

# Being a Woman in a Man's World: The Representation of Women in American War Narratives

---

Lazar, Alenka

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2016

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:446422>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-02-10**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku  
Filozofski fakultet Osijek  
Engleski jezik i književnost - Pedagogija

Alenka Lazar

**Biti žena u muškom svijetu: prikaz žena u američkoj ratnoj prozi**  
završni rad

Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

Osijek, 2016

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku  
Filozofski fakultet Osijek  
Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost  
Studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i pedagogije

Alenka Lazar

**Biti žena u muškom svijetu: prikaz žena u američkoj ratnoj prozi**

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Polje: filologija

Grana: teorija i povijest književnosti

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

Osijek, 2016

University of J.J. Strossmayer, Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
English language and literature - Pedagogy

Alenka Lazar

**Being a Woman in a Man's World: Representation of Women in  
American War Narratives**

BA Thesis

Mentor: Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2016

University of J.J. Strossmayer, Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English language and literature  
English language and literature - Pedagogy

Alenka Lazar

**Being a Woman in a Man's World: Representation of Women in  
American War Narratives**

BA Thesis

Humanities, Philology, Theory and history of literature

Mentor: Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2016

## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Abstract.....  | 1  |
| Introduction.....  | 2  |
| 1. History of Women in the Military.....   | 3  |
| 2. Analysis of Female Characters in American War Narratives.....   | 6  |
| 2.1. Portrayal of Women and Intimacy in Joseph Heller's <i>Catch 22</i> (1961) .....                             | 6  |
| 2.2. Role of Women in Tim O'Brien's <i>The Things They Carried</i> (1990).....                                   | 9  |
| 2.3. Kayla Williams' <i>Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S.</i><br><i>Army</i> (2005)..... | 12 |
| Conclusion.....  | 15 |
| Works Cited.....   | 16 |

## Abstract

Throughout history, women have fought for their right to participate in many aspects of the world: in making major decisions, being recognized as equal to men, and just generally noticed as valued members of the society with individual needs, wishes, and abilities. After a long period of fighting for their rights, through suffragette movements, protests, and petitions, women finally reached this long-awaited equality. They even got the opportunity to be a part of the most men-ruled area of life – war. During the conditions of war, men are surrounded mostly by other men, their fellow soldiers, and this is the opinion of the general public. But the issue at question is how women are positioned in the war, the army, what their actual role is, how other people and their combatants see them, and how they are presented to the public. As literature has always been a mirror of the current state of affairs, examples of women's position in the world can be found in it. In this paper, three novels are analyzed in order to point out how women in war are perceived: Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) and Kayla Williams' *Love my Rifle More Than You* (2005). *Catch 22* is a story told by a male protagonist and which puts women mostly in the roles of nurses and prostitutes. *The Things They Carried* is a novel in which women are shown merely as a comforting idea, along with a few strong female characters. And on the complete opposite end there is *Love my Rifle More Than You*, a novel written by a woman, at war, which brings a new and fresh view of a woman's position in the world. However, these novels which seem different at a first glance have one very important thing in common: they clearly show that women in the military are still seen through their gender. Their gender decides which position they hold, how they will act when they achieve something, and how important they are.

Keywords: women, war, narratives, gender, equality

## Introduction

This paper analyzes the American role and portrayal of women throughout American war narratives such as Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) and Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* (2005). The stories are studied and explained chronologically, based on the war they are about and the time they were published. Before the analysis of the stories, the reader is introduced to certain background information about the role and introduction of women into American wars, in order to understand the latter analysis and the importance of this topic. First, some important historical female figures are mentioned in order to bring the reader closer to the topic of gender roles in war. From the beginning of female participation in the war as nurses and caretakers, to this day and age when women are not only allowed to be an equal part of the army, but also be in the Special Forces. The second part is focused on an in depth analysis of each story and its male and female characters and their relationships. The analysis begins with Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, a story about World War II with a male protagonist and women in the roles of nurses and nameless prostitutes. The second chapter focuses on Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* where women in the Vietnam War are still degraded but a few strong female characters arise. And as a finishing chapter there is an analysis of a novel written from a female point of view, Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You* and her Iraq War story.

## 1. History of Women in the U.S. Military

Since the forming of country lines, there have been arguments over territories, certain politics, or simply ways of life. And since the beginning of these arguments, wars have been fought. Being a soldier is considered to be a man's profession, and that used to be the case all over the world. This paper deals with the American treatment, experiences, and portrayal of female warriors. For example, according to Bellafaire, during the American Revolutionary war (1775-1783) women had traditional roles as nurses and cooks. They followed their husbands into the combat occasionally but only if they proved their worth and were deemed deserving of the position. At the time, these women did not have a name but they are now called "camp followers" (15). According to "Time Line", some soldiers thought the women were distracting and got in the way but the reality was that they were needed and were of use to the army as much as the soldiers were. Women were at first allowed to follow their husbands into the war because some women were unable to work and needed their husbands to take care of them. And since the army could not afford to discharge all soldiers who need to take care for their family, they had to allow women to join them during the battle. Since women were useful, they were kept in the army. Women could even charge the men for their services, but the prices were highly regulated. Women who cooked would rarely do it for the soldiers, since most soldiers cooked for themselves and could not afford to pay a woman to cook for them. Some women are still remembered for taking part in the actual combat alongside their partners. Bellafaire mentions Margaret Corbin, who joined her husband during his missions but only to bring water to him and other soldiers. When her husband was killed in battle, she took over his position and fired at enemy troops until she was heavily wounded too (15-17). Another often mentioned woman who participated in combat is Molly Pitcher, who supposedly attended the cannon when her husband had been killed. However, it is believed that Molly Pitcher is a general term coined as a name for all women who have fought in the war.

During the American Civil War (1782-1783), women also had traditional roles in the war but tried to step out of the shade and participate. Some secretly enlisted as spies or even disguised themselves as men to be able to partake in the war even though it was still forbidden for them to serve as soldiers. Bellafaire here mentions Deborah Simpson who managed to serve for over a year in General Washington's army disguised as a man. Her gender was not discovered until she was wounded (21).

Sam Smith wrote about a Union burial that happened in July of 1863, where a woman's body wearing the uniform of a Confederate private was found. After counting and doing some

research, scientists found that between 400 and 750 women took part in the Civil War. They were able to do this because of the Victorian values they still held dear. They would sleep clothed, bathe separately, wore clothes that concealed body shape, and since most of the soldiers were quite young, the inability to grow a beard would instantly be attributed to youth. During this period, when women voluntarily went to war as nurses in order to provide medical help to soldiers, only „plain, sturdy, middle-aged women were hired so that soldiers would not be tempted to fall in love with their nurses“ (Bellafaire 19). They also served as cooks in both Union and Confederate battlefield hospitals, and wealthier women helped fund permanent hospitals, and according to Bellafaire, some women still disguised themselves as men in order to be able to partake in the battles (20). However, even though this was a case in history, seeing as many women disguised themselves as men in order to be accepted into the army, even nowadays women who enlist as soldiers do some kind of cross-dressing, as the soldiers combat attire is made entirely for men.

Women remained nurses during the Spanish-American War (1889) as well, needed more than ever after the appearance of a typhoid fever. However, unlike the practice of hiring unattractive women during the American Civil War, the new diseases demanded highly qualified female nurses but not with a military rank but as paid civilians. However, this resulted in forming a Nurse Corps in 1901 which meant that women were now out in the battlefield to take care of soldiers.

Things changed slightly during the last two years of World War I (1914-1918) when many more women went to war, not only as nurses but also as secretaries and administrators, or even architects (Bellafaire 42-76). In fact, World War I is the most important war of the female history because during this period women's role changed significantly. During World War I women from all classes took part in different areas of war, unlike before when the women who wanted to participate in the war, and were allowed to, were usually working class women. Upper class women were the founders and members of wartime organizations, middle- and lower-class women participated in these organizations and as nurses with the military. With the beginning of World War I women took over many masculine professions since men had to be enlisted but even then women still did not get called to the battlefield as real soldiers. It was not until World War II (1941-1945) that women got the chance to fill important positions in the army, such as pilots or military intelligence. After World War II, President Truman passed Women's Armed Service Integration Act (1948) which enabled permanent presence of women in the American army.

Many female military organizations (Marine Corps Women Reserve Women's Naval Reserve) were formed during the history, but the Gulf War of 1991 actually made a difference for women in military. During this war, approximately 41,000 female soldiers actually served in combat (“Time Line”).

At the turn of the new millennium, things changed slightly for women in the army. In 2000, Captain Kathleen McGrath becomes the first woman ever to command a U.S. Navy warship and in 2004 Colonel Linda McTague becomes the first woman commander of a fighter squadron in U.S. Air Force history. And finally, in 2008, over 16,000 women serve in the American forces all over the world (“Time Line”).

In 2013, the Pentagon announced that it would lift the Combat Exclusion Policy, which forbade women in the past to take part in combat, and on December 4, 2015, a document was passed that allows women to be integrated completely into the army, meaning that women can now also be Special Forces. According to a research done by Patten and Parker, women and men today equally serve in the Army, but women are more likely than men to be in the Air Force, and less likely than men to be in the Marines.

## 2. Analysis of Female Characters in American War Narratives

### 2.1. Portrayal of Women and Intimacy in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961)

*Catch 22* is a novel written by Joseph Heller who participated in World War II, and the novel itself was written about World War II. But the novel is not purely a factual work which describes the reality of war. If anything, it portrays the complete opposite. It shows the pure madness of war, meaninglessness, and absurdity of it all. As far as female characters in the novel are concerned, there is a lack of depth of and it is pushed to the extreme. Women are somewhat portrayed but remain mostly unnamed. If women are portrayed at all it is only as being there to serve the men for their fantasies. This part of the paper deals with the question of women and the position of intimacy in lives of the soldiers in *Catch 22*.

First of all, there is the question of how women are even portrayed in this book. It is a fact that all the women are merely mentioned as prostitutes and sexual objects, including the nurses. Even though the nurses voluntarily applied for their positions in the army, as it was explain the first chapter, and even though taking care of soldiers is their official, very important job, they are still sexualized in a way. Even though the nurses are rare female named characters and are described differently, they are still there only to serve the men. The nurses are described more in depth, and Heller goes as far as to even call some of them, like Nurse Duckett, intelligent. But despite describing her character, he still focuses on her appearance: "Nurse Sue Ann Duckett was a tall, spare, mature, straight-backed woman with a prominent, well-rounded ass, small breasts and angular ascetic New England features that came equally close to being very lovely and very plain" (301). In the chapter dedicated to Nurse Duckett (253-246) there is an entire scene where Yossarian and Dunbar are sexually harassing Nurse Duckett. Despite running away from them, shrieking, and backing away, like „a ping-pong ball with legs“ (302). Yossarian and Dunbar clearly state that they did nothing wrong, which implies that they had every right to do what they did, since women's wishes and desires are irrelevant anyway.

Other female characters remain nameless or get nicknamed after the men they have slept with. There is not a single scene in the entire novel where two women are talking to each other about any topic. They are always put into scenes with men who either think they are in love with them but forget about them soon after the encounter or men who do not have any feelings towards them whatsoever and their only desire is to use and abuse them.

There are numerous concrete examples of the men-women relationships in the novel. Nately is “in love” with his whore but despite this fact, she is still called “Nately’s whore”, and has no other identity. Other men also describe this relationship as foolish, as this woman Nately is in love with is nothing but a prostitute and it seems futile to put any effort into building a relationship with such a woman, which is a direct dehumanization and degradation of the girl: “What’s so special about her?” Aarfy sneered with mock surprise. “She’s only a whore” (229). Nately’s whore beats him with a shoe but everyone finds it funny at most because nothing better can be expected of a woman, according to the male point of view. But Nately’s object of desire proves to be a human being by herself when she actually returns his affection. Hungry Joe only wants to take pictures of naked girls, mostly without any success: “Hungry Joe ate voraciously, gnawed incessantly at the tips of his fingers, stammered, choked, itched, sweated, salivated, and sprang from spot to spot fanatically with an intricate black camera with which he was always trying to take pictures of naked girls“ (43). Aarfy argues that women should be at his disposal but does not want to pay them because they should wish to be with him: “Nobody has to pay for it for good old Aarfy. I can get all I want any time I want it“ (192). This concept unravels when at one point Aarfy rapes Michaela the maid, and kills her. Michaela the maid, even though she is employed, as a maid, is still portrayed as a woman who “was always rolling off for any man who wanted her“ (109) and is not even given a chance to say a single thing. She is described as „only a servant girl“ (428) and is eventually killed. Aarfy feels slightly uneasy about the whole affair, but he thinks it’s understandable. He says he “only raped her once” (333) as if the act of raping is something completely normal, and that he had to kill her once he raped her because he cannot allow her to spread bad things about him. But the issue here is that he didn’t think the act of rape is a bad thing. He purely thought that other people thought it was bad and he could not have a simple, irrelevant maid going around spreading bad things about him.

As far as intimacy is concerned, there is no real affection or confidentiality. Intimacy is portrayed only as pure desire and lust with no real connections between people. Yossarian slept with a lot of women, most of whom he discards. Even when he met Luciana and told her he wanted to marry her, he still tears up the paper she gave him which is an action that confused and surprised him, because he was not used to feeling any kind of affection towards women: “Yossarian was madly in love with all of them as he made his way back to the officers’ apartment, in love with Luciana, with the prurient intoxicated girl in the unbuttoned satin blouse, and with the beautiful rich countess and her beautiful rich daughter-in-law” (126). He

gives up on her easily when he gets an impression that she is demanding: "I will let you buy me dinner. But I won't let you sleep with me" (161). But this situation is a great example of how male treatment of women backfires on them. In Yossarian's relationship with Luciana we see that she has complete control of the entire affair. When she rejects him, he is powerless. So even though Heller spends little time describing the women in depth, he still gives them some credit, meaning that the behavior of men towards women reflects badly on the image of being a strong, powerful soldier. Even though at first Luciana is the object that Yossarian eventually manages to "conquer", Luciana is the one who walks away with dignity while Yossarian is picking up dirty pieces of paper from the gutter. Yossarian's lack of tact with women is highlighted during the whole scene with Luciana when he goes out to seek other women thinking that Luciana rejected him. Women, who are valued the most, are virgins, and at one point in the novel, women are said to be underage despite being over 30, because they would sell better.

Basically, most women in the novel are seen as objects of men's desire. Men who are surrounded by fellow soldiers without actual contact with women, except for nurses at times of sickness, even forgot how to act towards women, and that is visible throughout the novel. From Hungry Joe's animalistic behavior when he sees a woman to Aarfy's rape and murder of Michaela the maid.

Even though all women are degraded throughout the novel, being shown as prostitutes, silhouettes without aspirations and ambitions, their role is very important, as it is obvious from all the relationships in the novel that the men are at fault here. Every single woman shows her humanity either by taking care of the sick and the wounded in the war, or accepting the men by returning their affections, while the men are clearly shown as inhumane beings with foul minds.

## 2.2. The Role of Women in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990)

*The Things They Carried* is a novel written by Tim O'Brien, a writer who strongly opposed the idea of the Vietnam War, but was eventually obliged to participate in it. For this reason he decided to write a semi-autobiographical war story about Vietnam War.

The role of women in *The Things They Carried* might be a small one, but it is surely significant. There are not many female characters in the book, but the attention is focused on Martha, Mary Anne Bell and an unnamed girlfriend of a soldier named Henry Dobbins. Women's role in the lives of the men involved in this war story is that of a distraction. Men keep photographs of the women they left at home, or spend a lot of time romanticizing or fantasizing about them. They use the ideal of a woman as a distraction from the terrors of war, an ideal that reminds them of a different world, a world outside war. Only as a motivation, to have something to look forward to when they get far from the terrors of war. An example of this is Martha, Jimmy Cross' girlfriend whose picture Jimmy carries with him wherever he goes, and spends his time remembering the one date they had, hoping that one day she will be his:

In the late afternoon, after a day's march, 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 would imagine romantic camping trips into the White Mountains in New Hampshire. He would sometimes taste the envelope flaps, knowing her tongue had been there. More than anything, he wanted Martha to love him as he loved her, but the letters were mostly chatty, elusive on the matter of love. (11)

Another example of this is Henry Dobbins who carries his girlfriend's pantyhose with him. Dobbins was convinced that these stockings were the reason that he is still alive and never has been wounded. By doing this, using his girlfriend's item as a lucky charm, he is actually making his girlfriend his lucky charm: "Henry Dobbins carried his girlfriend's pantyhose wrapped around his neck as a comforter" (28). This shows that role of women is still not significant enough to partake in the actual war, but they only exist as a vague image in their minds. However, a few strong female characters do appear in the book, one of them being Mary Anne Campbell, Mark Fossies girlfriend. Linda is another significant female character, as she, for O'Brien, also represented hope, the idea. He kept her alive in his imagination and his dreams

just like he kept his dead fellow soldiers alive in his stories. But a lot of time has passed since Linda died, and she seems unreal, so O'Brien is able to only fantasize.

Through analysis of the stories we see that all the female characters are brought up only in relation to the men. They are always their girlfriends or someone they want to be with. However, not all female characters from the stories live up to the men's expectations. Martha never becomes Jimmy's girlfriend, and Mary Anne Campbell completely disassociates from the expected role she had. She arrives to Vietnam when Jimmy invites her, but she eventually leaves him to lead her own life as a Special Forces soldier. The story of Mary Anne Campbell is called "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" and it is a story that completely alters the idea that women are only notions invented to keep the men content until their return. Mary Anne proves that women cannot be held down and tamed by a man, breaking out of the predefined gender norms by becoming a part of the Green Berets.

By putting Mary Anne into the story, and making "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" the only story in which the protagonist is a woman, O'Brien erased the stereotype according to which women are fragile beings unable to cope with the images and events of war: "The way she quickly fell into the habits of the bush. No cosmetics, no fingernail filing. She stopped wearing jewelry, cut her hair short and wrapped it in a dark green bandanna. Hygiene became a matter of small consequence" (72). By describing her change, becoming one with the nature of Vietnam, O'Brien shows that a woman is able, just like men are, to leave behind her old life, adapt to the terrors surrounding her, perhaps even better than men are: "What happened to her, Rat said, was what happened to all of them. You come over clean and you get dirty and then afterward it's never the same" (83). Because while men spend their time holding on to photographs and meaningless objects keeping their mind set on a better life back home, Mary Anne is out there, fighting for her life and the people of Vietnam. Even though she is at first described as gentle, blonde and young, right at the start she shows her strength, not even blinking at the sight of blood. She speaks with confidence and does not let anyone shake her down. She changes from a naïve young girl from Ohio to a fearless, confident, female soldier. She stops taking showers, stops wearing makeup. "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" is a story that proves that war changes anyone who goes through it. And the fact that a woman is in the center of this story is important for the role of women in war altogether.

This story separates Mary Anne from every other character in the novel. It shows that Mary Anne has her own life and her own path that she is determined to follow, while all the other women mentioned remain barely an idea, a comforting thought which maintains the male

connection to home. It shifts the attention from the transformation of boys into soldiers to the idea that no matter which gender, war changes you: “Seventeen years old. Just a child, blond and innocent, but then weren't they all?” (77).

### 2.3. Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S.*

*Army* (2005)

The novel *Love My Rifle More than You* was written by a woman who was able to participate in the most male-dominated activity to ever exist: war. The novel was published in 2005, and it tells a story of the Iraq war from the point of view of one of the 15% of the women in the army. She is a living proof that being a woman in a man's world is not an easy task, despite the impression of being valued equally. This chapter deals with the protagonist's own views on women and struggles of trying to succeed and fit in in a place dominated by men.

Kayla Williams wants to „reach across gender boundaries and be considered a true brother in arms” (Peebles 50). She says that she wrote the book to get the point across. The point being that women are no different than men, as they also go to battle, they go through a lot of bad things and do not have it any easier than men. However, despite all her efforts, she can never achieve the position of being one of the guys. She is continuously seen as simply a girl, an object of desire: “A woman at war. You're automatically a desirable commodity and a scarce one at that” (18). For this reason, Williams finds herself in-between genders: she rejects her feminine identity but cannot attain the masculine one either: “I hated living with females” (46) or even: “It's unusual for me to pursue a friendship with another woman” (49).

Williams's story is somewhat different than the other stories told by women as she so boldly states, even though her position in the army is nothing new. Being a woman in military is directly connected to sexuality, according to Williams. Even though she is mostly objectified by the men surrounding her, she does not see it as a necessarily bad thing. In fact, she goes as far as to say that it gives her a certain amount of power: “They're *yours*. Fuck, you left your husband to be with them, you walked out on him for them. These guys, they're your husband, they're your father, your brother, your lover – your life” (14).

Williams in fact tries to hide her femininity. She points out her stamina and willpower, does not bond with other women in the army. Generally, Williams sees female qualities and features as negative, describes her female friend completely patriarchally and one of her boyfriends as being feminine. She is convinced that men see women as weak and incompetent so in order to achieve her brother in arms status; she turns on women as well, making sexist jokes and being judgmental towards women who openly display their 'femaleness':

Simmons sits on her cot and cries. In front of everyone. And in front of everyone, she blames her crying on PMS. Yet another thing that is absolutely not acceptable in the army. It encourages men to think what most men think already: that PMS makes girls do incompetent things. This woman's incompetence makes all women in the army look incompetent (268-69)

The writer, Kayla Williams, starts the story off in retrospective, having already lived through all of the experiences that made her who she is today. She wants to tell the world what she has learned: women are not considered equal. This is proved when she realizes that Rick's friends only respected her because she was "his" so therefore did not respect her, but him. Another example is the fact that she let the Fire Support Team think that Matt "owned" her: "You didn't mess with another guy's girl" (257). But the truth is that it was impossible to be an equally valued member of the squad, as the highest form of respect military men show for women is the fact that they restrain themselves from touching women around them (mostly).

Even though women are able to do almost everything men can, there were always double standards. Women need to run less, they need to carry less weight, they need to do less, but these are not the only double standards. At one point, Kayla finds out that she was declared a "slut" among the men in her platoon. She gets upset because when a man sleeps with a lot of girls, nobody thinks about it twice, but when a woman does it, she is immediately marked as immoral. Another existing double standard is the question of being gay in the army: "But in reality most men in the army – like most men in U.S. society – think that girl-on-girl action is hot, while dudes getting it on are filthy and disgusting" (230). The problem is, as Kayla also notices, this is applicable to everyday life, not only the army.

When Kayla was with the Fire Support Team, she felt as if she belongs. She thought they considered her a friend, "one of the guys". The whole problem with this situation is that she wanted to be one of the guys. She could not be proud to be a female soldier, distinct in her similarities with the other soldiers. But, she told sexist jokes in order to be accepted: "What's the first thing a woman does when she gets back from a battered woman's shelter? The dishes, if she's smart" (168.) All dressed in the same uniform but forever separated only because of one petty detail: gender. She tried to look tough because she thought she needs to hide the fact that she gets emotional, because emotions are considered to be a female trait. She is trying to convince she is, however, a part of the crew: "The FISTers would talk trash with me to bond with me. They wouldn't talk trash with me if they didn't like me. If we weren't friends" (181).

She almost gets raped and she thinks she was asking for it. She wants to commit suicide but hides it because she thinks everyone will blame it on the fact she is a girl.

Upon being deployed, women are instantly noticed by the male soldiers. Not for being able to carry a weapon or having high ranks, but only for the fact that there is, in fact a living female person among them. Men are convinced women in the army have it easier. That they can get things more easily, get away with anything, do less and seem equal and Kayla often does not negate this fact. Somehow, everything was always about men. One of Kayla's reasons to join the army was to prove an ex-boyfriend wrong:

So, five years later, I thought of Douglas when I enlisted. And even later still, during basic training, when I wanted so badly to quit, I thought of him yelling at me. Taunting me how I could never make it in the military. And I'd think: Fuck you Douglas. And I kept at it – to prove him wrong” (Williams 41).

Women, despite being the minority in the army, did not often get very close to each other. In fact, it was quite the contrary. Kayla often talked about how her female supervisors are incompetent and lead her into danger. However, there never was any mention about any of her male superiors being incompetent. She often talked about Sergeant Quinn and his many faults, but she never called him incompetent or bad at what he does. She was always able to find an excuse.

Most female characters, besides Zoe and Lauren, are portrayed as incompetent, uninterested, bad at their jobs, or something along those lines. This only gives wrong impressions to the reader. Especially when at one point Kayla even blamed herself for almost being raped. She describes the incident as initiated by Rivers but she keeps quiet about it to avoid looking weak in front of the others. So for this reason, there is a lot to be learned from this book. Looking at this whole situation as an observer, it is clear that women still blame themselves for bad things that happen to them in this day and age. Their confidence will shrivel upon one wrong move made by a man. And this only proves that this is still a man's world, and being a woman in it is not easy.

## Conclusion

Each of the novels analyzed has a distinct war story. Three different wars are described, but they have one thing in common: all three analyzed novels degrade women in war, one way or another.

In *Catch 22* women remain irrelevant nameless characters. Irrelevant when it comes to their own life story. However, they are crucial for the survival of the soldiers, being nurses and caretakers. Even as nurses, women are objectified and sexualized. If the women mentioned are not nurses, they are either nameless prostitutes or women nicknamed after the men they have slept with. Their characters are described simply by their appearance and the writer gives us no additional information about their lives. In *The Things They Carried* however, O'Brien does go a step further since in this novel there genuinely are a few characters with their own storylines, most important of which is Mary Anne Campbell. This woman is the only example of a strong woman who is able to cope with the horrors of war, a woman who does not need a man to depend on and who is brave enough to hold a gun and go out into the battle. But, still most of the other characters only serve the purpose of being a comforting thought a soldier can hold on to while going through this manly show of strength. And lastly, the third novel goes another step further, as it was written by Kyla Williams, a woman who fought in the Iraq war. But, despite having so much potential, despite Kayla having the opportunity and a voice to tell the other sides of the story, women in this novel are still in the men's shadow as every move they make is strongly linked to a male figure.

The analysis of these three novels has shown that women have been degraded since the dawn of time, especially in the condition of war which is still distinctly a male territory.

## Works Cited

- Bellafaire, Judith A. *Women in the United States Military: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: Routledge, 2010. pdf.
- Eileen Patten, Kim Parker. "Women in the U.S. Military: Growing Share, Distinctive Profile." December 2011. *Pew Research Center*. June 2016. pdf.
- Keller, Joseph. *Catch 22*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961. Print.
- O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Print.
- Peebles, Stacy. *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2011. Print.
- Schreibersdorf, Lisa. "Women at War: Changing Roles in the U.S. Military." *Feminist Collections* (2011): 18-22. pdf.
- Smith, Sam. "Female Soldiers in the Civil War: On the Front Line." *Civil War Trust*. Civilwar.org. June 2016. pdf.
- "Time Line: Women in the U.S. Military" *The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*. History.org. 2008. June 2016.
- Williams, Kayla. *Love My Rifle More Than You*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. Print.