians. So the unnamed narrator observed:

It is one of many ways we can forget the war of few moments. The joking is raw, cruel, and we know it, but continue nevertheless. We have heard every physical and emotional foible of Martha's. It seems as though we are all married to her. (16)

The soldiers in the trenches were ordered to keep their eyes open and ready the Lewis guns to pull the bayonet at any time. Though there were no fights, the attitude of British Commanders and Generals made the Canadian soldiers realize their fate of not complaining, their frontier Identity, and their No Man's Land (Canada). The unnamed narrator is wondered by the jingoism of Fry, who wants to do his duty first even though he has lost his legs. Brown and the narrator saved the life of Fry. No sooner did they explain the situation to the British Captain Clark than he ignored them due to their Canadian identity.

The Canadian soldiers hoped to attain nationhood, Canadian identity, and equality. But they were treated indifferently by the imperialists. They examined themselves as a soldier only. But later, only they realized their scattered identity. The narrator says: "Our Captain, Clark, pushes his way through the mess. He is an Imperial, an Englishman, and glorifies in his authority" (5). When the narrator explained, Clerk rejected it and asked Fry to continue the duty. Clark commanded: "Get up, you're holding up the line." (5).

In reality, the Canadian soldiers are never treated with humanity and equality. For example, their tattered uniform of Brown made Clark displeasure. Clark rejected Brown for being a farmer in the past who spoke about Beans. During the victory of their enemy (German), the imperialist Cleary informed the Canadian soldiers to fill the gap in the north. The young soldiers had been used as 'cannon-fodders.' The British treated Canadian as materials, not even as human beings. Harrison depicted: "We will be sent to fill the gap of the north. "... we're bloody shock troops, that's what we are....yeah... Whenever the imperials cave in, up we go" (43).

Like the soldiers of Charles Yale Harrison, Joseph Heller depicts the violent yet absurd and meaningless nature of the young men who are forced to sacrifice their sanity and lives to protect their countries. The fictitious novel *Catch-22* by him weaves together a variety of war stories of irrational events, and absurd characters driven to the point of insanity, and a satirical, senseless, commanding bureaucracy. Heller pointed out the futility of soldiers: "An unreasonable belief that everybody around him was crazy, a homicidal impulse to machine-gun strangers, retrospective falsification, an unfounded suspicion that people hated him and were conspiring to kill him." (Heller 47)

Though Harrison's *Heroes* did not have any intention, they questioned the unjust system prevailing in the war. Being young Canadian soldiers, they hope to attain the status of nationhood and identity even after their death. But their attempt became futile. For example, after her death, Brown was considered a dead farmer, not 'a brave jingoist Canadian soldier'; Brown's wife was a widow only, not a wife of a nation builder. They have witnessed only the frontier identity, not the Canadian identity. Charles Yale Harrison projected: "Brown is dead. He is not the awkward, stupid boy we knew. He is the symbol. He is a dead farmer. Martha is a widow because of his death" (30). Life became an insane dream for them. But this is not the case in the life of other soldiers like the British and other countries.

The soldiers suffered from the constant turmoil and witnessed different faces with the fear of killing and getting killed. While the German soldier approaches the narrator, he feels ill in his stomach, undo the fire, the feeling of an icy fear gripping his heart. He did not know how to use the bayonet. Like a chocolate cream soldier Bluntschil in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, the unnamed narrator of Harrison did not fight till the end. They see themselves as soldiers being artless. In the duel between the enemy and the narrator, the bayonet was pulling unknowingly stabbed the enemy. The unnamed narrator intended to save the enemy by pulling the breach lock back and trying to save his life.

Canadian soldiers are determined to achieve their identity of own. In the war field, they witnessed the double colonization of their own. Though they were called comrades, they are separated by the language gulf. When Anderson announced the war's end, the narrator proudly said, "I am proud of myself, I have been tested and founded not wanting" (55). While others celebrated the victory among the dead bodies, the narrator could not celebrate due to the trauma of the death of Karl, Brown, and Cleary. Like the soldiers, Michal Ondaatje's character Anil suffers from nightmares revived from

the flashbacks. Her nightmares are examined: "She rose out of the outline, turned back, and saw he had drawn outlines of the four skeletons as well" (Ondaatje 61-62).

Every deed has its result. But in the case of Canadians, it is totally strange. Though there were no changes in young Canadian soldiers' lives, they realized the importance of humanity after the deaths of unsung heroes of their own country. The narrator's revelation is not only of his own but also of all the young soldiers of Canada. He questioned the meaning of war and the role of Canada. While Anderson asked him to celebrate, he replied: "No. But the Lord has figured it out for me. 'And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion'" (44). When the Comrade asked him to depict the place of Canada, he replied that the leopard is France, the bear is Russia, the lion is England, and Canada is under the lion's tail. The unnamed narrator of Harrison resembles the heroes of Eric Maria Re Marque, who opposed the war. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* personifies the life of a German soldier who fought for the British. Paul comments:

Although all the boys are young, their youth has left them. In addition, the massive loss of life and negligible gains from the fighting are constantly emphasized. lives are thrown away by their commanding officers who are stationed comfortably away from the front, ignorant of the daily terrors of the front line. (When 19)

Charles Yale Harrison's protagonists questioned the role of Canadian soldiers in the trenches. They are keen on knowing the meaning of war and its effect on their own. They are soldiers while they are killed/ being killed. After that, they are called farmers, dependent on Britain, and so on. The soldiers of Canada see themselves as soldiers being identified as a colonial mind of Britain called frontier identity. They considered futility as the result of the war that engulfed the life of all.

The reader will not experience any titillating battles in *Generals Die in Bed*. Charles Yale Harrison's heroes are not jingoists but not cowards. They are not heroes of brave deeds, but mentally, they are strong. They reflect the entire life of Canadians by questioning the real meaning of war, the importance of identity, and the attainment of nationhood. They lost their roots, life, young age, parents, and hope. Dr. Jennifer Minter acknowledged the art of Harrison's writing as an attempt to reflect the cost of war. He pointed out that the narrator's encounter with Karl made him into a hero level.

Conclusion

Every Canadian soldier witnesses the smell and fouts in the trenches and the trauma of the death of comrades. Finally, they determined to make the weak mind and strong body and like to live like animals, not humans. Being human, they like to see themselves as a beast for survival. Though the world witnesses the pain of war, no one can able to drub it completely. The Syrian war has witnessed the death of many lives for the past eight years. It is only the war that makes abhorrence among the nation. The melancholy picture of the soldiers, like injuries, false promises, and lack of hope, made him feel wounded only, not the soldiers. Wilfred Owen depicted his un-named ex-soldier who returned from war with life-changing injuries:

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow.....('Disabled,' lines 1-3)

The war is the only root cause of all the evils and other devastating things. Society may render many bits of help, clean their blood, and wrap their wounds but cannot answer the solutions for the pains, sufferings, love, and trauma. Every soldier is waging an existential battle to the death. Let us take the weapon of non-violence to care and share the feeling of others and make the nation exultant. Charles Yale Harrison vividly examines the pain, madness, and physical, emotional, and brutal reality of the war that resulted in the degradation of humankind. Throughout the novel, he reinforces the theme that warfare is absurd, irrational, and counterproductive. His characters dramatize the faults of war that made the soldiers irrational.

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