

**DEPICTION OF WAR IN J P CLARK'S *THE CASUALTIES* AND
TONI MORRISON'S *HOME*: A COMPARISON**

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Abstract

Comparative literature, the inevitable byproduct of Rene Wellek's *Theory of Literature*, has been developing as the more dynamic discipline, which receives much acclaim from the world around. The present research compares the depictions of war by two different authors. Clark's *The Casualties* and Morrison's *Home* are the selected works for comparison. The former is a famous poem and the latter is a beautiful novel. The novel *Home* is set against the background of Korean War in the 1950s. *The Casualties* points to 1966, the time of the Nigerian Civil War. The study illustrates the close similarity between the selected works of different genres, with regard to the theme of war. The investigator, further, tries to unearth the dissimilarities. The writers, J P Clark and Toni Morrison, endeavor to reach the same goal by different means and the modes are identified and justified with utmost care.

The novel *Home* is set against the background of Korean War in the 1950s. The novel revolves around the heart-throbbing tale of Frank Money, a twenty four years-old war veteran's adventures, not in the battle field but on his way home. Yet, in the novel, he is, at every stage, presented as the painstaking victim of war.

The poem *The Casualties* points to 1966, the time of the Nigerian Civil War. J P Clark, in his poem, enlists the various aspects of war casualties, along with the layman's view – death is an inevitable sequel to war. His opening lines ensure the stand-- *The casualties are not only those who are dead. / They are well out of it (1-2)*. He concerns not only with the dead, *though they await burial by installment (4)*.

Toni Morrison, in her *Home*, depicts the life of Frank Money, a young soldier of the Korean War, who strives to restore his beloved sister Cee. The readers meet Frank not during the war but on his way back. The hallucinatory effects, which make the novel more influential, show the inhuman aspects of war at the physical level.

Mike, Stuff and Red, soul mates of Frank, are the real victims of war. Mike, at his last hours, was in the arms of Frank who had yelled at him to stay back. He beat away the birds which were so aggressive, from his friend's body. In the case of Stuff, Frank went in search of the blasted arm which was located twenty feet away. Red, their army friend, especially of Stuff, was also dead. His body parts that had been found were so little to occupy a whole stretcher. So, it is quite natural that these warriors, most probably, can never get the complete burial. As Clark says, they always *await burial by installment* (4).

The poet focuses not only on the loss of material assets and property, but also on the irretrievable loss of the near and dear ones. He sympathizes the longing hearts, in particular, for the affectionate touch by the departed, temporarily or permanently.

Frank, the protagonist of *Home*, prevented Cee from all the evils including flirtation. She followed each and every word of Frank closely. As the novelist says, *the four year-old brother was clearly the mother to infant* (88).

Throughout her life, Cee leads a shadow life. But the shadow starts to disappear when the reality enlisted in the military service. Cee fell in love with Principal, the first man who approached her. He was a visitor from Atlanta. All the Lotus girls were impressed with his big city – accent, knowledge and wide experience. Especially, Cee believed every bit of word that came from his mouth. He married her and took her to Atlanta, where she was left all alone. When she found him a fraudster, who married her for an automobile, she was broken. The broken heart, as usual, longed for the presence of Frank: *If Frank were there he would once more touch the top of her head with four fingers, or stroke her nape with his thumb* (53). But the motherly touch that some/ May not know is not there, as Clark highlights (7-8). The awaiting parents of Mike, Stuff and Red cannot, even, grope their sons' dead bodies.

The casualties are not only those led away by the law at night, but they include the enemy's horrible prisons where humanity has no place. Toni Morrison's *Home* portrays the poet's observation as such: Frank, whom we meet as a young man, was in the hospital. His quick escape makes the readers curious to know his malady. But, he could not recall his immediate past. Most of the bare footed, half dressed folks would go only to the jail. John Lock, the benevolent who gave Frank food and shelter wondered that instead of jail, how he would end up in the hospital. The dialogue between the Locks makes the readers aware of the cruelty of the cell which, sometimes, acts as a haven. They, even, talk about the selling of dead bodies from the prison, in a very casual manner.

The poet adds the escaped soldiers and their state to the list: *The casualties are not only those who are escaping. / The shattered shall become prisoners in / A fortress of falling walls* (15-17). Clark, further, compares the soldiers with the *wandering minstrels*, as their hearts, in anxiety, beat like drums (24). The hero, Frank, himself is an apt illustration of this type. He, the shattered, certainly becomes the prisoner, mentally – caught by PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He is confined with his own personal trauma which serves as a psychological prison.

Frank, as a young man, was not at all an enthusiastic hero. His tender heart dreaded to join the military, indeed. When he found himself in the Mental Health clinic, Frank pretends to sleep there. The fake rhythmic snores, still eye lids and the regular heartbeat need hundreds of hurdles to overcome. As the author rightly indicates, *He would need something that stirred no*

feelings, encouraged no memory—sweet or shameful. Just searching for such an item was agitating. Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain (7-8). His prime motto is to restore her sister, Cee. The letter, informing the current position of Cee, attracts his whole attention: *Come fast. She be dead if you tarry (8).*

But the impact of war is so strong that he could not come out of the hallucinatory realism. Even a positive quote from the Bible which gets his instant appreciation, opens, the next moment, gates of dead realities – Mike, Stuff and Red.

Mike's death changed him totally. The boys had played together, giggled together; 'argued, fought, laughed, and even enlisted together. Frank, who dreaded and even felt nervous after a kill, became so violent: *Now, with Mike gone, he was brave, whatever that meant (98).*

He even turned to be a sadist, that *The copper smell of blood no longer sickened him; it gave him appetite (98).* On his way to Georgia, he heard the yelling of women. He hurried to the place and wondered at the silent man who had gazed at the fight between two women. Frank had punched him till the later became unconscious. The women only rescued him from Frank. The man was almost, beaten to death Frank who once felt nervous after a kill becomes excited at *the wild joy the fight had given him (102).* Further, the *dream dappled with body parts* that he has, manifested the increasing level of Post-Traumatic Stress in him (16).

The men-at-arm, in the battle field, according to the poet, may hear their friends' cry for help, but they are helpless, as they have unexpected attacks from all the sides. The novel also reflects the actuality, as Frank Money cannot save the lives of his dearest friends, at the warfare.

The researchers found some dissimilarity, though the chosen works of diverse genres are brimming with enormous similarities. And, the notable variations are explained below:

Clark, the poet regrets the fact that wars are broken out, mostly, for the welfare of the kings, but thousands are burning though they had no say to the matter. The poet describes the mental state of the soldiers, who escaped from their enemies:

They are the emissaries of rift,
 So smug in smoke-rooms they haunt abroad,
 They do not see the funeral piles
 At home eating up the forests.
 They are wandering minstrels who, beating on
 The drums of the human heart, draw the world
 Into a dance with rites it does not know. (20-26)

For J P Clark, War casualties, including the soldiers, alone *are the emissaries of rift. (20).* In the case of Toni Morrison, the emissaries include all types of exploitations – war casualties, racial segregation, medial abuses, and exploitation of workers and so on.

Toni Morrison does not add any imaginative colours to make Frank Money a perfect hero. As an ordinary human being, he too, had committed a great sin that haunted him every now and then. He shot a little girl dead, instead of controlling his own lust. To save his *good man* image, he went to that extend, without knowing the role of conscience.

Frank confesses the truth, which he wants to hide from himself. Frank only shot the girl dead. The truth haunts him every minute. It damaged his self image and terrified his soul to the core. He consciously suffocated himself with big-time mourning for his dead friends, because it *kept the Korean child hidden.*

J P Clark, on the other hand, notes down the haunting memories, in a more general phase. The soldiers may overcome these difficulties and try to lead a happy life, but the smoke room will haunt them lifelong.

The poet pities the laymen, who return to their native and face the unexpected riots broken out with the throats and hands of the looters. The novelist with her diverge themes lists out different riots caused by different aspects – Racial segregation gets more and more intensified in the Elko coffee incident- a young man who got off to buy some coffee at Elko, station was severely kicked. When his lady comes to his rescue, she, too, gets a rock thrown in her face.

Frank, on his way to Georgia, was attacked by the looters. Billy Watson, whom Frank met at the Booker's diner, provides him with food and shelter. His little son, Thomas who lost his right hand, is the victim of a local riot.

The novel, though, explains the war casualties and segregations, there are always some generous hearts to aid and mend the ailments -- For Mike, Stuff and Red, it is Frank who gave the peaceful departure. Mr. Gardener helped the fellow travelers who suffered under the hot sun. In the Elko coffee incident, the railway workers rescued the couple and gave them first – aid. Though the cops can *shoot anything they want*, humanity, rules over the world in the forms of The Watsons (31). For Cee, it is always Frank who played the mother's role. Besides Frank, Sarah, Ethel Fordham and other good hearts nursed her with dedication. Frank himself is helped by the noble hearts – The Locks and The Watsons.

The poem enlists the casualties of war in a simple but strong manner. It does not deal with the mending of such impacts. The poet tries to inculcate the moral, using negativity or by creating fear and empathy. He, indeed, effectively uses logos. But, the novelist's appeal is different, though she shares the theme with J P Clark. She appeals to the readers' emotions.

The study illustrates the similarity between the selected works of different genres, with regard to the theme of war. The investigators, further, tries to unearth the dissimilarities. The writers, J P Clark and Toni Morrison, endeavor to reach the same goal by different means. The poet conveys his message in a simple but a strong manner. He strengthens the theme in its own ground, while the novelist develops it with the aid of the sister themes – Racial Segregation, medial abuses and exploitation of workers. The former tries to enlist the war fatalities, while the later tries to explicate those casualties with the heart throbbing incidents.

Works Cited:

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