

Structuralism and the wars essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Timothy Findley was a Canadian novelist and playwright. He has written many novels such as *The Last of the Crazy People* and *The Butterfly Plague*. Findley also writes an extraordinary novel titled *The Wars*. This novel is about a young man whose name is Robert Ross and is on his way to war because he feels guilty about the death of his sister. Mentally and physically he is not ready for war because he feels much violated of his privacy. As Robert is in the war to end all wars, his family is going through hard times as well. Everyone sees things differently. Their beliefs and principles may be different from somebody else's beliefs and principles. Someone may think or even say that a certain thing is right however according to another person they make think it's wrong. Likewise, there can never be just one truth; there are different perspectives on how individuals see things. The novel *The Wars* by Timothy Findley portrays many of these truths and proves that there is not just one truth but many truths. The idea of structuralism is that conscious experience can be broken down into basic conscious elements. All conscious experience must be described in its most basic terms. (Richard Hall)

The structural criticism that is portrayed in *The Wars* by Timothy Findley through symbolism, the encounter with nothingness and the theme of identity proves that there is not one truth in every text. In chapter 2 of the beginning of the novel, the narration is told in second person. In the beginning of the book, an archivist is going through some old pictures. These pictures show the readers the captured life in these photographs. Also since the photographs are old it decays which symbolizes death. Since the old photographs decay, it shows that life can also decay which can cause death.

“ As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles.” (Findley, 7)

There is a time and place for everything and it has all come to an end like the war. This can also relate back to the epigraph said by Euripides “ Never that which is shall die.”

This means that even though people die, their memories will live on forever. Similarly, in the decaying photographs, the people may die in it but their memories will live forever. While the archivist is going through these photographs, she is going back into the past and talks about Robert’s family and how much their life has changed. The archivist also talks about Robert’s life before the war. Also towards the end of the book, Robert’s photograph starts to fade. “ In the drawing room, sitting in its silver frame, Robert’s photograph started to fade.” (pg. 186) The fading of Robert’s picture signifies and foreshadows Robert’s death which happens in the end of the book. This relates back to Euripides’s epigraph because, when Robert does die, his memories are only left with his loved ones. However, when Robert’s family receive news that Robert is missing in action, it only separates their family. Also in the epilogue of *The Wars*, all it talks about is Robert and when he was younger.

No matter how old you get, you will always have memories of something with you, even if you do not remember that person who you share the memory with, you will always have something to remember that person by for Robert’s family, they have his photographs and they have his memories. This shows that there is no proof of anything because it gets fragmented. In part 4 of *The Wars*, Robert is at the d’Orsey’s house. He is staying at their

house as a friend and a patient because he hurt his foot. One night Robert and Barbara are having sex and at that time Barbara's sister Juliet sees them. She is twelve years old so what she sees frights her. Juliet starts to speculate why two people would hurt each other. It did not make sense to her at all. She was confused by what she saw. Juliet thinks that Robert will kill Barbara because of his anger. " He had a great deal of violence inside and sometimes it showed in his expression when you found him sitting alone on the terrace or staring out of a window. Still he was not at all times angry when he was alone." (Findley, 156-157)

After seeing Robert and Barbara together; those images kept flashing back in her head. " Just about noon, I started to cry, I don't know why. It made no sense." (Findley, 160) Juliet has her encounter with nothingness when she breaks down because she is confused about everything. War; puberty, even the sex with Robert and Barbara made her more confused. This relates back to the thesis that the truth is always changing like the way people change day by day. Robert's character has changed so much from the beginning of the book up until this part. Furthermore, Robert also has an encounter with nothingness before he has sex with Barbara. We have seen his shy and reserved character to his aggressive and impulsive character. He feels the need to take out his anger on something or someone so he ended up using Barbara. Also Juliet is changing as well. She is going to become a woman soon. Her body is getting ready for these changes and her mind is also.

She uses the aid of alcohol to get rid of the pain she is feeling inside and just to get her mind off of what is happening around her. Likewise, there is never

one truth that you have to believe, there is always more than one truth because everyone has a different perspective on life and the way they should live their lives. When Robert's sister Rowena dies, he has a private guilt inside of him that makes him want to join war. However, war is a very public place and one can find it hard to be private when one is constantly surrounded by hundreds of men. When Robert, Taffler and a few other people go to a whorehouse, Robert ends up drinking. He conforms because he feels the need to fit in with the other soldiers. He was teased into going. "If you didn't go, you were peculiar. It was that simple." (Findley, 32) Robert did not want to go this whorehouse but he only went so he could fit in with the other soldiers and for his better judgement. When Robert sees Taffler with the Swede, Goliath, he is both shocked and enticed.

The war forces things to be exposed and it is a concept Robert is not comfortable with. However, Robert feels more violated when he gets raped. His body and his mind were invaded not only by his assailants, but by the war itself. "His assailants, who he'd thought were crazies, had been his fellow soldiers. Maybe even his brother officers. He'd never know. He never saw their faces." (Findley, 175) The people who raped Robert were his fellow soldiers, people he interacts with on a day to day basis. Because of this, Robert feels violated. He feels like the world is not the same like it was before. The world is changing each and every day. People end up changing and as they change their personality changes. No one has ever seen what the future holds and when the future does come, it changes everything for everyone no matter how big or small. Inevitably, after the rape scene, Robert's life has taken a drastic turn. In the chapters after the rape scene,

Robert becomes more aggressive and he has more anger inside of him as “ Captain Leather rose to his knees and began to struggle to his feet.

Robert shot him between his eyes.” (Findley, 184) Robert has a lot of aggression and is frustrated about the whole scenario. As people change, so do their personalities and the way they perceive things, it will make one believe in one thing and then think it’s right but as they see something else, their minds are always changing like the truth. The truth is never one thing, it changes as the world changes. The structural criticism that is portrayed in *The Wars* by Timothy Findley through symbolism, the encounter with nothingness and the theme of identity proves that there is not one truth in every text.

The fading of the photographs symbolize death and when a photograph starts to decay, that foreshadows the death of someone however the death of someone always tears a family apart as shown in the novel. When Juliet sees Robert and Barbara together, she gets confused not only by that but with the changes that are happening to her this proves her encounter with nothingness. Similarly, Robert also has his encounter with nothingness right before he is going to have sex with Barbara, we see in the whorehouse how his character was way different then how we perceive him now. Right now, he is more aggressive and violent in nature. War ends up changing a person most of the time for the best. Robert has an identity crisis after he gets raped. He feels as if not only his body but his mind and spirit have been invaded by his fellow war mates.