

THE REPRESENTATION OF INNOCENCE AND ITS LOSS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE IN BẢO NINH'S *THE SORROW OF WAR*

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Abstract

Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* offers a haunting portrayal of the emotional and psychological aftermath of the Vietnam War through the central themes of love, loss, and trauma. This study examines how the protagonist, Kien, navigates his fractured identity in the aftermath of conflict, with particular emphasis on his relationship with Phuong and his recurring memories of the battlefield. Drawing on Linda B. Sherby's psychoanalytic framework, which views love as essential to meaningful life and loss as inevitable yet integrative, the research interprets how war destabilizes emotional continuity and ruptures relational bonds. Through close textual analysis and thematic interpretation, the novel is revealed to depict love as both redemptive and destructive—offering fleeting solace while also intensifying grief. Kien's fragmented recollections and emotional disconnection illustrate the lingering grip of unprocessed mourning. The study also analyzes how the novel's nonlinear structure reflects the disorienting nature of trauma and memory, reinforcing Sherby's notion that healing requires confronting and carrying loss. Ultimately, *The Sorrow of War* transcends national history, presenting a universal reflection on how war transforms love into longing, and loss into an enduring, unresolved presence within the self. This research underscores the novel's relevance as a postwar narrative of emotional survival.

Keywords: *Love and Loss; Postwar Narratives; Psychoanalytic; The Sorrow of War; Trauma and Memory*

INTRODUCTION

War literature has long served as a reflective medium, capturing not only the physical destruction of conflict but also its profound emotional and psychological consequences. It functions as a cultural repository where individual trauma intersects with collective memory, shaping the ways societies remember and process violence (Tal, 1996). From Homer's *Iliad* to Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, war narratives have offered windows into the human condition under extreme circumstances. In this continuum, Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* stands out not simply as a Vietnamese war novel but as a poignant psychological study of postwar trauma and emotional dislocation.

Ninh's narrative transcends traditional war storytelling. Rather than glorifying combat or upholding nationalist ideologies, *The Sorrow of War* foregrounds the fragmented psyche of a survivor. The novel destabilizes the heroic war narrative by privileging emotional and existential suffering over military action (Bourke, 1999). The protagonist Kien's internal battles are rendered more vividly than his engagements on the battlefield. This perspective aligns with a growing body of postwar literature that prioritizes introspection and vulnerability as central modes of resistance to institutionalized war discourse.

Written from the viewpoint of a North Vietnamese soldier, *The Sorrow of War* offers a rare, intimate insight into the other side of the Vietnam War, which is often dominated by Western narratives. Drawing from his personal experiences as a soldier, Bảo Ninh presents a deeply human portrait that eschews ideological binaries. His voice, both raw and poetic, captures the fractured consciousness of those who return from war irrevocably changed. This lends the novel a universal dimension, echoing the experiences of veterans across time and geography.

One of the novel's most compelling features is its exploration of love as both sanctuary and affliction. Kien's memories of Phuong, his childhood sweetheart, serve as emotional anchor points throughout the novel. However, this love is never redemptive; rather, it is steeped in regret, longing, and irretrievable loss. As Kaplan (2005) notes, trauma often entangles itself with intimate memories, making love a site of both comfort and renewed pain. In *The Sorrow of War*, love is inextricably linked to trauma, prompting readers to reevaluate romantic idealism in wartime literature.

Similarly, the pervasive theme of loss extends far beyond the death of comrades or the destruction of landscapes. It penetrates Kien's sense of self, eroding his identity and leaving him emotionally unmoored. This loss is totalizing—it touches his past, present, and imagined future. In this way, Bảo Ninh articulates a holistic vision of trauma where personal relationships are as damaged as the physical world (LaCapra, 2014). Through the figure of Kien, the reader confronts the psychological void that persists even after the war ends.

The destruction of innocence is another critical motif. Kien's transformation from an idealistic youth to a disillusioned survivor mirrors the collective trauma of a generation sacrificed to war. The novel interrogates the myth of patriotic duty by showing how war not only kills bodies but also corrupts minds and ideals. As Felman and Laub (1992) argue, trauma narratives frequently expose the collapse of meaning itself, and Kien's loss of innocence becomes a symbol of existential rupture.

Structurally, *The Sorrow of War* employs a nonlinear, fragmented narrative that mirrors the workings of post-traumatic memory. The novel defies chronological order, instead oscillating between moments of the past and present, reflecting how trauma distorts temporal continuity (Caruth, 1996). Kien's recollections surface abruptly, often intruding upon the present without warning, a stylistic device that immerses readers in the disorientation of trauma. This reflects the novel's commitment to psychological realism over linear storytelling.

Moreover, Bảo Ninh uses recurring symbols to give shape to Kien's inner turmoil. The Jungle of Screaming Souls, recurring dreams, and natural imagery evoke the invisible wounds of war. These symbols function not merely as literary devices but as expressions of the unspeakable, the inexpressible nature of trauma. As Whitehead (2004) posits, trauma fiction often relies on symbolic language to represent the unreliability of memory and the failure of conventional language to capture suffering.

While situated firmly within the context of the Vietnam War, the novel's emotional core—centered on grief, longing, and psychological fragmentation—transcends its historical specificity. It speaks to the broader human condition, asking how one continues to live after encountering the extremities of violence and loss. In doing so, it joins a canon of global trauma literature that seeks to universalize the emotional aftershocks of war.

Kien's love for Phuong, riddled with guilt and nostalgia, also becomes an entry point for examining how personal memories intersect with collective trauma. The intimacy between them is forever haunted by violence, making it impossible to disentangle affection from agony. The novel suggests that in the wake of catastrophic events, no memory remains untainted, and no relationship remains intact. This aligns with contemporary trauma theory, which holds that trauma is recursive and relational, always embedded within human bonds (Bennett, 2005).

By blending personal narrative with historical trauma, *The Sorrow of War* resists the reductive binaries of victor and victim. Kien's story becomes a microcosm of Vietnam's national trauma, allowing Bảo Ninh to critique both personal and institutional mechanisms of memory. As such, the novel becomes not only a work of fiction but also a form of witnessing. It reflects how literature can carry the ethical burden of memory in the aftermath of atrocity.

Although *The Sorrow of War* has been widely examined through the lens of trauma and memory, this paper focuses specifically on how Bảo Ninh illustrates the death of innocence through interwoven themes of love and loss. In doing so, it contributes a new perspective to the scholarship by situating these themes within the framework of symbolic narrative structure and psychological fragmentation. The aim is to offer a more emotionally textured reading of the novel—one that emphasizes not just what was lost in the war, but how it was lost.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies qualitative literary analysis through close textual reading of *The Sorrow of War*, guided by Linda B. Sherby's (2013) psychoanalytic framework of love and loss. Sherby posits that love is essential to a meaningful life, yet is always threatened by inevitable loss. She argues that unresolved grief can fracture the psyche and lead to emotional stagnation unless consciously integrated into personal narratives. It identifies how these concepts manifest in Kien's relationship with Phuong, his alienation, and the psychological echo of war trauma. Narrative elements—particularly fragmentation, repetition, and memory—are examined as literary expressions of mourning and psychic dislocation. Drawing from Sherby's notion that emotional healing involves carrying the lost with us while learning to move forward, the methodology focuses on how Kien's trauma resists closure and expresses the impossibility of total emotional reconciliation after war. This analysis is supported by additional trauma theory and Southeast Asian postwar literature to enrich interpretation.

The analysis is also informed by Stuart Hall's (1997) representative approach to media and culture, which looks at how ideas, identities, and emotions are constructed and conveyed through language and symbols. In this case, the researcher would analyze how Ninh uses narrative techniques and symbolism to represent love, loss, and trauma in the context of the war, and how these representations shape our understanding of the experiences of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Kien. Hall's concept of representation is vital in understanding how the novel constructs its meaning about love and loss amidst the devastation of war.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Love, Loss, and Innocence in Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*

Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* delves into the psychological and emotional aftermath of the Vietnam War through the intertwined themes of. These themes are intricately woven into the protagonist Kien's journey, reflecting the multifaceted impact of war on his relationships, identity, and sense of self. Through a fragmented narrative structure and evocative symbolism, the novel portrays how war disrupts not only lives but also memories, emotions, and ideals.

Love

Love in *The Sorrow of War* serves as both a source of solace and a reminder of irretrievable loss. Kien's relationship with Phuong encapsulates the idealism and purity of pre-war youth, representing a connection untouched by the chaos of war. The passage, "We two may die as virgins, our love is so pure. We ache for each other, unable to be together" (Ninh, 1991, 24), highlights the tension between emotional intimacy and physical separation, symbolizing the war's power to fragment even the deepest bonds.

The phrase "our love is so pure" encapsulates the idealistic and untainted nature of Kien and Phuong's relationship before the Vietnam War disrupts their lives. Their love represents a sanctuary, a prelapsarian state uncorrupted by the violence and trauma of the world around them. Bao Ninh uses their connection to symbolize a lost innocence, a powerful emotional anchor that contrasts with the horrors of war. The purity of their love suggests an intense emotional bond that transcends physicality, as they ache for each other while being unable to be together. This yearning captures the tension between desire and restraint, emphasizing the idealism of youthful love before it is eroded by the brutal realities of war.

In literature, the motif of pure love often serves as a counterpoint to violence and chaos, as seen in works like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1997). While Kien and Phuong's love is not destroyed by family conflict as in Shakespeare's play, it is similarly overwhelmed by external forces beyond their control. The war becomes an insurmountable barrier that distorts their connection, transforming their love from a source of solace into a painful reminder of what has been lost. Linda B. Sherby's (2013) exploration of love and trauma in war literature highlights how such relationships, forged or remembered amidst crisis, often become symbolic of pre-trauma life, representing both hope and heartbreak. For Kien, Phuong remains a constant presence in his memory, embodying a purity that contrasts with the guilt, regret, and loss he experiences as a soldier.

This portrayal of idealized love is also a reflection of cultural and historical contexts. In Vietnamese culture, relationships often hold spiritual and symbolic significance, and Phuong represents not just a person but a connection to Kien's unbroken self. As war strips Kien of his innocence, his memories of Phuong sustain him, serving as a lifeline to a world untouched by destruction. This aligns with themes in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), where the character Lieutenant Cross fixates on his love for Martha as a means of coping with the chaos of the Vietnam War. In both novels, love is elevated to a symbolic realm, offering a brief reprieve from trauma while simultaneously intensifying the pain of its loss. Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* masterfully captures this duality, portraying love as a force both redemptive and heartbreaking, a fragile thread that links the human spirit to a fleeting sense of purity amidst devastation.

However, as the war progresses, Kien's love for Phuong becomes tainted by regret, guilt, and the irreparable damage of trauma. Even after the war, his inability to reconnect with her reflects the enduring emotional barriers left by conflict. In the line, "He had tried desperately to forget Phuong, but she was unforgettable. He longed for her still" (Ninh, 1991, 61), Kien's yearning for Phuong becomes a reflection of his yearning for the innocence of his past, a time before war consumed their lives.

The words "but she was unforgettable" underscore the indelible imprint that Phuong leaves on Kien's life, reflecting how love and memory intertwine in the aftermath of trauma. Despite Kien's attempts to move on and suppress his feelings, Phuong remains a constant presence in his thoughts, embodying not only his lost innocence but also the profound emotional bonds severed by war. This unforgettable quality speaks to the depth of their connection, which transcends time and circumstance. Kien's inability to forget Phuong highlights the persistent grip of memory, especially when tied to moments of emotional purity and significance.

Phuong's unforgettable presence aligns with the concept of "haunting," as explored by Caruth (1996) in her study of trauma and memory. Caruth suggests that traumatic memories often persist because they are tied to unresolved emotions and events that are too overwhelming to process fully. For Kien, Phuong is not just a memory of love but a symbol of the life and innocence he can never reclaim. Her image represents the idealized past that contrasts starkly with his war-ravaged present, creating an emotional tension between longing and despair. This echoes the experiences of other postwar protagonists, such as in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, where the main character is similarly haunted by memories of loss, love, and an unfulfilled past.

Moreover, the phrase reflects a universal human experience: the inability to forget profound emotional connections, especially in the context of war and trauma. Kien's fixation on Phuong can be compared to Lieutenant Cross in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, who carries Martha's letters as both a burden and a solace. In both cases, love becomes a tether to the pre-war self, a reminder of what was sacrificed. Bao Ninh, through Kien's reflections, poignantly captures the enduring power of love to transcend trauma, even as it deepens the pain of its absence. "But she was unforgettable" speaks to the heart of Kien's struggle: the simultaneous comfort and torment of remembering a love that can never be reclaimed. This aligns with Sherby's framework (2013), which emphasizes that love, particularly during traumatic events, often becomes a powerful yet painful anchor to humanity.

Loss

In his dreams he saw Phuong now and then, but more often he dreamed of crazy, twisted things, distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow. Horrible, poisonous nightmares brought back images that had haunted him constantly throughout the war. During the twilights of those cold nights the familiar, lonely spirits reappeared from the Jungle of Screaming Souls, sighing and moaning to him, whispering as they floated around like pale vapors, shredded with bullet-holes. They moved into his sleep as though they were mirrors surrounding him. (Ninh, 1991, 60-61)

This excerpt vividly illustrates the psychological devastation left by the war and the pervasive presence of trauma in Kien's postwar life. The imagery of "lonely spirits" and "shredded with bullet-holes" evokes the harrowing toll of violence and death that continues to haunt Kien. These "distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow" serve as manifestations of both his personal losses—friends, comrades, and his relationship with Phuong—and the collective suffering of his generation.

The phrase “mirrors surrounding him” suggests that these apparitions reflect his fractured psyche and the inescapable grip of his memories. This aligns with the novel's broader theme of loss, where Kien cannot separate himself from the horrors of his past, particularly those embodied by the Jungle of Screaming Souls. The inability to let go of these memories demonstrates how loss in *The Sorrow of War* extends beyond physical death to emotional and spiritual disintegration.

Loss permeates every facet of Kien's experience, encompassing not only the physical deaths of comrades but also the emotional and psychological disintegration that follows. The passage, “In his dreams he saw Phuong now and then, but more often he dreamed of crazy, twisted things, distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow. Horrible, poisonous nightmares brought back images that had haunted him constantly throughout the war” (Ninh, 1991, 60), captures the persistent grip of trauma. The haunting visions of the Jungle of Screaming Souls, where “lonely spirits... shredded with bullet-holes” appear, serve as a powerful metaphor for the collective losses experienced by Kien and his comrades. These dreams reflect the inescapable presence of past violence in Kien's life, a constant reminder of the lives lost and the humanity shattered by war.

Kien's emotional estrangement is further illustrated in his avoidance of Hanh, “The words she longed to say would never be voiced. Perhaps in their dreams, for soon she was gone” (Ninh, 1991, 58). This highlights how war silences communication and resolution, leaving relationships unresolved and feelings unexpressed. Stuart Hall's (1997) representation theory can be applied here, as Kien's inability to articulate his emotions symbolizes how the psychological impact of war often manifests through silences and absences, creating a void where connection once existed.

Even Kien's reflections on his suffering are tinged with futility, as seen in the line, “Nothing lasted forever in this world, he knew that. Even love and sorrow inside an aging man would finally dissipate under the realization that his suffering... was small and meaningless in the overall scheme of things” (p. 61). This philosophical acknowledgment reflects Kien's gradual resignation to the impermanence of human experiences, even as the scars of war remain indelible. Also reveals a profound existential realization that underpins Kien's journey through the emotional wreckage of war. This statement reflects his resignation to impermanence, as he acknowledges that even the most intense feelings, such as love and sorrow, are ultimately fleeting. Kien's recognition of the transient nature of his suffering illustrates a shift in his understanding, where he no longer views his pain as uniquely significant but as part of a universal human experience. This perspective offers a glimmer of solace, as it situates his grief within a larger, cosmic framework, reducing its overwhelming intensity.

The concept of impermanence in Kien's reflection resonates with philosophical ideas that explore humanity's struggle with transience. Hannah Arendt's work on the human condition emphasizes the tension between the fleeting nature of individual experience and the desire to leave a lasting legacy. For Kien, the realization that even love and sorrow dissipate reflects the inability to preserve life's most profound moments in perpetuity. War accelerates this sense of ephemerality, where death and destruction magnify the fragility of human emotions. The temporality of his suffering becomes a double-edged realization—on one hand, it offers relief from prolonged pain; on the other, it underscores the loss of the very emotions that once defined his humanity.

Kien's understanding of impermanence also aligns with literary explorations of the effects of time and memory. The fragmented structure of *The Sorrow of War* reflects how memories, no matter how vivid, fade and morph over time, much like the dissipation of love and sorrow described in this line. This perspective is also evident in how modern narratives depict trauma, where the passage of time does not necessarily erase pain but transforms its intensity and meaning (van der Kolk, 2014). In this context, Kien's acknowledgment of the impermanence of his suffering is not a dismissal of his emotions but a step toward reconciliation with a life irrevocably changed by war. By placing his anguish within the broader “*scheme of things*,” Bao Ninh crafts a universal message about the transient, yet deeply human, nature of emotional experience.

Innocence

The loss of innocence is a central thread in *The Sorrow of War*, encapsulating Kien's transformation from an idealistic young man to a disillusioned survivor. His memories of love and camaraderie before the war contrast sharply with the brutality and dehumanization he later experiences. The passage, "*He believed he had been born again, and the bitterness of his recent postwar years faded. Born again into the prewar years, to resurrect the deep past within him*" (p. 75) it demonstrates Kien's yearning to reclaim his lost youth and purity. However, this longing is ultimately futile, as the war has irreversibly altered his identity and worldview.

"He had tried desperately to forget Phuong, but she was unforgettable. He longed for her still. Nothing lasted forever in this world, he knew that. Even love and sorrow inside an aging man would finally dissipate under the realization that his suffering, his tortured thoughts, were small and meaningless in the overall scheme of things. Like wispy smoke spiraling into the sky, glimpsed for a moment, then gone." (Ninh, 1991, 61)

The imagery of "dawn mixed with dusk" reflects the duality of Kien's memories—offering a fleeting sense of comfort while underscoring the sorrow of what has been lost. His realization that "nothing lasted forever" (Ninh, 1991, 61) further illustrates his emotional evolution, as he comes to terms with the impossibility of returning to a state of innocence.

The phrase, "nothing lasted forever" (Ninh, 1991, 61) reflects Kien's growing acceptance of the impermanence of life, love, and suffering. It encapsulates the emotional resignation he develops as he processes the cumulative losses inflicted by the Vietnam War. This realization does not diminish the weight of Kien's memories, but it allows him to philosophically distance himself from his pain, acknowledging that even the most intense emotions, whether love or sorrow, will eventually fade with time. By comparing his suffering to "wispy smoke spiraling into the sky, glimpsed for a moment, then gone," Bao Ninh uses ephemeral imagery to emphasize the fleeting nature of human experiences. This acknowledgment of transience serves as a survival mechanism for Kien, as it allows him to confront the futility of clinging to an irretrievable past while navigating the scars left by war.

Kien's reflection aligns with existential themes often explored in postwar literature, particularly the idea that personal suffering becomes insignificant in the larger, relentless flow of time. This concept resonates with Albert Camus's existential philosophy, which posits that life's impermanence and inherent suffering are unavoidable, and individuals must find meaning within this impermanence. Moreover, the idea of impermanence mirrors Buddhist teachings, which were culturally significant in Vietnam and emphasize that attachment to worldly experiences leads to suffering. Similar themes are explored in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, where Paul Bäumer's disillusionment with the war mirrors Kien's recognition of the transitory nature of life and emotion. In both texts, the characters learn to confront trauma through a detached acknowledgment of their losses, reflecting a universal aspect of postwar resilience. Bao Ninh masterfully embeds these philosophical reflections in *The Sorrow of War*, showcasing the depth of Kien's internal struggle and his attempt to reconcile with a world forever changed by conflict.

The *Jungle of Screaming Souls* serves as a poignant symbol of this collective loss of innocence. The spirits shredded with bullet holes are a haunting reminder of the destruction of ideals and youth. Hall's (1997) emphasis on the cultural and symbolic construction of meaning resonates here, as the jungle becomes a representation of the psychological ruins left behind by war.

The loss of innocence is central to Kien's journey, representing the transformation from youthful idealism to a fragmented and disillusioned survivor. His pre-war life, filled with love and hope, contrasts sharply with the dehumanization of war. Kien's yearning to reclaim his innocence is poignantly depicted in this passage:

For that whole Sunday Kien wandered the streets in a trance, feeling a melancholy joy, like dawn mixed with dusk. He believed he had been born again, and the bitterness of his recent postwar years faded. Born again into the prewar years, to resurrect the deep past within him, and this would continue until he had relived a succession of his life and times; the first new life was to be that of his distant past. His lost youth, before the sorrow of war (Ninh, 1991, 75).

The imagery of “dawn mixed with dusk” encapsulates the duality of memory, offering solace while emphasizing the irrevocable loss of innocence. It also symbolizes the duality of hope and despair, capturing the emotional tension that defines Kien’s postwar existence. Dawn, traditionally associated with renewal and beginnings, reflects Kien’s yearning to reconnect with his prewar innocence and the purity of his love for Phuong. Meanwhile, dusk, symbolizing endings and loss, underscores the pervasive sorrow and disillusionment brought by the war. This metaphor encapsulates Kien’s psychological state, where moments of hope and clarity are inevitably overshadowed by the haunting memories of violence and destruction. The blending of these two opposing times mirrors the novel’s fragmented narrative structure, where the past and present coexist in a chaotic and nonlinear flow, much like Kien’s trauma-laden memories.

From a broader perspective, the juxtaposition of dawn and dusk represents the transitional space in which Kien’s identity resides. He is caught between two versions of himself: the idealistic young man before the war and the disillusioned survivor struggling to make sense of his pain. This duality is reflective of how trauma impacts memory, creating a sense of timelessness where the boundaries between hope and despair, beginnings and endings, blur. Kien’s longing to be “born again” into his pre-war life reflects his desire to escape the trauma and disillusionment that now define his existence.

This loss of innocence is also symbolized by the young girl in the war zone, “Kien and Danh ran over to her. The air was full of Gunsmoke and the smell of blood, yet the young girl’s perfume seemed stronger. She was cradling her face in her hands, her curled hair almost covering them. Between her hands, they could see smeared lipstick and her lips twisted in pain” (Ninh, 1991, 91). The girl, with her perfume and smeared lipstick, represents a fleeting moment of humanity and innocence amidst the chaos of war. However, her pain and disarray highlight how war contaminates even the most delicate aspects of life, leaving behind a world stripped of purity and hope.

The themes of Love, Loss, and Innocence in *The Sorrow of War* are deeply interconnected, shaping Kien’s psychological and emotional journey. His love for Phuong, once a source of hope, becomes a reminder of what is irretrievably lost. The pervasive sense of loss—through death, trauma, and disconnection—defines Kien’s existence, while his yearning for innocence highlights the war’s devastating effect on both personal and collective identity.

Ninh’s fragmented narrative structure mirrors Kien’s fractured psyche, allowing readers to experience the nonlinear and cyclical nature of memory and trauma. This aligns with a qualitative approach, which emphasizes the importance of interpreting narratives to uncover deeper emotional truths. By weaving these themes together, *The Sorrow of War* offers a universal meditation on the enduring scars of conflict and the fragility of humanity amidst violence.

CONCLUSION

Bao Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War* intricately explores how war disrupts the human experience of love, loss, and innocence. Through Linda B. Sherby’s framework, the novel reveals that love—while offering emotional depth and human connection—can also become a painful anchor when entangled with unresolved trauma. Kien’s memories of Phuong symbolize both the sanctuary of youthful intimacy and the irreparable rupture caused by war. His inability to forget her illustrates how deep emotional bonds persist in the psyche, aligning with Caruth’s theory of trauma as repetitive, haunting memory. Loss permeates the narrative not only through death but through psychological fragmentation, failed communication, and emotional isolation. Kien’s growing awareness of life’s impermanence—“nothing lasts forever”—reflects existential resignation and emotional desensitization. His yearning to reclaim innocence signifies a universal longing to restore meaning after devastation, yet war renders such renewal impossible. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how traumatic love and irreparable loss shape one’s identity over time. Sherby’s emphasis on sadness and carrying loss internally resonates with Kien’s fragmented healing. Thus, *The Sorrow of War* becomes not just a narrative of historical trauma but a profound psychological exploration of how love and loss remain entangled within the human spirit, long after the guns have fallen silent.

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