IN THE LAKE OF THE WOODS: A MYSTERY? Essay, Research Paper

IN THE LAKE OF THE WOODS: A MYSTERY?

Almost from this novel?s first page we know that Kathy Wade will vanish, and it is not long before we discover that her disappearance will remain unsolved. We then ask ourselves, ?how is this novel considered a mystery if we never even find out what happened to Kathy?? In the Lake of the Woods, by Tim O?Brien, still has undeniable suspense. There are other topics in the novel like the impact of the Vietnam War, morality, and human behavior that help us see beyond the mystery of Kathy?s disappearance.

Certain events that took place during the Vietnam War remain a mystery to most of us. People never seem to talk about what really happened in Vietnam. Tim O?Brien does not fail to reveal a solution to this book of mystery. He reveals the horrors of the My Lai Massacre throughout the novel but most in chapter 13, The Nature of the Beast. The following quote is of the morning of the My Lai Massacre as described by Tim O?Brien:

He (John Wade) watched a young man hobbling up a trail, one foot torn away at the ankle. He watched Weatherby shoot two little girls in the face. Deeper into the village, in front of a small L-shaped hootch, he came across a GI with a woman?s black ponytail flowing from his helmet. The man wiped a hand across his crotch. He gave a little flip to the ponytail and smiled at Sorcerer and blooped an M-79 round into the L-shaped hootch?At his feet was a wailing infant. A middle-aged woman lay nearby. She was draped across a bundle of straw, not quite dead, shot in the legs and stomach. The woman gazed at the world with indifference. At one point she made an obscure motion with her head, a kind of bow, inexact, after which she rocked herself away. (106)

So, in a way, even if we argue that the novel is not a mystery because Kathy has vanished and has not been found, the mystery of the My Lai Massacre has been revealed.

Morality is also a big topic in the novel. When John Wade is in My Lai, he?s confused on what to do exactly. He does not want to participate in the massacre, but his commands were to wipe out the whole village.

Sorcerer uttered meaningless sounds??No,? he said, then after a second he said, ?Please!??and then the sunlight sucked him down a trail toward the center of the village, where he found burning hootches and brightly mobile figures engaged in murder. (107)

This creates an inner conflict in John Wade, therefore creating suspense to the reader. John is drowned out and is ignored. He feels helpless at this point. As confused as he is, he kills Weatherby and a farmer by accident.

We can get closer to solving the mystery of Kathy?s disappearance by studying the behavior of each character. By doing so, it adds suspense to your reading and understanding. If you compare Kathy to the My Lai Massacre, you can see that they are the same. Many people tried to bury the My Lai Massacre incident just like John Wade probably buried Kathy. Kathy and John had secrets that were later found out just like the Vietnam War had its secrets that were too being found out. Kathy had a thing with the dentist, Harmon, and that?s not secret anymore. John Wade liked spying on Kathy and he also had war secrets that were, too, found out. The Vietnam War had its own secrets. My Lai was only one village that was massacred out of many others. Also, if you compare John and Kathy, you can see that their behavior is similar. Kathy lost John to insanity or to depression just like John lost the election to morality. John is an unwilling participant of the My Lai Massacre just like Kathy is an unwilling participant in politics with John.

In conclusion, all these topics help build suspense for the reader. It all depends on how the reader puts all the clues together to figure out the mystery in this novel. I consider In the Lake of the Woods a true mystery because it did solve the mysteries behind the Vietnam War.