Humor as escape from war

Kim Thuy’s *Ru* provided an insightful perspective of refugees at war from a refugee narrative. However, it presents the experience with humor since the war is not all negative, *Ru* “celebrates the wisdom, determination and courage of individuals, especially women, who struggle with fate and environment.” (1, Refugee Narratives in Ru) The humor creates a fun and relaxing tone. It provides an easier understanding of them and reminds the authority to reflect on how rational actions affect others. Being optimistic and having a sense of humor is important during the war, *Ru* proves that it can help them to survive. Combining humor into a tragic story improves the reader’s experience and helps to digest the heavy and hard topics in the novel. The humor and the positivity in the story not only helped the protagonist but also the reader.

During the refugee experience of the protagonist, she, and her family experienced countless tough times. From the start of the war, their life has been getting rougher and rougher. Their parents lose their jobs and social status, and the downfall of being janitors and homemakers. However, they keep an extremely optimistic mindset, they are able to “hold their gaze steady, no matter the mood of the moment. My mother often recited the proverb that was written on the blackboard of her either-grade class in Saigon: Ðời là chiến trận, nếu buồn là thua. Life is a struggle in which sorrow leads to defeat.” (Thuy, 18) They believe that one they their life will be back to normal, no more running away and living in overcrowded ships eating engine-oiled biscuits while being terrified that at any time something or someone will take their lives. The protagonist leads by example from her parents as they fall from a high social status to refugees. But they did not give up on life, nor on their children. They tried to show her that they will see the sun one day, by being optimistic themselves. Demonstrating that if they stay pessimistic and believe that they are going to die, they will die, and vice versa. The protagonist also creates laughter during challenging times. As humor is important during the war, “dark humor is therapeutic. Combat zones can be intense and traumatic. Humor makes everything better! Sometimes just being immature takes some of the pressure off.” (Kirkpatrick) Humor, even the worse ones, can help ease the stress and pressure, it can let tough times flow faster and easier. Bring happiness to people using the simplest way. Humor is a useful tool, and its effect may be surprising “humor can play a critical role in building positive relations or potentially inflaming conflicts.” (Zelizer) Therefore, humor improves the chance of the main characters surviving under harsh conditions as it creates hope, as long as there’s hope humans would thrive and work towards it.

The humor in this story also improves the reader’s experience. This novel is a very realistic refugee narration and the author wanted to show what it is genuinely like during wartime as a refugee. So, the author shows the actual events that happened during the period of escaping to Canada without sugar-coating the content. Nevertheless, as most of the readers have never been through tough times like that, it is understandable that the harsh and depressing facts like child prostitution, loss of humans, and political oppression, are hard to digest and read. Hence, some light jokes and humor were inserted in between different events, so that it could create an easier and more relaxing tone. Humor also helps readers to understand a passage easier “expert indicates that laughter is an effective instrument for facilitating language learning. Humor is a matter of interest to us. Humor was a part of our pedagogical framework most notably.” ( Asrifan & Octaberlina) The author also shares someone of the positive aspects of the war, “Sao Mai resurfaced like a phoenix reborn from its ashes, like Vietnam from its iron curtain and my parents from the toilet bowls they had to scrub.” (Thuy, 126) It is new hope after a disastrous time, the negativity makes a huge contrast with the positive and makes it stands out more. The effect of this might not work as well as humor, but it is another way to balance the depressing topics of the novel. Together it eases the reading experience of the readers and makes it a more delightful attempt to expose the dark side of the war.

In conclusion, humor is an immensely powerful and crucial tool in writing. Kim Thuy brilliantly uses humor to enhance both the protagonist and the readers’ experience. Good laughter can ease even some of the more depressing truths in the world while keeping the seriousness and significance of those events.

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| Exceeding | Clear and focused topic  Clear and complex thesis statement - specificity  Stylistically/syntactically sophisticated – demonstrating literary academic diction and tone  Complex structure (smoothly flowing transitions and argumentation)  Clear, focused paragraphs with convincing and elegant use of textual evidence.  Grammatically correct. Correct spelling.  Very insightful, critically/theoretically elevated analysis of the text/topic; goes beyond the literal |
| Meeting | Clear and focused topic  Clear thesis statement.  Structurally clear (clear topic sentences, paragraph coherence/focus, paragraphs have adequate connections to one another).  Solid use of textual evidence.  Grammatically correct. Correct spelling.  Provides solid insight into the topic’s meaning/significance. |
| Emerging | Lacks a clear argument.  Structurally unclear/compromised (a lack of clear topic sentences and/or unfocused paragraphs; paragraphs seem disconnected/scattered).  Grammatical/spelling issues  Inadequate use of textual evidence  Falls into plot summary; lacks adequate insight into the text |
| Incomplete / Rewrite | Not completed (amount written is inadequate).  Chronic grammatical/spelling issues that make the paper unreadable.  Substantial structural issues that make the paper unreadable.  Clear and pronounced misunderstanding of the requirements/genre of the assignment |

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