

Postcolonial Truth and Trauma in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*

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Abstract

Many scholars have already used postcolonialism as a lens to read and analyze literary genres that represent many aspects of social interaction and human life in severe conditions. Kevin Powers is one of the writers who has served as an American veteran during war in Iraq. Even though his novel *The Yellow Birds* has been studied from various lenses, it has not been explored from the postcolonial prospects. Therefore, this study aims to analyze Powers' representation of truth and trauma in *The Yellow Birds*. It argues that during war psychological shocks influence those who participate in war. Moreover, war is a trick of the politicians to accomplish the colonizers' plans against the colonized. The study draws on many postcolonial and psychological thinkers to explain the targeted concepts. The findings suggest that staying for long periods in the battlefield and witnessing the atrocities of war result in traumatic life that distort the normality of human life.

Keywords: (Colonialism, Psychological Trauma, Kevin Burrows, Yellow Birds).

دراسة الحقيقة والصدمة النفسية لرواية الطيور الصفراء لكيفن بورز من منظور ما بعد

الحقبة الاستعمارية

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الملخص

إنَّ العديد من الباحثين قد عمدوا الى استخدام نظرية ما بعد الحقبة الاستعمارية كمنظور لقراءة وتحليل الاجناس الادبية التي تعرض جوانب عديدة من التفاعل المجتمعي وحياة الناس تحت ظروف العيش الصعبة. ولعل كيفن بورز احد هؤلاء الكتاب الذين خدموا كجندي في الجيش الامريكي خلال الحرب في العراق. رغم دراسة روايته الطيور الصفراء من جوانب عديدة الا انها لم يتم دراستها من جوانب نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. ولذلك فان هذه الدراسة تهدف لتحليل العروض التي قدمها بورز في روايته مثل الحقيقة والصدمة النفسية. تقتض هذه الدراسة جدلا بانه وخلال الحروب فان الصدمة النفسية تؤثر على اولئك المنخرطين في المعارك. علاوة على ذلك، فان الحرب العوية السياسيين لإنجاز مخططاتهم الاستعمارية ضد الناس المستعمرة. ان الدراسة تضع نصب عينها أنموذجا للعمل للعديد من مفكري نظريتي التحليل النفسي و ما بعد الاستعمار لشرح المفاهيم التي تستهدفها الدراسة. وتقتض الدراسة نتائج البحث وهي ان البقاء لفترات طويلة في ميدان المعارك و مشاهدة الفظائع بأَم العين ينتج عنها نمط حياة من الصدمة النفسية التي تعكر صفو الحياة وتجعل الحياة الطبيعية للبشر ضرب من الاستحالة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (الاستعمار، الصدمة النفسية، كيفن بورز، الطيور الصفراء).

1. Introduction

War literature is a type of literary writings that registers the experiences, feelings, sufferings, and attempts to achieve liberation. It is concerned with shedding light on the perspectives of living under the domination of the colonizing power or representing the heroic features of some of those involved in a conflict. As clarified by Edward Said in

his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), the "western literature" that has been concerned with war has to a great extent been involved in showing other nations as peoples, who lack the prospects of culture (p. xvi). He asserts that such forms of depicting others this way is due to the national spirit of superiority that the western colonizers have endowed themselves with to be a master of the world. This represents the imperial wish that Said clarifies in the attempts of the European to invade others and distort their culture by the means of the western war literature.

In his *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha develops many concepts about the perspectives of the colonial domination. More precisely, he offers a complete definition to the postcolonial approach as he asserts that "Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order" (p. 245). Thus, postcolonialism provides interpretations to the human relationships when the colonizer suggests his privileges to others, who suffer from the malicious practices against them. In other words, new interpretations of the Western colonial strategies, practices, and tactics have been examined since Western authorities become involved in dominating others historically and culturally. Distorting the cultural identity of the colonized nations become a colonial priority to prevail others and preserve the domination and superiority of the Western colonizers.

In his introduction of *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell clarifies how the modern notion of war is different due to the modern memory of the world that has been haunted with terrible shocks. For him, war results in various forms of human catastrophes.

He asserts that "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends" (p. 8). War is a curse that falls upon people to destroy their tranquil perspectives of living. It leads to catastrophes, homelessness, and immigration and enormous numbers of refugees. War is a tactic of domination that seeks to control others in order to exploit them and turn them into surrendering followers.

Powers' *The Yellow Birds* depicts an American veteran's life experience before, during and after participation in the American war in Iraqi. Powers reflects his own experience in the battlefield in his novel that represents the psychological and physical suffering of the protagonist, John Bartle of the twenty-one-year-old and his companion Daniel Murph the eighteen-year-old have felt. Being shocked by the horrible realities of war and the number of dead soldiers, each of the two men has to take care of his own life for survival. They become used to destruction everywhere and to killing even civilians coldly as a strategy for survival which Bartle detests, even though he considers a necessity. One night the colonel arrives at the base to tell his soldiers that they have a fighting mission in the nearby orchard. He tries his best to make his soldiers believe that their battle in Iraq is something urged in the Bible, the thing that makes Bartle represents the three years of an absurd fight in the same area. After the death of the doctor with whom Murph has used to stay, he flees from the base to be tortured and killed on one of the minarets in Tal Afar. Bartle remembers his promise which he has already made to Murph's mother blaming himself for not caring for her son as he has promised. When Bartle goes back home, he is sent to prison on accusation of responsibility of Murph's death. At the same time, Sterling commits

suicide. After years of prison life, he goes to live isolated in the Blue Ridge Mountains. There, Bartle starts forgetting about his past memories and he leads his tranquil life. This study aims to examine truth about the false policy of the American leaders. In addition, it seeks to show the suffering of the American soldiers, who do not know why they have been brought to such land and what is the real purpose of the war.

2. Theoretical Background: Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism as a literary approach has been evolved to examine and deal with the relationships between the colonizers and the colonized. More evidently, the theory has brought forth the perspectives of human suffering that result from the colonial practices against others and are depicted in literary productions to convey the while and after era that is featured with the colonial domination over many nations. However, theory has achieved its wide and vast popularity, depending on the enormous contributions of anti-colonial theorists like Albert Memmi, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and many others. Such popular anti-colonial theorists have been involved in exposing how the life of the colonized nations has become miserable due to the colonial and imperial strategies of prevailing others, exploiting them, preserve colonial domination and repression, and marginalizing and excluding the colonized in colonies and host communities as well.

However, the wide efforts of the aforementioned theorists have been concerned with coding the various concepts of the theory and this has in turn led to a complete approach. Particularly, the perfect and complete version of the theory can be within the theorizations of Homi Bhabha. The turning point in the completion of the theory is seen after

the publishing of Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994). Accordingly, postcolonialism has become an approach with complete definitions and concepts since Bhabha has highlighted the fundamental essence and purpose of the theory. He explains the nature of the theory as "Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order" (p. 245). For Bhabha, postcolonialism provides developed, increased, and various interpretations to the colonial tactics, strategies, propagandas, practices, and plans that the Western colonial authorities have adopted and developed to assure their cultural rights of domination over other groups.

2.1. Postcolonial Trauma

Trauma is a developed branch of psychoanalysis, which is concerned with examining the human behaviours and responses after certain terrible moments in life. Apparently, the first spark of the theory goes back to the contributions of Sigmund Freud (1908/1915), Roland Fairbairn (1952), Harry Sullivan (1953), Roland Laing (1960), Michel Balint (1968), and Cathy Caruth (1996). However, Henry Lothane (2006) suggests that trauma is an "investigative tool" that can be used to examine and interpret human behaviours while and after specific conditions that form unforgettable shocks to individuals (p. 711). In this meaning, trauma is considered a perfect theory that has its own concepts about human behaviours and their responses in the community.

Walter Young (1988) argues that individuals interact perfectly "under normal conditions" (p. 35). However, pressure and shocks from outer threats might lead to disturbance in human behaviour since

individuals lack the perspectives of integration in their social surroundings. In other meaning, terrible moments in one's life might lead to traumatic life since past memories are brought back or recalled in the human mind as constant threats.

In her *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith Herman defines trauma as "The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (p. 1). Accordingly, trauma includes psychological conflicts between hiding the shocks and provoking it to others. Thus, traumatized people stay under the threats of terrible moments that they hide in order to be safe. However, hiding is not a solution since the behaviour of the traumatized people shows disturbance that others find difficulties in justifying.

Contradiction and fragmentation are two perspectives of trauma. Herman argues that "People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy" (p. 1). Thus, traumatized people prefer to keep their past experience secret and this keeps them under threat and pressure of recalling their past.

Moreover, traumatized people suffer from the symptoms of disorder that can be seen through social separation and the fear of the recalling of past memories of trauma. According to Herman (2012), social disconnection result from not feeling support in the social surroundings. Traumatized people feel that others do not care for their suffering and the result they prefer isolation to sociability. Herman asserts that "Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love,

and community" (p. 37). In this saying, isolation is seen as the way for salvation that traumatized people follow in order to escape trauma and its threats. Herman suggests that such type of introvert behaviour is the result of the malfunction that is seen when traumatic events "violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis" (p. 37). Trauma changes individuals into introvert ones that reject to be involved social relationships and interactions since they see in the interference of others in their life a chance for the repetition of the same terrible experience. Hence, Herman clarifies that "Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community" (p. 37). Thus, sociability becomes a threat that individuals try to escape through isolation. In other words, isolation is thought of by traumatized people as a way to hinder the occurrence of the shocks again.

The other symptom of trauma is the repetition of the threats that traumatized people feel. Herman (2012) claims that the influences of trauma become a permanent or constant alert, which works as a trigger of the horrible moments. Traumatized people feel he persistence and repetition of the terrible threats that haunt their minds. Herman calls this feeling of 'hyperarousal', which is "the first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocation', and sleeps poorly" (p. 25). Hyperarousal can be seen through disturbance that traumatized people reflect through their changeable mood and irritable behaviours. Herman adds that "Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present" (p. 26). The effects of trauma last for long periods after the horrible moments that traumatized people experience.

2.2. Truth of War

Wars in the modern age are triggered on political or economic causes. Therefore, the colonial powers have tendency to prove that wars are justified for their own reason that often lack validity or reality. In other words, the colonial politicians have had specific policies to justify their invasion to other nations, which in turn try to reflect unjustified reasons. For example, the Anglo-American war against Iraq in 2003 is set as a way of liberating the Iraqi people from the domination of the Ex-Iraqi regime and to dispose the world from the mass destructive weapons that the regime develops. Years after the end of the war, the American leaders confess that there are no mass destructive weapons in Iraq. At the same time, the war has led to the destruction of the Iraqi community and its infrastructure. Consequently, what the colonial power suggests as truth about their wars is proved to be a propaganda to exploit the wealth of others. Thus, truth of wars becomes an interesting topic for many anti-colonial thinkers and theorists.

Paul Fusell (1975) assets that truth about colonial wars is a complicated matter that burden the colonized nations because of the ambiguity that the wars create. He argues that "If truth is the main casualty in war, ambiguity is another" (p. 87). The colonial power tends to distort reality through presenting moral causes for their military campaigns against others. However, their moral causes are later proved to be false after the massive destruction that colonial wars cause to other nations. Truth is the way that the western colonizer follows to depict war according to his policies. Rather, it is a form of distorting the face of others according to the requirements of domination. For Said (1993), truth of war is "the political reality as more than a source

of novelistic irony" (p. 204). This shows how the western colonizer has his distinguished lens to judge issues according to his will. All the concerns of the colonial power are to show themselves as liberating powers that work morally for the sake of the poor peoples. Unlike that, such false claims become a mere justification for interference and domination.

In the same context, Said (1979) rejects the colonial justification about the wars that colonial powers start to dominate others. He explains that the colonial powers depend on political causes to justify wars and that is seen through the colonial efforts to interfere in other nations' affairs. Said argues "One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away" (p. 6). The colonial strategies are built on their own views that justify interference in others and dominating them. Truths that the colonial powers suggests are only political tactics of domination that show morality in using power against others. However, the terrible experiences of various nations with the colonial power show the falsity of the colonial claims.

Said (1993) adds that "Truth, in short, becomes a function of learned judgment" (67). In this meaning, truth about wars do not reflect realities of the situation. Rather, they convey the way the colonizers adopt and use to justify domination of others. Justification of the colonial aggression against others is a strategic involvement of the colonial power. For example, the Western colonizers suggest their superiority to Arabs since they [Arabs] like other colonized nations in the West lack the same cultural thinking that the Westerners have. Said asserts that "On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other

there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these" (p. 49). Thus, colonial justification of domination occurs through showing the inferiority of others. Arabs are seen as illogical groups that do not use correct thinking about life. This way, the colonial power creates a cause to interfere in others and dominate them.

Ashcroft and his followers (2000) share the same notion about colonial truth and justification of domination. They argue that colonial domination requires "the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups" (p. 37). In this meaning, truth about wars is not what reality is. Rather, it is a reflection of the colonial views that seek to prove the colonial right decision when the colonial powers invade others and exploit their land, people, and wealth.

Colonial powers believe in their superiority to others, therefore, all their claims about the inferiority of others are to justify their domination of those nations. Accordingly, all the efforts of the colonial powers are to dominate others, suggesting morality as a cause for domination. However, all the colonial wars against other nations prove the opposite since the destruction that wars create is enormous and colonized nations suffer from its consequences years after liberation. Truth becomes a colonial material of cheating others in order to show morality that wars completely lack. Eventually, concepts of truth and trauma will be the essence of the analysis in the later chapter of this study.

3. War Experiences in Powers' The Yellow Birds

3.1. Trauma

Powers uses many pictures that reflect the war and the life of those who participate in it. More than delivering a registration of human practices in war, Powers aims to draw his readers' attention towards trauma through exposing the severe moments of war and the recurrent threats of death that have haunted the life of the veterans during war. He depicts many of prospects of life that the veterans have witnessed during their service in Iraq war. Trauma is the result of life that can be categorized within three main groups: waiting for death, practising the killing and urging the killing practices and advocating them in the novel. The very beginning of the novel shows Powers' indication of his narrator; Bartle, who describes war and the life of the American veterans there. The novel opens as "THE WAR TRIED to kill us in the spring" (p. 9). The passage depicts war as a fasting monster which attracts people to be its prey. It shows that the veterans are in a fierce trap that waits for its prey to swallow after waiting for a long time. It is war that seems a capturing tool of the victims who just wait for their vague destination that is determined by the deadly waiting for the unknown. Powers compares war to the fierce criminal who waits his victim in the dark; the eyes are following that victim everywhere. In the same line, the hungry war follows all those on the battlefield. Veterans are just waiting for their turn to fall in its grip.

The fear of death is what has made those veterans in a bad psychological situation. Their life has turned into a misery of waiting death. The even do not have the trust that they could survive the killing at some moment. Murph is the most effected character by that truth of death-haunted life. Even Bartle suspects their survival of the damn trap of death. He recalls those moments when a conversation between him

and Murph about their survival has occurred. He says: "Yeah, Murph. We'll be OK," I said. But I didn't believe it" (p. 23). It seems that all those veterans suspects survival in that war. They are just waiting for death to arrive one day.

Bartle recalls his memory of killing when entering the city of Tal afar after destroying it completely. The scenes have been a total shock since the corpse of the kids are everywhere they try to tread. He describes the city as a city of ghosts due to the massive destruction saying that: "The ghosts of the dead filled the empty seats of every gate I passed: boys destroyed by mortars and rockets and bullets" (p. 51). Thus, Bartle suggests that war is a destruction of life and dreams that those kids lose for no reason. He is in a disturbed situation between thanking Heavens for staying alive and thinking of possibility to complete life after witnessing the practices of the unmerciful destructions of human life. In war, everything is destroyed; every soul, everybody and ever life.

Bartle's suffering comes after witnessing the killing of people. Among the worst moments of life that has resulted in his trauma is seeing the corpse of Murph who has been killed and distorted in a terrible way. His memory has turned to flash backs of their old days from the very beginning of the novel. Therefore, throughout the novel Bartle recalls memories of Murph, one of which is about the faded smile of Murph due to the severe condition of the fight and the death threats that have haunted their lie. He remarks that "There were times when I looked at him and could only see two small shadows, two empty holes" (p. 10). To a great extent, these memories indicate the repetition of hurt in the Bartle's psyche due to loss of his friend.

Herman and Foster's notion of the compulsive repetition of terrible memories is seen through Bartle's inability to dispose of the image of killed friend. He suffers the loss of this poor young man whom he has loved and shared the worst moments in life with. Bartle recalls his memory when he dreams of his death during the times that have influenced their life due to the involvement in the fierce struggles. To a great degree, trauma is presented in Bartle's illusive suggestions of imagining the fighters in empty houses. He recalls that, "there were no people. In some of the rooms we thought we saw people and we yelled out sharply for the people who were not there to get on the floor" (p. 10). This same illusion is the traumatic perspectives that Foster and Herman suggest about the repetition of traumatic threats. Bartle suffers the confusion of the mind between recalling the past memories and the safety feeling. During the war, he is haunted with fear that makes him unable to think or act well. Another time Bartle says that "The memory seemed impossibly distant, buried in the dust, waiting for some brush to uncover it" (p. 13). This indicates the repetition of fear threats that he and Murph have suffered a lot. Waiting for death has the basic traumatic impacts upon the mind and soul. The mentality is disturbed and Bartle suffers the confusion of memories. For him, the nightmare has come true. The same point is that Foster suggests "it [trauma] looks like to nightmare as shock victims who prepare for disasters that have already come" (p. 136). Bartle lives his confusion between believing the death of Murph and the recurrent representation of his memories.

The perspective of shock is what human beings cannot get rid of for so long. It is the unforgotten image that strikes the mind between now and then recalling the bad memories in one's later life. Bartle suffers that shock the first time he comes across Murph's body torn and distorted. He tells his heart broken due to the unbelievable scene "We

pulled Murph free from the tangle of brush and laid him out in some shadow of respectability. We stood and looked him over. His ears were cut off. His nose cut off, too. He had been imprecisely castrated" (p. 95). trauma is a reflection of reality that stands against the false imagination. Such reality is experienced by Bartle when he sees the corpse of his best friend. It is not the previous fear that acts in his psyche now. It is the real death in its worse images.

Bartle's state of confusion of memory results in the disturbance that occupies his life after Murph's death. He seems the most affected person by the killing of Murph, which leads him to complete isolation. Sometimes he thinks of committing suicide for blaming himself for that incident. Some other times he lives isolated without noticing those who act in his surroundings. Bartle describes this situation as "Sure, there is a fine line between not wanting to wake up and actually wanting to kill yourself" (p. 64). Bartle's life has been only a sort of chaos of mentality and sensation due to his loss and the haunting blames of his own self. Moreover, traumatic confusion is what Bartle suffers due to his inability to differentiate between his life after being back home and the recurrent recalling of his memories.

Bartle has suffered the "obsessive fixation on the object in melancholy" (p. 132) after Murph' death. Despite the passing of days, the effect of that distorted corpse is kept stuck in his mind. He is unable to believe the reality of his friend's death. He thinks that Murph is here, in the nearby, in some places, but he feels that he is unable to reach him. These traumatic perspectives have the negative impacts of distracting Bartle's soul and mind. He explains that situation "I hadn't known what I was doing then, but my memories of Murph were a kind of misguided archaeology" (p. 66). This illustrates the contradiction in human behaviour and thinking as well. It seems that trauma operates

within a continuous series that each episode involves the recalling of the previous and at the same time paves the way for a recalling soon again.

Bartle's life seems unmoving further after the killing of Murph. He has been haunted by memories that he even has difficulties in recalling. He lives his situation of in-between reality and illusion. He has lost all his ability of remembering his words and promises. Now, there are no meanings for things. He does not care for losing anything. He shows the situation through the following passage that shows how life has been only a sort of absurdity "I couldn't think of anything else. My days passed sitting in the dust, throwing rocks into a bucket, missing, didn't matter. I thought a lot about that ridiculous promise I'd made to Murphy's mother" (p. 73). This shows how Bartle tries to collect his broken memories that has turned him into an astray man who does not know what to think about and what to believe in. Bartle, who suffers a lot after Murph's death, lives in a complete chaotic life and memories that fill all his thinking. Every shared incident with Murph is represented in his mind for so long.

3.2. Truth of war

Powers' *The Yellow Birds* is a novel of war with a lot of political perspectives. The writer himself tells his story while servicing as a veteran in Iraq. He has witnessed all the aforementioned scenes of killing practices, slaughtering people, destroying cities, loss of souls and trauma. For that same reason, his novel in general inquires the absurdity of war that destroys life.

The first image that has a referent is the celebration of the coming back veterans who are seen as heroes of war that have accomplished a noble mission in defending their land. Bartle feels that the truth is what people do not know about war. He has participated at some points of

his military service with the killing practices and with destroying cities that he expresses his shame of it many times in the novel as seen in the previous section. In the same line, in the United States, he is ashamed to tell his friends the truth that he believes in it about war and its cruelty. He narrates his psychological suffering due to that as follows:

I had become a kind of cripple. They were my friends, right? Why didn't I just wade out to them? What would I say? "Hey, how are you?" they'd say. And I'd answer, "I feel like I'm being eaten from the inside out and I can't tell anyone what's going on because everyone is so grateful to me all the time and I'll feel like I'm ungrateful or something. Or like I'll give away that I don't deserve anyone's gratitude and really they should all hate me for what I've done but everyone loves me for it and it's driving me crazy." Right.
(p. 68)

Bartle suffers being one of those who participated in the killing practices and who deserve no gratitude; however, a lot of people at home do not know about such practices conducted by the veterans during war.

Moreover, the sacred mission that veteran have believed in turns to be false and what Bartle cares about is recognizing the reality of world through war. It is the greedy war that suggests nobility in trivial practices. Eventually, Bartle comes to the shocking truth through indicating the huge number of the tombs of those veterans who pass away and registered as numbers. They are real people who are killed for no sacred or noble reason. Bartle tells that "We only pay attention to rare things, and death was not rare. Rare was the bullet with your name on it, the IED buried just for you. Those were the things we watched for" (p. 12). War has turned death into a phenomenon that is

seen everywhere Bartle turns his eyes. Therefore, truth in war is death spreading more than achieving noble goals of defending the land of home from any threats. Bartle seems to rethink about war and concludes that it is the play of death spreading; rather than noble goals achieving.

In war, the only truth is that human beings cannot activate like those who are away from it. Bartle shares the same feelings that Murph has. One of his memories indicates how Bartle thinks of being tight in war. He considers this feeling is a false one since in war there are no people to avoid death. Bartle says: "You and me, we're tight just cause" (p. 78). Bartle sees in his all assumptions about life and safety in war a false suggestion since those who participate in wars lose their control of everything. The only truth that Bartle suggests is recognizing how artificial their thinking about war has been.

Moreover, among the shocking realities of war is how the American veterans' corpses travel their long journeys back home. When those veterans reach home, they are buried to be on the lists of those who have defended home away. Bartle sees in that an artificial illusion that seeks hiding the truth of killing for no more than a war game which mothers have to pay a high price for as seen in Murph's death and the suffering of his mother who reflects the suffering of the American mothers because of war. Bartle refers to all realities during his conversation with Sterling about Murph's death. He expresses the reality of the situation in the following passage that shows women and their suffering after losing their kids in war:

It would land in Dover, and someone would receive it, with a flag, and the thanks of a grateful nation, and in a moment of weakness his mother would turn up the lid of the casket and

see her son, Daniel Murphy, see what had been done to him, and he would be buried and forgotten. (p. 95)

This indicates that life is destroyed because of wars and mothers lose their appetite of good living after losing their sons for missions they do not if they deserve such a massive loss of souls. Bartle feels empty when he is back home. He has no answers to tell Murph's mother about how her son has been slaughtered in war or how he has failed in keeping his promise of protecting him and bringing him back home. The woman now is full of grieve about her loss. Bartle blames himself of leaving the body of her son by the river which has caused her a lot of pain. He fears the truth that Murph is killed because of him. He recognizes that Murph has been isolated in his later days. His fault is leaving him for his isolation.

The same feeling that Bartle feels about Sterling's suicide. It is the truth of death that has haunted all the novel. Survival is a matter of chance during war. Maybe, those who care for life survive, but unfortunately death is uncontrolled power that war uses to destroy all participants in the battlefields. Bartle says: "What do I care about the truth now? And Sterling? The truth is he cared nothing for himself. I'm not even sure he would have realized he was permitted to have his own desires and preferences (p. 86). Bartle suspects that Sterling death is one of the ways that Sterling tries to escape war after discovering the absurdity of life in war.

Bartle goes to prison on charge of having the responsibility of Murph's death. He accepts the penalty to stay in prison for a period of time. The only truth for him inside his cell is that in war people lose souls and values as well. He tries to overcome being fallen and seeks a new life out of war and the killing practices. Bartle seeks a change of life away from his memories of war that seems a heavy burden for him.

Now, he is familiar with the truth of war. War is a political game that mothers and innocent people pay its highest prices.

4. Conclusion

This study has dealt with Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*. Trauma and truth of war are the main potentials of the study. The findings show that the fear of death and watching of the killing practices result in trauma that Bartle suffers a lot from. It is the shocks of seeing Murph's body and how it has been distorted by the Iraqi Fighters. Bartle is haunted with that image for so long. This is seen through his losing of the ability to live normally. He is not able to think of everything but that shocking image of the torn body. Furthermore, the novel shows the truth that Powers wants to convey to his readers that all assumptions about heroism and the other noble values are false ones. Those veterans feel ashamed of their practices in war and the time they are considered national heroes. Powers himself has witnessed many of the killing practices, slaughtering people, destroying cities, loss of souls and trauma. For that same reason, his novel in general inquires the absurdity of war that destroys life.

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