

A Study on the Implications of War in Greg Bear's *War Dogs*

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Abstract

This paper applies the theory of deconstruction to unravel the implications of hidden political agenda and the misuse of science in waging wars in Greg Bear's *War Dogs* (2014). Bear is a famous American writer who is often classified as a hard science fiction author. He usually addresses major questions in contemporary science and culture and is known for proposing solutions. The novel selected for this study, *War Dogs* is a trilogy and the novel's science fictional worlds stand as critiques of post-World War II political regimes which have been hardly studied. So, through Derrida's theory of deconstruction and Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, this paper aims to explore the selected works as critical literary pastiches against political wars' devastation of human beings' lives during postmodernism. Derrida's concept of dissemination and aporia will be used to analyze the multiplicity of the allegorical descriptions in the novel and to argue that the narrative structure which is used as a tool for critiquing the contemporary reality. Finally, Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra will be used to discuss the novel's oppositional state against reality, specifically the political reality.

Key Words: Aporia, Deconstruction, Dissemination, Politics, Postmodernism, Simulacra.

Introduction

This paper is based on Greg Bear's novel titled *War Dogs* (2014) which analyzes the narrative structure and the implications of war. Greg Bear is an American Science fiction writer who is often classified as a hard science fiction author because of the deep levels of scientific details found in his works. *War Dogs* (2014) chronicles the war between earth and some alien invaders in the solar system. Deconstruction, as a theoretical school, focuses on the narrative peculiarities on literary works. For this reason, the discussion will shed light on the narrative qualities of the novel in order to explain the implications of war. More specifically, it will study the depiction of war in the novel. The novel provides military insights regarding war and the political agendas. The implications of war are both explicit and implicit in this novel. On one hand, the explicit implications denote the depiction of war actions and events that take place in the course of the novel's

plots. On the other hand, the implicit implications of war refer to the hidden agendas of political strategies in the narrative features of the novel. The implications of war, therefore, will be explicated by applying three main concepts, Derrida's concept of dissemination and aporia and Baudrillard's concept of simulacra. The study will first apply the concept of dissemination to analyze some of war events in the novel's plot. Then, it will apply the concept of aporia to scrutinize the implications of war and apply the concept of simulacra in order to analyze the representation of reality in the context of the novel.

The Use of Dissemination in Greg Bear's *War Dogs*

The concept of dissemination refers to the structural elements in the literary works that deal with critical issues outside the text. Andrea Hurst, in *Derrida Vis-à-vis Lacan: Interweaving Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis* (2008), claims that the concept of dissemination deals with some

issues outside the text itself: The death drive toward full re-appropriation of the outside, then, is necessarily frustrated, for satisfaction here would be a matter, impossibly, of eradicating the protective barrier that both enables the inside to resist the outside and opens the one up to the other (162). In *War Dogs*, the most conspicuous issue is war. In the beginning of the novel, it is clear that the narrator tells his story before he embarks a mission for out space for military operations: In another online operation, the *Gurus* and their new recruits led a second select group – military, clandestine services, political – on a merry geocache chase (9). In this situation, it is evident that the narrator is about to enroll a military mission in the space. In a striking way, Bear depicts this mission in terms of political considerations. Bear, in *War Dogs*, uses narrative repetitions for the sake of accentuating the fabrication of war as a political practice. The narrator continuously repeats the story of the *Gurus* (the Alien refugees) that threaten the stability of people's lives (9). He repeats them in quest of something that might point to a huge breach of national security (9). The repeated mentioning of the *gurus* reflects Bear's serious concern with the hidden political agendas. In this sense, dissemination resembles a kind of "identity" gained by fictional characters (Abu Jweid 529). In *War Dogs*, the space invasion frightens the narrator. He becomes psychically upset of the space creatures: "We still don't know how many *Gurus* came to Earth originally." (9)

Like Hurst, Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, in *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida* (2004), did an experiment to illustrate the concept of dissemination. This experiment reflects the textual implication of the concept of dissemination. It describes the military features of the concept of dissemination. In *War Dogs*, the narrator talks about his military preparations for invading Mars, "The shields buck in the upper atmosphere over Mars." (13) Therefore, the narrator's experience resembles the polysemous world of politics that is full of hidden agendas.

Tom Cohen, in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader* (2001), asserts that "probability is even a certainty if one takes as seriously as one should *dissemination* as Derrida has described it and which he understands to be at work in every text as its possibility, that is, the possibility of its coming to find a reader" (88). As

such, the concept of dissemination comes in the form of signs in the text.

The textual notions of the concept of dissemination are also tackled in Barry Stocker's *Derrida on Deconstruction* (2006). Stocker appropriates the concept of dissemination to the metaphorical aspects of the literary text: "the first way in which metaphors destroy themselves is when they follow the line of resistance to the dissemination, the plurality that cannot be reduced to univocity, of the metaphorical in a syntax that carries a loss of meaning within the metaphor, since it is the metaphorical absorption of metaphor in the proper meaning of Being" (149). In *War Dogs*, Bear provides the political hidden agendas with metaphorical implications so as to polish the destructive peculiarities of the novel's text. Being so, metaphor is all about politics and space military: "Every Skyrine drops with at least one basic weapon, his sidearm" (43). Bear's writing style abounds with metaphorical insights. He repeatedly uses his protagonist narrator to tell the intricacies of their military campaign on Mars: "we are at the butt end of a fight" (34).

In *Narrative after Deconstruction* (2003), Daniel Punday discusses Derrida's concept of dissemination. He claims that "Derrida seems to have in mind an opposition between, on the one hand, space as a metaphor for alterity (the impossibility of identity) and, on the other, space as something concrete and productive in its own terms" (33). Bear enhances his text with metaphorical meanings. The narrator speaks about the war actions in space. The war takes place between the military mission and the aliens: "the first object hits the atmosphere. It draws a superfast ghostly white flame across the sky. The flame lingers and turns pale purple" (47).

The concept of dissemination has a close affinity with the language of literary texts. In *On Being with Others* (2006), Simon Glendinning claims that "nonmasterable dissemination is not even a polysemia, it belongs to what is outside language" and "it makes no difference even if one were to say a word has several meanings, if only they are limited in number; for to each formula [logos] there might be assigned a different word. For instance, we might say that "man" has not one meaning but several, one of which would be defined as 'two-footed animal,'" while there "might be also several other formulae if only they were

limited in number; for a particular name might be assigned to each of the formulae" (78).

The use of Aporia in Greg Bear's *War Dogs*

The concept of aporia is similar to the concept of dissemination because it exposes the structural fabrication of literary texts. In *Reading Derrida's of Grammatology* (2011), Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan claims that "in fact, something of the intractability of the idea of *différance* seems to arise from the need to maintain apparently contradictory characterizations such as these in suspension, in an indecision that is required by the thinking of *différance*, but that is impossible, since the resulting aporia also demands to be resolved by a decision" (76). In *War Dogs*, Bear tackles the science fictional trends of the time. He immensely deals with science fiction as a main concern of the novel though it has to do with political and military issues. Again, the narrator is fascinated by the special typicality of his military mission when he talks about Mars: "Mars is cosmically bitching: whistling, hissing, sighing – then, letting out with a shrill high scream as something much too grand shoots overhead" (51).

In *Hegel after Derrida* (1998), Stuart Barnett tackles that concept of aporia. He claims that "astonishment then does not amount only to a lack of knowledge to be filled or an aporia to be overcome – a characteristic that would not really distinguish one science from others" (96). Such aporic sense is conspicuous in the course of Bear's *War Dogs*. The fictional events tell how the military clash takes the form of science fiction. The description of the Gurus clarifies the clash between humanity and the celestial creatures: "Gurus seemed reasonable, mostly. They took a larger view. No surprise, given their celestial origins. They didn't mind their benefits expanding to all nations even those that refused to acknowledge they were real." (147) In this manner, Bear provides meticulous aporic insights about science fiction and military politics.

In *Derrida, Literature and War: Absence and the Change of Meeting* (2009), Sean Gaston contends that "the aporia of the inside that does nothing when it is on its own is indicative of the nature of the potential" in literary works (42). In this sense, Gaston claims that "the aporia of the duel suspends the right of the sovereign power to punish crimes with the death penalty. One kind of honor

suspends another since... it is precisely the propriety of a sacrifice above and beyond life that gives the death penalty its sovereign right.... the aporia of the sovereignty of sacrifice as the transcendental possibility of the law" (96-97). Bear, in *War Dogs*, the narrator talks about his horrible experience in the space when they met the Skyrines: "then we get real quiet. That kind of shock is not good. We could have killed each other." (244)

In *Between Deleuze and Derrida* (2004), Paul Patton and John Protevi tackle the concept of aporia from Derridan perspective: "We must not exaggerate the import of this shift, however, and think Derrida has left behind his post-phenomenological orientation - nor indeed, that there are not aporetic moments in his early work. The shift from deconstructive quasi-concept to experience of aporia maintains a continuity of concerns with his earlier work, even if there is a sort of figure-ground inversion" (184).

Simon Skempton, in *Alienation After Derrida* (2011), claims that the concept of aporia "does constitute the loss of the positive plenitude of abstract givenness and the founding of an identity [of the literary text] in difference that maintains the infinity of living contradiction, the subsisting effectivity of paradox and aporia" (78). In *War Dogs*, the deconstructive aporic identity of the narrative text is about the influence of war upon narrator's individuality. He both physically and psychologically suffers from the sequences of war in his journey to Mars. He describes the Martian as Antagas. Indeed, the word refers to the metaphorical meaning of antagonism that dominates the clash between the narrator and the Skyrines. "my pistol is getting off bolt after bolt, and then, just as an Antag weaves to within a few meters, it runs out of charge – of course" (278). Bent Sørensen, in *Five Faces of Derrida* (2008), approaches the Derridan conceptualization of aporia. He claims that "since ultimately there is no theme in the narrative which has not been dealt with extensively in Derrida's own writing, be it haunting and spectrally; violence, trauma, guilt and shame, confession and forgiveness; or practice, application and theory, it is arguable that the entire piece is circumscribed by Derrida's thinking and that Derrida countersigns the narrative both in content, style and method" (20). The discourse of *War Dogs* is directed towards the political atrocities described by the narrator. He details his military experience with the Antagas: "because the Antag has

dropped its weapon or I can't see a weapon. Maybe they long for hand-to-hand or claw-to-hand or whatever, for honor, for glory. And then it's on me" (278)The quotation below summarizes the aporic status of *War Dogs*, whereby the narrator contemplates upon the contemporary scientific boom. In essence, it embodies Bear's obsession with politics' potentials to invade outer spaces for certain hidden agendas:

Titan. Out around Saturn, more than one and a half billion kilometers from Earth. Some of us have already become heroes out there. What kind of suits do we wear? Nitrogen and methane atmosphere, mostly, with traces of acetylene and propane helping shape abillowing, yellow-orange haze over a plasticky, oily geology rich with long-chain hydrocarbons-sitting on deep ice and an ocean way beneath *that*, flowing over a weirdly uneven, stony core. (291).

The concept of aporia entails the deconstructive nature of literary texts. Nicholas Royle, in Jacques Derrida (2008), argues that "the techno-scientific and effective decentering of the earth, of geopolitics, of the anthropos in its onto-theological identity or its genetic properties, of the ego cogito – and of the very concept of narcissism whose aporias are . . . the explicit theme of deconstruction" (16). These scientific factors are the representative tokens of the concept of aporia.

The Use of Simulacra in Greg Bear's *War Dogs*

The concept of simulacra refers to the reality outside the literary text. The concept is also associated with postmodernism. In *Social Ontology, Spectacle, and Hyperreality: A Critical Examination of Searle, Debord and Baudrillard* (2015), Nathan Ward claim that "we are now living in a thoroughly 'postmodern society' comprised of 'simulacra'; there are no cohesive social relations or collective meaning any longer" (21). In *War Dogs*, the protagonist lives the same postmodern experience: "Hoofing it outside Skybase Lewwis-McChord, I'm pretty sure this is Washington State, I'm walking along Pacific Highway, and this is the twenty-first century and not some fudging movie" (1) This advanced life refers to postmodernism in the science fictional sense. The narrator also has some experiences in this postmodern life: "After three weeks in the shit, rough confusing weeks. I feel dizzy.

I look down, blink out the sting, and keep walking. Cosmoline still fidges with my senses." (1-2) In addition, he describes his life in the American Virginia: "We came back in separate ships, he did not show up at the mob center, and my Cougar is still parked outside Skyport Virginia. I could grab a shuttle into town, but Joe told me to lie low. Besides, I badly want time alone-time to stretch my legs, put down one foot after another." (2) War, in Bear's *War Dogs*, shapes the narrator's life: "How's the war there?" she asks. (3) He speaks with the taxi driver. Then, he talks about space life: "Hey, spaceman, welcome back! Tell me true, how's the vac?" (4)

In *War Dogs*, the hyperreal experience lies at the heart of science fiction. The narrator embarks a celestial mission into out space. This is, in fact, a token of postmodern human society. The narrator says: "In another online operation, the Gurus and their new recruits led a second select group-military, clandestine services, political-on a merry geocache chase, in quest of something that might point to a huge breach of national security. There was a breach, of course" (8-9). He also refers to the world leaders who control the political agendas for certain purposes: "World leaders were gradually made aware of the game change, with astonishing tact and political savvy. Citizen awareness followed a few months later, after carefully coached preparation. It seemed the Gurus knew as much about our psychology and sociology as they did about the rules of the universe. They wanted to take things gradual." (9) Bear tackles this hyperreality as a sort of science fictional element: "And so over a period of six months, the Gurus came forward, moving out in ones and twos from their Yemeni Hadramaut beachhead to world capitals, economic centers, universities, think tanks-transforming themselves into both hostages and indispensable advisors" (9). This early encounter between human beings and outer creatures is an indication of the necessity for military preparations. The narrator speaks about the Gurus presence on Earth: "The Gurus explained that they are here in tiny numbers because interstellar travel is fantastically difficult and expensive, even at their level of technology" (9). He talks about his relationship with them: "Just as we were getting used to the new world order-just as we were proving ourselves worthy-the Gurus confessed they were not the only ones out there in the

dark-years. They explained that they had been hounded by mortal enemies from sun to sun, planet to planet, and were in fact now stretched thin-left weak, nearly defenseless” (10).

Bear, in *War Dogs*, utilizes fictional creatures, like the Gurus, in order to give an implicit meaning of space invasion and political concerns. The narrator carries out these meanings when he contemplates them: “Gurus were not just being magnanimous with their gifts of tech. they needed our help, and we needed to step up and help them, because these enemies were already inside the far, icy margins of our solar system, were, in fact, trying to establish their own beachhead, but not on Earth” (10). He also refers to their celestial presence on Mars: “On Mars. Some pundits started to call this enemy the Antagonists-Antags. The name stuck. We were told very little about them, except that they were totally bad” (10). For this reason, he prefers to call them Antags who live on Mars: “Welcome to Mars, the red and no immediate threat” (14). This is the simulacra “reality” of science invasion in postmodern time. Bear polishes this political mission with since fictional sense because he writes in a postmodern literary mode.

In the implications of the military discussion of simulacra, Ward refers to the U.S.’s and Russia’s rally for nuclear armament. In fact, such rally is a substantial kind of hidden political agendas; Ward writes: “Mass-produced, self-referring and self-obsessed replicas of blueprint models, nuclear weapons in the possession of the USA, Russia and other countries are hyperreal” (32). This kind of weaponry is simulacra of postmodern era. In a striking way, Bear depicts this rally in *War Dogs*. Being an American citizen, the narrator describes the aliens’ uniforms that resemble the Russians’ military uniforms: “In a few minutes, walking steady, no leaping, we surround the body. There’s another about ten meters off, and another twenty beyond that three in all. The uniforms are Russian, probably with French equipment. Take bends over the first and rolls it face up. The skintight is still puffy. The helm plate is gruesome. Can’t tell if it was male or female” (20). He also lives in a Russian tent: “That’s too stupid a question to answer. We’re here in a Russian tent.” (25) They lead this life now on Mars: “It’s extreme on the Red. The air is just a millibar above a vacuum it’s always

too damned cold. While there’s quite a bit of water on Mars, overall most of it is tough to get at-locked up at the poles or cached beneath old seabeds or hidden in deep-flowing aquifers” (27). This mission is all military to confront the Antags: “Sometimes Antags let a fountain sit for weeks, working away, storing up volatiles, and when troops arrive and settle in, then they blow up real sense of humor. Just as we start to party-scrap and stain on the Red” (28). But, he strangely recalls the Russians: “Dead Russians are saving us this night” (33). In the end, Bear provides literary insights regarding the hidden political agendas undertaken by the U.S and Russia. He conveys such insights through science fiction.

The concept of simulacra indicates the depiction of reality in literary works. In *Simulacra and Simulations* (1981), Jean Baudrillard says that reality is depicted in an imaginary manner in literary texts: “this imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer’s mad project of the ideal coextensively of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive. It is all of metaphysics that is lost.” (2) As such, simulacra are the projection of reality in text that is replicas of true reality outside the text.

Conclusion

Bear’s literary ability to depict the hidden political agendas of war through science fictional style is admirable. Bear is concerned about contemporary political issues that disturb the common status quo. Therefore, he has used his literary works as tools of critiquing the devastating political practices in the postmodern era. He exposes the hidden agendas of politics of the world’s super powers. The interpretation of military missions to outer spaces has been accentuated since they are of paramount importance for seeking political hegemony i.e., the world’s political power seeks ultimate hegemony through advanced military hegemony. In fact, this rally for power is an indicative factor of the hidden political agendas in the postmodern world.

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