

The things they  
caried



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"The things they carried" In "the things they carried" Tim O'Brien defines a fine line between fiction and non-fiction in the form of story telling and the memories he has accumulated from his participation in the Vietnam war the way they "seemed" rather than "what happened" because that's how you tell "a true war story" and that's how the book effectively engages the reader throughout the whole book because nothing is ordinary, not even the way the book is put together, you just can't anticipate anything and therefore leaves you glued on to the book wondering what he'll throw at you next.

In order to put together such war stories Tim O'Brien uses many rhetorical devices to put the reader in the characters shoes such as flashbacks and great detail in imagery to drag you into the scene. He also uses symbolism in order to develop his characters and express their qualities of who they are, in addition to using anecdotes throughout the story and hyperbole in order to tell a "true war story". When first picking up "the thing they carried" I noticed right off the bat O'Brien's eye for detail in imagery.

The first scene where Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carries Martha's letters and every late afternoon he would read the letters "after a day's march, he would dig his foxhole, wash his hands under a canteen, unwrap the letters, hold them with the tips of his fingers". From this passage alone I can infer that Lieutenant Jimmy Cross has a deep affection for Martha since he makes it a routine in the midst of war to read her letters daily.

On top of that having an extreme delicacy for the letters themselves in taking the time to wash his hands and hold them with the tips of his fingers to prevent any leftover smudge from making its way onto the letters.

Furthermore in the scene O'Brien describes Jimmy's obsession with Martha " He would sometimes taste the envelope flaps, knowing her tongue had been there". That passage cements my idea that Jimmy is indeed a weirdo in my eyes and just like that Tim O'Brien has developed a character and leads me to wonder how is this obsessed weirdo going to lead his pack of young alpha company soldiers?

How is he going to lead when Marsh's always on his mind? Another scene that I quite can't get out of my head and that just drags me right in was when Rat Kelley found himself a wild baby buffalo. At first he tried helping it out and feeding it but there was no success, resulting in Rat Kelley to shoot the poor creature through the knee " It went down hard, then got up again" yet if that wasn't enough he continued shooting " He shot off an ear..... Hindquarters..... Title humps at its back". All for no apparent reason " It wasn't to kill; it was to hurt". Rat Kelley didn't want the easy way out for the baby buffalo, he wanted it to suffer just like he was for Kurt Lemon or even the war as a whole so he kept shooting until he shot it in throat " almost silent, just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been". After shot after shot it still showed life, it just didn't want to go away just like this war wouldn't go away. But why a baby buffalo?

Well maybe Rat Kelley felt it was a part of the land, just like the mine that killed Kurt Lemon was, and if he somehow avenged his close friend by making a baby buffalo suffer and die he would have avenged his friend in a way. Tim O'Brien would also explain the things the other soldier carried such as weapons and utilities in addition to adding amplification to the scene in order for the reader to develop a brief feeling for " the things they carried"

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and further drag you into the scene such as the precise detail of a 6. Pound nylon-covered flak jacket or the ALAS oil used to maintain an M-16.

Besides their relevant necessities the soldiers also carried objects that had a deeper meaning than just necessities, objects that helped them escape the war and remind them of life before the war, symbols of pop and a reason to keep fighting. Such as Henry Dobbins carrying his girlfriend's pantyhose which symbolizes his girlfriend by the smell of them and considers a luck charm even after his girlfriend dumped him "No sweat," he said.

"The magic doesn't go away. Then there's Ted Lavender with his tranquilizer to escape the hell hole the war was to him along with his 7 ounces of premium dope which ultimately cost him his life because he let his guard down while in the bathroom. Also there's Rat Kelley which carried comic books with him all indicating that he is very much a teenager that escapes from war and into his superhero fantasy in his comic books which could lead to explain how the giant mutant bugs were after him "He claimed the bugs were personally after his ass..... He said he could hear the bastards homing in on him" Sanders said.

These objects symbolized much more than just necessities but were a part of themselves, who they were and what they valued in life and it too played a part with Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, He was a young man seeking love, it was that blinded love that led to Ted Lavender's death and his own guilt towards it. In a way "the things they carried" also brought some of these soldiers down, including Rat Kelley's close friend Kurt Lemon which like Kelley was just

a boy who would often try too much to impress as O'Brien point out which ultimately caused him to laugh his way towards death on a 105 round mine.

In addition Tim O'Brien also puts anecdote to use throughout the " things they carried". Such as in the chapter " how to tell a true war story' where he starts off by debriefing about Rat Kelley and his situation while writing back to Kurt lemons sister after his death. O'Brien then goes back in time to clarify on what had happened with a touch of hyperbole because that's how you tell a " true war story': " watched lemon step from the shade into bright sunlight.... Hen he died it was almost beautiful, the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree full of moss and vines and white blossoms". It was a beautiful almost perfect death the way the sunlight came around to hand pick him from the war he didn't belong in. That's how you tell a " True war story', as it seemed and felt not what happened, cause the point is to leave the reader skeptical of the story " the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't" as O'Brien said.

Which is why you must add your own twists and turns to a story with all its distortion as it seemed to you. Another instance of anecdote occurs far later in the book in " the lives of the dead" where he explains how a story is very much parallel to a dream where the dead he once dumped come back smiling into the world. Such as in a 1969 afternoon he remembers taking sniper fire from a small village as lieutenant Jimmy Cross orders an air strike demolishing everything except an old dead man.

Well what seemed dead to O'Brien because most the platoon would go up to him and shake the old mans hand " How-Dee-do" said Dave Jensen and "

Chime five" Rat Kelley said soon afterwards they would all sit him up and toast with him all in O'Brien disgust. Yet O'Brien did much of the same with Linda (His first love). When soon after her death of cancer at nine years old Linda would come back to life in O'Brien dreams where they would have full conversations and she would even have birthday parties with him. To him it would all be too real then and even now at forty-three years of age.

At the end of the day Tim O'Brien effectively uses many literary devices in order to engage the reader and hypnotize them into his own little story telling world that you just don't want out. He leaves you guessing every turn of the page, Where he going to take you next? Because he might jump into the war or before or even long after and to the man he is today still struck with these memories and stories he has perfected for everyone to believe and keep wondering on how it all went down. In the process creating a perfect war story.