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The White Donkey

“The White Donkey” is a graphic novel written by Maximilian Uriarte who is a United States marine veteran that has toured Iraq twice. Its about a man named Abe who joins the marines to go on a self-defining journey. His journey takes a turn for the worst when he sees the horrors of Iraq and the war. After serving his country, PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) gets control of him and nothing will get in his way to end his self-defining journey. Uriarte uses tone, characterization, and imagery to show that PTSD is a modern-day backlash of war and is overseen by the military community.

Tone is a very big literary tool used by Uriarte to show the affects of PTSD on soldiers after war. In the beginning of the story Abe’s tone was very pessimistic and he seemed like he hated what he was doing in the military. For example, when he and Garcia were going through IED training Abe says, “Ugh...I had a dream I was back home. I hate waking up in this shit hole.” You can already tell at this point in the story that Abe hates the military and doesn’t really know why he joined. Once he gets to Iraq his tone is somewhat the same, but he is destined to see firsthand action and his tone is not only pessimistic, but now witty. After Abe shoots the innocent man his tone changes a lot. For example, he calls Jenny on the phone to talk and when she can’t hear him he starts to bash her, and his tone flipped a switch. This incident should have been dealt with in a better way by the higher ranks. They didn’t really care how it affected his health, but only told him that it was a clean kill. After he gets home from his tour his tone with

his sister, Jenny, and old friends gets very depressing and angry. For example, his sister invited him to dinner, but all Abe says is “Fuck off” and keeps himself locked in his room. At this time the post-traumatic stress is really taking a toll on him and he not only hates the military now, but everything else in his life. The last example of Abe’s change in tone is at when he argues with Jenny and his sister then drives drunk to Garcia’s grave. During the argument Abe says, “Who the fuck are you telling me anything?! **I’ve been to Iraq**, I’ve seen and done more in the past year than you have done in your entire life.... Fuck both of you.” Abe’s tone here is coming from PTSD. AT first his tone was just very pessimistic on the military, but after Iraq and not getting the help he needed, his tone became violent and mean with everyone important in his life including himself.

Character development and characterization in “The White Donkey” really show how PTSD is a disorder that is looked past and is a major issue in today’s military community. Uriarte uses indirect and direct characterization of Abe to show how PTSD can destroy a soldier. The first place that shows Abe’s character is at training camp when he and Garcia are talking. Abe is asked why he joined and he says, “I...I don’t know. I just know I wasn’t finding it at home.” This shows the readers that Abe joined the military to find himself and go on a journey. He thought he would get something good out of the Marines, but failed to do so. Abe’s character changes for the worst when Garcia dies. When lieutenant Ding talks to everyone about Garcia’s death all he is wondering is if they will receive a Combat Action Ribbon. Abe flips out and punches him because Ding doesn’t even care about Garcia or how everyone is dealing with the death. This is also a good example of how the military don’t address PTSD directly. Abe’s character is faced with a challenge once he arrives back in the states. He starts drinking a lot and fighting with anybody who tries to help him. At the end of the book Abe visits Garcia’s grave

drunk and holding a gun to his head. Abe says, “I hope I see you when I get there...I think I finally figured out what I was looking for...It was you.” This is the moment I believe Abe killed himself from the stress and torment that Iraq had brought him. At the beginning of the story his character seemed to be trying to find himself and make something of his life. When the violence and visuals of war became too much he was ignored by the military and left on his own to deal with PTSD. If the military had not turned a blind eye then he could have gotten the help he needed instead of falling into a pit of depression, anxiety, and alcohol.

Uriarte uses very vivid and violent imagery in the “The White Donkey” to portray the affects of post traumatic stress disorder on soldiers from the war and how it is overlooked. The start of Abe’s road to PTSD is when Uriarte uses violent imagery to show the gruesomeness of war. Uriarte decided to use an image of Garcia with his head blown off, covered in blood while Abe stood over him in shock. Using imagery that vividly shows a soldier mangled from an IED gives the readers a very clear idea of what war can look like. After Garcia’s death his platoon is devastated and the higher ranks address that for a minute then only care about if they will get a medal of honor from his actions. They expect the platoon to just get over it as soon as possible. This act of carelessness shows that even the higher ranked military men do not care about how that might affect their troops after they leave Iraq. After Garcia died the imagery in the book changed drastically. For example, Abe’s eyes were depicted a lot for the rest of the book. The images showed a clear emptiness or depression in Abe and no one seemed to notice. It was obvious by the imagery that Abe was going downhill and the only time he asked about his mental stability was during the survey a month after he got back. The survey was a standardized questionnaire about PTSD and seemed to be not taken seriously by Abe or others. This shows that the military is fully aware of post traumatic stress disorder, but try to hide it through some

meaningless survey so they don't have to deal with it. The last image that speaks mountains on the effects of PTSD on soldiers and how its not seen as a problem is when Abe wakes up from a nightmare to look into his bathroom mirror which has the question "Have you ever killed anyone?" written across it and he is covered in words such as hero, Man, Veteran, etc. This image shows how Abe sees himself. He sees himself as a murderer and the post-traumatic stress has taken one of its last tolls on him. The fact that civilians keep asking him if he has ever killed anybody shows that PTSD is not seen as a big issue and again is pushed aside.

"The White Donkey" really shed light on the harsh truth of war, but there are other resources that tell the same story. For instance, my neighbor Scott who is retired from the Navy seals and the Seal 6 team gave me his input on the traumas that come from war. He said, "I would do everything over again and serve my country for the greater good, but it did take a toll on me mentally." He said that he can no longer sleep without night terrors, has bad anxiety, depression, and severe paranoia. These are all symptoms of PTSD from serving in the military. Scott isn't the only militant that has these problems. 11-20% of soldiers who served during operation Iraqi Freedom came back with PTSD (Ncptsd). That is just the percent that admitted to it, so I am sure that it is actually a tad higher. Since the percentage rate is so high it leads to much greater problems. A 2013 statistic on soldiers who fought over seas explained that about 22 veterans a day commit suicide (Ncptsd). Suicide is an extreme side effect of PTSD and when it affects 22 veterans a day its devastating. There are ways to cope with PTSD or get the help you need, but it can be looked down upon in the military because it seems weak. I do think that Since Maximilian Uriarte is a retired veteran and has seen firsthand what war can do to a person that his writings should be taken into accountability. He understands that war is gruesome and the toll it takes on a person can be devastating. I think "The White Donkey" is a really good example of

what war and PTSD are really like and how the military needs to do more outreach for soldiers who come back with mentally instable.

Maximilian Uriarte does a great job of using visuals and other literary tools to show the affects that war can have on people. This book really opened my eyes to the PTSD issue and how it isn't seen as so important by the military. Looking into the problem more really showed me the military's stance on it. I believe that the military overlooks PTSD because it shows their men as weak and military men are supposed to be very masculine. "The White Donkey" really opens civilian's eyes on the true colors of war through character development, graphic imagery, and tone.

Work Cited

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