

Critical analysis: the things they carried

Business



In "The Things They Carried", by Tim O'Brien, the author portrays the soldiers' personalities through the things they carried on them. He also shows that some personalities aren't fit for war, you need to be strong. Throughout the story, he builds the characters personalities, and shows us who these people are, through their luggage. The main character, Jimmy Cross, is the platoon's leader. He is ordered to watch over everyone. Kiowa, a member of the platoon, is a very religious American Indian and is seen often in the story.

Ted Lavender is recurrent throughout the story in Jimmy's mind.

At the end of the story the significance of Pat Lavender is brought to attention. Kiowa carries a hunting hatchet and a bible in his rucksack. "Kiowa, a devout Baptist, carried an illustrated New Testament that had been presented to him by his father, who taught Sunday school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma" (117 O'Brien). Kiowa also "carried his grandmother's distrust of the white man, his grandfather's old hunting hatchet" (117 O'Brien). Kiowa is constantly disturbed about his surroundings but never wants to say so.

Kiowa carries the bible because he is very religious.

He reads the bible each night in his foxhole before he goes to bed. Kiowa makes Jimmy come to sense about the fantasies after Ted Lavender's death. Jimmy "shut down the daydreams. This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, where there were no pretty poems or midterm exams, a place where men died because of carelessness and gross stupidity. Kiowa was right.

Boom-down, and you were dead, never partly dead" (128 O'Brien).

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross is the platoon's commanding officer. He is consumed in this love for Martha, who is from his hometown. He can't push Martha out of his mind and concentrate on the war.

Day and night is spent thinking of Martha and reading letters from her. At night he would dig his foxhole " wash his hands under a canteen, unwrap the letters, hold them with the tips of his fingers, and spend the last hour of light pretending.

.. He wanted Martha to love him as he loved her" (117 O'Brien). While marching down the trail he sucks on a pebble that Martha sent him. " On the march, through the hot days of early April, he carried the pebble in his mouth, turning it with his tongue, tasting sea salts and moisture" (120 O'Brien). She picked the pebble up off of the beach for him.

He continues to think about the New Jersey shore instead of looking for signs of ambush. On occasion " he would yell at his men to spread out the column, to keep their eyes open, but then he would slip away into daydreams, just pretending, walking barefoot along the Jersey shore, with Martha, carrying nothing" (120 O'Brien). O'Brien's fantasy and daydreaming of Martha leads to the fall of his comrade, Ted Lavender. From that day on he changed his ways and tried to become more of a leader. On the morning after Ted Lavender died, " First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross crouched at the bottom of his foxhole and burned Martha's letters.

Then he burned the two Photographs.

.. He was determined to perform his duties firmly and without negligence”(127-128 O’Brien). Throughout the story, the author showed how different peoples’ objects contribute to their personality and to the platoon. Jimmy Cross is supposed to be a leader but fails miserably because he is too caught up in love fantasy.

This leads to the death of Ted Lavender because he was not watching the area for the enemy, he was thinking about home and Martha. Kiowa is part of the platoon and makes Jimmy realize that he has to do what is right.