

Melody Dorame

English 450

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### Bear the Burden of War

There are many contributing factors that may affect a soldier's conditioning, mentally and physically. A soldier is put through rigorous training before being sent to war, but no amount of training can prepare him for what he is about to face or for what is to come after. *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien lists each character and what he carried physically and literally in order to define them as individuals and gives the characters values, beliefs, relationships, fears, and dreams. O'Brien takes these meaningful and reoccurring symbols, objects, and figures to show how a physical item can contribute to an emotional burden. The weight carried by these men is determined by rank and responsibility and the same can be said for the heavy emotional loads they carry as well. In order to get a better understanding of what these soldiers in the book were forced to endure, a representation through art can sometimes bring on emotions felt by the soldiers. Melody Dorame's evocative painting entitled, "Weight of War" emulates the mental and physical burden that tangible and intangible items bear on a soldier during the time of war.

With this intention, the shadowing of the soldier's face in Dorame's artwork reflects the desolation of a soldier during war. Being the largest image on the piece, the main focus of the soldier is his face and shoulder, which are on the right hand side of the canvas. The man is clearly dressed in uniform and is wearing a helmet to emphasize that he is indeed dressed for battle. The entire side of his face and eye area is shadowed in a deep black, contrasting with the color of flesh on the opposing side. The shadowing was with the intent of showing no identity for

this man he is just “another combatant”; an expendability. The soldier has no face and no name, he is just another entity. The contrast also displays the soldier to have no emotion on his face keeping his composure on the outside but hiding any sensation he may be feeling on the inside. In this case, the shadowing of the soldier’s face signifies the main focus of the art piece and how the surrounding items affect him mentally and physically.

In a like manner, the intangible items in “Weight of War” reveal the psychological burdens of the mind of a soldier. These intangibles exhibited on the painting are displayed as words and images to represent the incorporeal. Spread around, but always above the soldier’s shoulder line in order to represent weight being bared, these items include figures such as a black cat, praying hands the word “guilt” in bright red, a grim reaper and a grieving figure with the word “grief” above his head. The black cat represents superstition either being good luck or bad luck that the soldiers believe so much in. The praying hands signify the religious belief, even if the soldier is or isn’t religious in a Christian way he still has values and morals. The word “guilt” in bright red symbolizes the blood that has been shed and there is guilt for outliving others. Death again is represented by the grim reaper himself, never knowing if he is coming for one soldier or the next. And lastly the grief stricken figure with the word “grief”, which is left colorless to show the emptiness that grief can leave in a soldier. Each of these intangible symbols are significant in the presentation of the emotional burdens in a soldier’s life.

By the same token, the tangible items in Dorame’s painting emphasize the actual and physical weight carried by a soldier during war. These objects include condoms, a New Testament bible, love letters, photographs, comic books, gum, a stocking, a diary, dope/tranquilizers, and a folded flag. Each of these items fall between the intangible items and are actually material items that can be felt, not just painted on the canvas. Again, leaving the

items above the soldier's shoulder line, these items characterize physical burdens and their weight. In the book, *The Things They Carried*, each soldier carries a specific item to represent who they are as a person. Kiowa, for instance, carried the New Testament bible that was given to him as a gift by his father. Henry Dobbins, being superstitious, carries his girlfriend's stockings around his neck for good luck and lastly Ted Lavender, who was so nervous at times, carried the dope and tranquilizers to calm himself down. Since the soldier in the painting is not one man, but all men, these articles can represent any soldier. By not painting these items, Dorame kept the tangible substances real and touchable in order to characterize with the soldiers and the actual items they carried. The characteristics of these show physically what affects the soldiers and how they have meaning to show how each soldier is affected mentally as well.

Even more, the color blue in Dorame's "Weight of War" portrays the loneliness for a man during time of war and the seclusion that surrounds him and at the same time a longing for freedom. The blue paint is the entire back round of the art piece and is a well-lit tone of blue. The hue is that of a slight brightness, almost identical to the sky on a perfect day. The blue background attributes the effect of isolation and sadness that the soldier feels during a period of solitude. A soldier may appear to be composed when necessary but the deep emotions buried within can cause a tremendous amount of stress and worry effecting him mentally during war. For example, Jimmy Cross seemed to appear in order as a leader but in fact had his head in the clouds and by daydreaming lost a soldier. Blue also corresponds with the sky and being free and a sense of doing what one chooses instead of taking orders like soldiers are forced to. Freedom may be what a soldier may want more than anything during these times of war and hostility. This use of the color blue shows how the soldier can be influenced by his emotions and the emotional burdens that come with time of war.

Therefore, Dorame's portrait is one view of the mental and physical symbols, items and emotions that soldiers carry with them during war and how it effects them. By capturing the soldier and the emotionless image he displays, the portrait emphasizes how on the outside a soldier is to remain collected at all times. On the other hand, the displaying of the intangible symbols shows how soldiers are not just robots of war, but men with emotions, values, fears, and beliefs and gives them identity. The tangible items are not only a reminder that the items carried by soldiers have actual weight in pounds, but have weight on the mind as well. These items and symbols act as a window to the emotional burdens and defines the soldiers throughout the war and after.