

**When Words Survive War: Trauma and the Legacy of War Poetry across
World War I (1914-1918) and the Palestinian Experience (1948 onwards)**

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English.

Department of English and Humanities

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The poetic reactions that are produced as a result of war have always been in the face of suffering, loss, and psychological trauma. In addition to the physical pain, war makes people mute, whereas poetry is used to bring out and provoke those gruesome memories. The present paper is a comparative textual analysis of war poetry in World War I (1914-1918) and the ongoing Palestinian experience (1948 onwards) and how, in both cases, the personal trauma becomes a place of collective memory through poetry. The paper focuses on the works of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, poets in World War I, and also Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer, Palestinian poets. The thesis identifies the significance of war poetry as an ethical remembrance tradition by comparing World War I poetry to modern Palestinian poetry. The results of this thesis demonstrate that war poetry is not only a document of the psychological torment; it is also a kind of revolt against the prevailing social orders and cultural patterns.

Keywords: *War poetry, trauma, collective memory, World War I, Palestinian poetry*

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my younger sister, Tasnuva Rahman, who has consistently supported me throughout my life, particularly throughout my four years at BRAC. Her constant support has significantly impacted my experience in writing this paper. Without her unwavering love and support, I would not have been able to complete this assignment on time.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except war. Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war, and the pity of war” (Owen).

Just months before his death in 1918, English poet Wilfred Owen famously wrote this as a response to the brutalities and losses of World War I. In May 1918, Wilfred Owen wrote in the preface of his collection of war poems that his subject is war and that he was not concerned with poetry, hence the expression ‘The Poetry is in the pity’¹. A hundred years later, in a completely distinct place and time, Palestinian poetry serves much of the same purpose. In areas devastated by rule, attack, displacement, and ongoing conflict where lives are uprooted, homes are ruined, and generations come of age in exile, poetry remains one of the few outlets for horror, loss, longing, identity, defiance, and communal despair.

This study does not engage in the construction of a historical and political equivalence between the context of the First World War and the Palestinian conflict. The two contexts are fundamentally different in terms of scale, temporality, and structure. The similarities are made on the level of the function of literature. By analysing the way, the two contexts of the war are treated by the poets in the face of violence and the inadequacy of representational language, this research engages with war poetry as a form of ethical witnessing. The similarities that are being made in this thesis are not based on the historical context of the two events but on the function of literature.

¹ The preface, found among his papers, was later published in the posthumous 1920 edition of his *Poems*, edited by his friend and fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon.

This particular study focuses on the role of poetry as a platform for the transmission of trauma in various wars.

1.1 War Poetry as a Response to Trauma

War poetry serves as a direct articulation of the experiences and feelings of both soldiers and civilians associated with conflict, functioning as a vehicle for conveying loss, grief, and disillusionment. Katie Cannon, an American theologian said that, “Our bodies are the texts that carry the memories and therefore remembering is no less than reincarnation” (Ven der Kolk 202). World War I was an international brutal conflict between 1914 and 1918. It resulted in many soldiers experiencing psychological and emotional disturbances. Ven der Kolk mentioned that, “[t]he outbreak of World War in 1914 once again confronted medicine and psychology with hundreds of thousands of men with bizarre psychological symptoms, unexplained medical conditions, and memory loss” (202). The psychological tolls of soldiers were gradually acknowledged over time. “In 1922 the British government issued the Southborough Report, whose goal was to prevent the diagnosis of shell shock” (203). Consequently, contemporary notions of trauma and psychotherapy can be described as “shell shock”, a painful metaphor for the psychological harm, that the 1922 Southborough Report attempted to erase.

In contrast, Palestinian poetry is rooted in a history of conflict that has been long-standing and in which violence is not perceived as a historical event but as a state that is embedded within civilian life. Poets such as Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer articulate a trauma stemming from experiences of displacement, occupation, loss, and memory. Unlike the historical nature of World War I poetry, Palestinian poetry is rooted in a violence that is still ongoing and in which trauma is perceived as a shared and inherited experience. Poetry is a means of survival and

resistance to erasure and marginalisation. Shahid et al. (2024), examine the psychoanalytic dimensions of *Gaza Writes Back*, with a particular emphasis on how trauma, memory, and resistance are interwoven into the fabric of Palestinian poetry. Especially relevant concepts are “acting out” versus “working through” - indicating compulsive repetition of trauma versus healing through storytelling (Shahid et al. 2024). It can be illustrated that the attachment to trauma can be described as narrative. In this regard, narrative has been found to be a tool by which people can transcend suffering and find their way through it.

Despite the fact that the trauma of World War I has been widely theorised, the ongoing conflicts, such as in Gaza, show how the trauma does not end with the war arena and affects civilians, families, and national identities. This continuity creates a transhistorical approach to literature, in which we can look at how poetry has adapted itself to various forms of war and how poetry has preserved its fundamental role as an instrument of bearing witness to trauma.

1.2 War Poets as Witnesses Against Silence

Poetry is the manifestation of individual or subjective thought and strong emotions. Nevertheless, poets have been composing about war since the times of *The Iliad* by Homer to World War I poetry by Wilfred Owen and commentaries on displacement and resistance by Mahmoud Darwish. World War I had a massive influence on the face of war poetry as it now became an accepted genre in contemporary literature. During World War I, a lot of young soldiers had a habit of writing poems to share their feelings and war experiences. These are the united voices of soldiers that built a genre that we refer to today as the First World War poetry. The custom of verse witnessing was not, however, terminated by the war. War poetry still serves as a

kind of living testimony up until this day in Gaza, and it is a tradition, which has evolved, changed and survived to speak-for the dead, the displaced, the grieving, the exiled, the traumatised.

The war poetry had various functions: it was a way of emotional outburst, the revelation of the ugly reality of the war that was usually not revealed publicly, and it was also a way of coping with the long-lasting conflict. During the First World War, a mass of war poetry emerged, and this helped war poetry to become an established modern genre of literature. However, poets, soldiers or civilians, were a motley group who responded to World War I in their different ways. The poets each presented a different angle: Wilfred Owen bitterly lamented the horror of the trench warfare; Siegfried Sassoon was bitter but fiercely critical of the military commanders and patriotism; Rupert Brooke idealized the ideal hero; and Robert Graves was the poet who described the immense psychological effect of the war on the servicemen. The poets did not simply write their works in order to record their own experiences during World War I; they tried to challenge the myth of glorification of war, especially the concepts of honour and glory, and also to show the great pain and suffering that the wars caused.

Though the British war poets were expressing the trauma of the First World War, the resistance and remembrance were also expressed through poetry in other times and in other geographical locations. One might say that Palestinian poets in other words and in other situations are the voices of identity, memory, and survival. Palestinian iconic poet and national poet of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, and Fadwa Tuqan, with her soulful cries of assertion and identity and womanhood and homeland, are today joined by such emerging voices as Refaat Alareer, Hiba Abu Nada, and Mosab Abu Toha. Their poetry is an instrument of cultural maintenance and

political protest that tells the story of the constant struggle, displacement, and endurance in Gaza and elsewhere.

Here, poets are not only witnesses of war but also moral witnesses since their poetry does not allow obliteration and encourages memory. Yet, when the poets are placed in a two-poet column, Owen and Sassoon in the case of World War I, Darwish and Alareer in the Palestinian case scenarios, this study reveals consistency and adaptation, how the war poems are still used to express trauma and memory, despite the shift in nature of war and the socio-political environment.

1.3 War Poetry as Living Testimony: Scope and Argument of the Study

The paper is not only interested in war poetry in the context of a particular time and place. It considers instead war poetry as a genre in a state of evolution with time, but one with the same intent of being utilized as a means of witnessing and remembering. This paper leaves the political aspect of war behind and puts it instead on war as a condition of life. This thesis does not allow the war poetry to be limited to a particular historical time and geographical place by integrating the voices of the trenches of the First World War and the rubble of Gaza and the Palestinian experience as a whole. Rather, it introduces war poetry as a kind of living witnessing, as a tradition, which lives, evolves and thrives, and continues to speak on behalf of the dead, displaced, grieving, exiled, and traumatised.

In this study, trauma is explored as a collective and cultural experience, and how war poetry translates individual trauma into collective memory. Although World War I poetry and Palestinian War poetry have been extensively researched in their respective genres, very little has been done to analyse them together from a trauma-based, transhistorical approach to literature. Through an archival research approach, it analyses selected works by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon

alongside those of Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer, demonstrating how their differing poetic styles articulate trauma, suffering, loss, and longing. Finally, this thesis brings the two genres of war poetry into dialogue with one another, engaging trauma studies and comparative literature by exploring how war poetry functions as a living tradition of ethical remembrance.

Chapter 2: Trauma, Memory, and War Poetry: Existing Literary Scholarship

Review

This chapter provides an overview of existing studies on the key themes of the background of World War I and Palestinian war poetry and psychological scars. In order to conduct this research, the author reviewed existing literature from published research papers, scholarly articles, and books available through academic databases or publishing houses on war poetry, World War I, and Palestine written by recognised scholars in the field of literary studies. A total of 45 original research articles, journals, books and documentaries were found, with case studies investigating the war, poets and poetry and evaluating the social and cultural context. For this study, a few publications with transformation frameworks were selected. It explores the detailed explanation of trauma theory and comparative literature defined and structured by different theorists. Finally, the chapter addresses the gap in the research paper.

2.1 Disillusionment and Shell Shock: World War I Poetry

The First World War (1914-1918) is often considered a watershed moment in modern history, not only for its profound political and social implications but also for its impact on the cultural landscape. But any war could eventually end in disaster. Paul Fussell described The Great War² in his book *The Great War and modern memory*, the horrific living conditions of the warriors in the “British trenches” during the battle, and he also mentioned what Major P.H. Pilditch³ said a

² World War I is often referred to The Great War.

³ P. H. Pilditch served as a commissioned officer in the Army in France during World War One, rising to the rank of Major. He trained as an architect at Cambridge University and was articled to Colcutt & Hamp in London. (Pilditch, Philip Harold 1890 - 1949 | AHRnet)

month before the war ended: that they “spent some time in the old No Man’s land⁴ of four years’ duration...It was a morbid but interesting occupation tracing the various battles amongst the hundreds of skulls, bones and remains scattered thickly about” (54). Now, when we bring up the scenario of The Great War in literature, the most pertinent topic which comes with it is the formation of a new literary genre called War poetry that emerged prominently during the First World War because soldiers used to write lyrical songs or verses as their mode of expression at that time. In literary terms, the genre of “trench poetry” emerged: as one commentator notes, trench poetry⁵[...] was inspired by the soldiers’ daily life on the front, especially the constant witnessing and interacting with horrifying scenes.

Professor Tim Kendall stated in the book *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology* that the war poets deliberately chose poetry as a medium to express themselves because it was considered an “art in which Britain could confidently claim supremacy over its enemy” (9). He also adds how these lyrical verses were viewed as a “patriotic act” which “celebrated and enhanced the nation’s cultural ascendancy”, that is, it showcased their nationalistic spirit and depicted how the culture of Britain is superior to that of their opposition (9). World War I introduced mass industrialised warfare, trenches, chemical weapons, and a collapse of previous beliefs about honour, glory and civilisation. An article published by the Poetry Foundation titled “World War I: Poetry by Year” addresses that “[...] poems in 1914 and 1915 extol the old virtues of honour, duty,

⁴ 'No Man’s land' refers to an area or strip of land that no one owns or controls, such as a strip of land between two countries' borders, especially in a war.

⁵ This line is quoted from the University of North Texas Libraries website, specifically an exhibit titled “The Lost Generation: World War I Poetry: The Soldier Poet”. The page highlights the prominence of poets who fought in the First World War. link- (exhibits.library.unt.edu)

heroism, and glory, while many later poems after 1915 approach these lofty abstractions with far greater scepticism and moral subtlety through realism and bitter irony” (Amos et al.).

2.2 Exile, Occupation, and Resistance in Palestinian Poetry

The evolution of Palestinian poetry genre can be traced through different historical moments, each marked by different forms of oppression and resistance. From the early years following the Nakba⁶ to the contemporary experience of genocide and occupation, Palestinian poets have continued to use their craft as a form of defiance and a call for justice. In the journal, “The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation”, Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi investigates the phenomenon of poetry among the Palestinians in the 1970s, which was a period of optimism and struggle. The dominant theme is post-1967 poetry in the occupied territories, particularly in the “West Bank and Gaza Strip” (Ashrawi 77). Therefore, as poetry is seen as an expression and tool of “national solidarity and political consciousness”, two poles of poets can be distinguished. For example, “nationalist, committed, and politically aware poets” who see poetry as a vehicle to “move the masses, and individualistic, personal poets” who are completely detached from their people and setting (84). Both groups experience catharsis, in the former on a national scale and in the latter on a psychotherapeutic one.

Palestinian poetry emerges from a historical condition of forced displacement, with exile functioning as its central thematic and structural foundation. Hussain Hamzah, in the article “Exile

⁶ The term “Nakba” (Arabic for “the catastrophe” or “the disaster”) refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land during the 1948 Palestine War and the establishment of the State of Israel. It is a foundational event in Palestinian national consciousness, marking the destruction of their society and the beginning of the ongoing Palestinian refugee crisis. (Al Jazeera English)

in *Contemporary Palestinian Poetry*”, emphasises that exile in contemporary Palestinian poetry does not appear as a matter of choice but is imposed upon by the political and social circumstances which the Palestinian people had encountered in 1948 (258). This rupture transformed poetry into a primary medium for articulating war, loss, and national trauma. Hamzah further argues that Palestinian literature can fundamentally be treated as a literature of exile and absence, asserting that “no other literature has taken shape and evolved to this extent in the crucible of exile” (257). War poetry thus becomes a space where memory, nostalgia, and the longing for return function as counterforces to erasure.

Saddik M. Gohar expands this argument by situating Palestinian exile poetry within a postcolonial framework. He defines exile as a signifier not only of living outside one’s “homeland” but also of the condition caused by such “physical absence” (229). Palestinian war poetry transforms loss into a form of historical testimony, where personal trauma reflects collective dispossession under colonial and imperial power structures. The relevance of resistance is political as well as cultural. Salas Adell (2024) explains that Palestinian poets establish their identity in defiance of efforts to efface their memory, either by means of the destruction of their landmarks or through the destruction of their cultural narrative. According to Boayrid (2019), poets such as Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, or Tawfiq Zayyad employ the use of discourse to resist the narrative of power, with the language and literary devices defining the political position of their literature. An example of this is the way Zayyad employs the use of metaphors in his “Here We Will Stay” as the representation of the unwavering resistance of the Palestinian people (Boayrid 53).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Freud's Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud's book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) is often cited as foundational for trauma theory, introducing concepts like "repetition compulsion" and the "death drive" in the context of "war neuroses" (21-29). In the article named "Trauma and the pleasure principle" states that, for Freud, "trauma involves an external shock that overwhelms the mind's capacity to bind excitations, resulting in intrusive repetition, flashbacks, nightmares"—the mind tries to master the event through repetition rather than assimilate it. For example, the poets' repeated imagery and structure of horror and the recurring motifs of shells, mud, gas, and dead comrades can be seen as poetic enactments of the repetition compulsion—an attempt to "break through" the original traumatic experience via representation (Freud 26).

Now in the context of war, Freud began to seek out the cause of "post-traumatic disorders" (Freud 29). The book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle; Group Psychology, and Other Works* was written just a few years after the First World War and the world was rife with victims of this war. During this period, soldiers often associated any symptoms of trauma with their war-related injuries. However, Freud was not convinced. In his work, he observes that even personnel who had not been at the frontline exhibited these symptoms. World War I poet Wilfred Owen, repeated experiences prove Freud's point about how trauma is recycled in the mind in order to present that experience. In the Palestinian war poetry, the repeated assertions of identity and ascription to place in the work of Mahmoud Darwish reflect the trauma of individuals and cultures forced to relocate. Freud explained that war poetry, in many different locations, uses repeated imagery and wordage

to create trauma in the reader. Throughout Freud's career, he noted that people who had a trauma-related neurosis got it from a particularly frightful experience (16-24).

Jeffrey Alexander's Cultural Trauma Theory

Jeffrey Alexander defines cultural trauma as occurring "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). Now in the war context, this transformation not only focuses on shared experience but also "[...] lost wars create a sense of anger and aimlessness; that disasters in the physical environment led to panic; that assaults on the human body lead to intense anxiety; that technological disasters create concerns, even phobias, about risk. The responses to such traumas will be efforts to alter the circumstances that caused them. Memories about the past guide this thinking about the future" (Alexander 3).

Thus, individual traumas "[...] emerge at the level of the collectivity; social crises must become cultural crises. Events and their representations are distinct entities. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (Alexander 10). Individual traumas are not isolated experiences but arise within a collective frame. In other words, while trauma is often viewed as an individual experience, a personal psychological wound, it also emanates from shared experiences at the level of groups or societies.

Comparative Literature Analysis

In the article “Comparative Literature?” by David Damrosch, the definition of comparative literature is emphasised as a study that “arises in a kind of competitive symbiosis with the nationalisms dominant in nineteenth-century Europe” (Damrosch 326). The field is concerned with the “interactions of national traditions”, but it also serves as a bridge to the “world literature” that reflects the intellectual production beyond national and regional boundaries (Damrosch 327). The article also notes how comparative literature helps engage with “global contexts” by facilitating a broader understanding of literary traditions across cultures. This approach integrates “specialised and generalist” perspectives, indicating the role of cross-cultural and thematic comparisons within the framework of global literary studies (329).

Another article titled “Comparative Literature and Its Theoretical Dimensions” mentions some fundamental and contemporary trends in Comparative Literature. The field of comparative literature “is wider than it seems at first glance, as it is not limited to the study of explicit metaphors and transmission of ideas, themes and literary models of people from one literature to another but also studies the type of impact which is baptised by the writer in his language in which he writes after benefiting from the other literature” (Shamsuddin 84). This process is referred to as the writer's interpretation based on their reading of the text derived from another literature. This interpretation can vary significantly from the actual truth, either by a large margin or a small one.

2.4 Beyond Historical Boundaries: Identifying the Research Gap

The above-mentioned sources give a detailed review of World War I poetry and Palestinian poetry as two distinct and independent literary traditions. Though World War I poetry has been researched in detail regarding themes such as shell shock, disillusionment, and modernist trauma,

Palestinian War poetry has equally been examined in relation to exile, resistance, and postcolonial identity. Yet, this tradition of war poetry appears to be separated from World War I poetry on the basis of historical markers and boundaries. Therefore, what appears to be unexplored in this field of study is an examination of the role of war poetry from different historical conflicts in the formation of a transhistorical methodology of witnessing, wherein the individual experience of trauma is replaced by cultural remembrance. This thesis, moreover, in bringing World War I and Palestinian War poetry together, makes an intervention in the field of trauma studies and comparative literature, as it examines war poetry as a living tradition that refuses to cease and continues to produce cultural remembrance.

Chapter 3: Writing Trauma Across Borders: Wilfred Owen and Mahmoud

Darwish

War affects not only the physical realm but also the psychological and cultural dimensions of survivors. The poetry of Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) and Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) exemplifies distinct methodologies for confronting the pain of war within diverse circumstances. Wilfred Owen and Darwish, despite the significant temporal and geographical divide, share a commonality in their poetic treatment of war. This chapter examines three pairs of poems that explore themes of trauma, memory, and resistance as articulated by their respective poets. A connection can be made between Wilfred Owen's works, which address the anguish of war, and Darwish's works, which examine themes of identification, emotional resonance, and moral similarities and differences.

3.1 Biographies of Owen and Darwish

3.1.1 Wilfred Owen

World War I was an awful war that took a toll on the image of the glorious past. The young Englishman Wilfred Owen, born in 1893, experienced a significant influence from the war. He joined the British Army, eager to join the war. However, his hearing of horrific events during trench warfare forced reality to set in. Campbell refers, “Both Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen wrote poetry that privileges direct combat experience whose ostensible purpose is to educate an ignorant civilian populace of brutal realities” (209-210). Although his experience during the World War I profoundly influenced both his life and his poetry, particularly during his hospitalisation for

shell shock at Craiglockhart War Hospital⁷ in 1917. Pividori asserts that, “[...] from this condition he was discharged in November of the same year. As Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż suggests, “Owen’s hospitalisation at Craiglockhart hospital for ‘shell-shocked’ officers rendered him the perfect sacrificial ‘anti-hero’ of the Great War.” These experiences, both on the battlefield and during his recovery, shaped Owen’s perspective and poetic voice” (50). These harrowing experiences not only deepened his understanding of trauma and suffering but also fuelled his critique of war, which became central to his powerful anti-war poetry.

Fig 1: Portrait of Wilfred Owen

Date: Early 20th century (World War I period, 1914-1918)

Source: The Encyclopedia of the First World War (encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net).

<https://share.google/1oRH7X6E9LrbVQJq4>



⁷ Several of the soldier-poets being treated at “Craiglockhart wrote about their dream-life in shockingly realistic terms, which was in stark contrast both to the public perception of war at the time and to the confidently patriotic verse of earlier war poets” (Sliwinski).

3.1.2. Mahmoud Darwish



Fig 2: Portrait of Mahmoud Darwish

Contributor: Poetry Foundation (online profile)

Source: Poetry Foundation — “Mahmoud Darwish” (online poet biography).
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mahmoud-darwish>

Furthermore, Darwish was most famous for being known as “the voice of Palestinian resistance” (Ghannam and El-Zein 1). In 1948, the British ended their stay in Palestine and established a new state in much of historical Palestine. Following it, there are almost six million refugees. Darwish’s family joined Palestinian refugees fleeing Israeli killings to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. After a year in a UN refugee camp in Lebanon, the Darwish’s family returned to their captured homeland in 1949. Israeli settlers established new colonies on the ruins of these villages and cities (1-2). The incident that shocked the Darwish’s family out of their homes had a significant impact on the poet’s life, making it impossible for him to find his way back home, except via language, poetry, and his lovers. The poet, while in school, was writing poems. His debut collection was published in 1960 at 19 years old. His 1964 second collection of poems, *Olive Leaves, or Awraq al-Zaytun*, established him as a notable Palestinian resistance poet.

3.2 Articulating Loss: Close Readings of War and Exile

3.2.1 “Anthem for Doomed Youth” and “Identity Card”

In Wilfred Owen's poem, “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, the poet satirically attacks the sacrificial ceremonies associated with war. He particularly protested the deprivation of proper funeral rites and the degrading dignity associated with battlefield death. The poem parallels the traditional funeral ritual, with bells tolling, choirs singing, and people praying, with the reality of trench warfare, with the death of young soldiers going unattended by any ritualistic ceremonies that are sacred. The first line, “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?” (1), gives the soldiers' death a more personalised, humane touch, saying that they are less than human, with their death occurring in such a manner that is very much like cattle, slaughtered rather than dying with dignity. “Only the monstrous anger of the guns” (3) is very much in contrast to the funeral tolling bells, saying that the violence associated with war has replaced the funeral bells.

Also, the rhyming style, distorted to represent war, parallels the lost structure of the traditional funeral ritual for the distorted reality of the battlefield. Owen's poem conveys the anguish of war, extending beyond the battlefield to impact society in general. The phrase “each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds” (14) illustrates that the anguish associated with war constitutes an endless cycle prolonged by each life that is lost. The grief foreseen after the death of a soldier extends to society, as the collective experiences the pain of lost youth, which embodies the trauma associated with war.

In contrast, Mahmoud Darwish’s “Identity Card” became a national poem in Palestine (Alhirthani 17). It has “two layers of identity: Darwish’s personal identity and the collective national identity of the Palestinians” (23). The poem begins with the speaker asserting his

humanity in the face of bureaucratic oppression: “Write down: I am an Arab / And I have a name, a mother, a home” (lines 1-2). A direct declaration that targets the erasure of Palestinian identity by colonial authorities, which emphasises he will not be reduced to a mere data point on a bureaucratic form. The use of the “identity card” by Darwish as a symbol of state oppression supports the dehumanisation of the Palestinian people, whose existence is reduced to a number and whose dignity is contested by an occupying force.

Consequently, “His poem, ‘Identity Card’, or Bitaqat Hawiyyah, became a cry of defiance in the face of the occupiers who had been trying to overlook the presence of the Arab-Palestinians on their homeland” (Ghannam and El-Zein 2). As the poem progresses, the speaker’s declaration escalates; it progresses from a simple statement of identity to a big assertion of defiance: “I do not supplicate charity at your doors/Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber...” (lines 14-15). This rhetoric builds up to the image of not only the psychological toll of living under the Palestinian cultural discourse but also of the rising anger over the oppression that removes the humanity of the Palestinian people. However, while there is a need to assert the dignity of the speaker as a resistance, the aspect of the identity card as a symbol of conformity stands out as a resistance to the violence that steals away the speaker himself.

Thematic Comparison

Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth” and Darwish’s “Identity Card” both concern themselves with the reality of the front line of war and the deep subject matter concerning the identity of different races. While Owen repeatedly shows the devastating effects of war on the younger generation, Darwish focuses on the disappearance of Palestinian identity under the backdrop of colonial rule. Through their works of ritual, wrath, and trauma, both poets are using

their pieces as tools of resistance. These poems underscore the transformation of language and rituals due to oppression and violence. Both poems demonstrate how trauma is socially mediated. In Owen, the battle death is transformed into a form of cultural trauma, where the individual sorrow is shared culturally in ritual language, as in the "...pallor of girls' brows" (Owen 11). In the case of Darwish, the cultural trauma is that of the Palestinian uprooting, as in "my roots were entrenched before the birth of time" (Darwish 21-22).

Accordingly, through the psychoanalytic perspective offered by Freudian theory, Owen discloses the repressed sorrow and death fear engendered by war through machinery. Soldiers' mourning is inadequately expressible and indicative of psychic repression: "No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells" (line 5). In addition, Darwish's, "Write down! / I am an Arab" (line 1) defends and asserts self against humiliation and erasure through compulsive repetition. They prefer to employ poetry as a means of opposing war through disguise, which Owen rejects to reveal the harsh realities of conflict, whereas Darwish rejects the simplification of human identity into bureaucratic categories that strip it of its divine essence. Each of their poems exemplifies how war, occupation, or any sort of trauma profoundly affects human identity politically, even shaping the language used to articulate that identity.

3.2.2 "Strange Meeting" and "A Lover from Palestine"

"Strange Meeting" by Owen deals with the intense encounter between two soldiers from warring camps in the afterlife, who are revealed to have shared experiences and the futility of the war from both camps. The speaker in the poem has an encounter with the dead soldier who is visualised with "piteous recognition in fixed eyes" (7), symbolising the shared humanity between the two characters despite the fact that in the real world, the two are enemies. This can best be

seen as an instance of intense ethical realisation. The first lines, “It seemed that out of battle I escaped / Down some profound dull tunnel,” introduce the dark and somehow subterranean world of death. The imagery in the lines “Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground” (12) juxtaposes the different elements of conflict and death, perhaps symbolising the intense alienation the soldier feels as he is left behind by the devastating effects of the war. The speech exchanged by the speaker and the dead soldier in the lines “I am the enemy you killed, my friend. / I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned.” (40-41) symbolises the end of the elements of opposition with the merging of the enemies and the friends as the two become one in the shared human experience. The final stanza of the poem, with the wish to ensure that the realities of the war are unheard, is an indication of the revulsion felt by the poet for the realities of war and the melancholic wish to see that the second war does not repeat the mistakes of the first.

However, through this meeting, Owen wants to highlight the fact that trauma, especially that caused by the war, overcomes the boundaries of individuals, as he introduces trauma as a universal occurrence that all human beings experience. The context in which the poem is placed, that of an underground chamber, symbolically represents that psychological zone in which victims of trauma are placed. In that place, sounds echo ominously, and memories overlap each other. This corresponds with the heavy loading that past trauma places on the minds of victims. Instead of placing trauma in the context of a visual performance, trauma imagery in his poem represents a channel through the experiences of individuals, like those of anger, pity, and sympathy. Owen moves the concentration of the poem away from individual contemplation to a general understanding that all soldiers are victims of the same event referred to as the ‘war’.

Contrarily, Mahmoud Darwish’s “A Lover from Palestine” identifies the site of trauma outside the sphere of war experience and instead in the aftermath of exile, loss, and cultural

dislocation. The poet Darwish has employed the metaphor of the homeland as the loved one to denote the idea of love, loss, and the everlasting agony of separation. For example, “Your eyes are a thorn in my heart” (1) has very deftly woven the idea of love and suffering into one, encapsulating the love for the homeland and the agony of exile therein. The metaphor of the “shattered mirrors” in the verse “Our mirrors were shattered, / And sorrow was multiplied a thousandfold” (16-17) consequently projects the idea of breakage, thereby encapsulating the idea of both displacement and sorrow. Here, the love letters are described to contain “A song,” but the poet personally can sing “the elegy of our homeland” (19), which is mixing the ideas of both love and loss. The idea of mixing up the concepts of both love and loss is further reinforced by the “planting of ‘it’ in the heart of a lyre” (20), translating the agony into art, hence using the musical medium to reflect the idea of resilience.

Additionally, Darwish also uses a metaphor for the Palestinian people as a “palm tree,” a resilient figure that cannot be “uprooted by the Israeli occupation's storm” (Marouf). This is a very effective symbolism that shows the relationship between the Palestinians and their homeland as people who have a very rooted interest in their homeland. According to Gohar, this poem interweaves between the personal and the collective moments that show how the current political struggle has touched personal and collective identity “in many different ways” (231). By writing “A Lover from Palestine”, Darwish does not only talk about his personal loss as a poet who has been displaced by the cultural and ideological changes brought by Arab Nationalism or by Israeli occupation. Moreover, his experience reflects a people who have been displaced by the conflict and struggle for a meaning that can be found in a meditation on love.

Thematic Comparison

Both poems deal with the topic of trauma; Owen's "Strange Meeting" concentrates on the common plight of soldiers during war, while "A Lover from Palestine" by Darwish combines love with the loss of a nation. Though the two poems belong to different contexts, one being the trenches of World War I and the other occupied Palestine, they do, however, deal with a common theme that is interpersonal relationships that deal with trauma. The encounter between enemies is one that turns them into companions in Owen's poem, while the symbol of the homeland as a lover described by Darwish is the pain of exile that is psychological. From the Freudian lens, the speaker in Owen's poem grapples with the return of the repressed in the nightmarish underworld wherein the enemy soldier proclaims, "I am the enemy you killed, my friend" (40). By contrast, Darwish expresses the repressed collective trauma in the language of love: "Your eyes are a thorn in my heart" (1). In this regard, the Palestinian identity is collectively vicariously constructed through shared suffering by Darwish in the collective memory.

There is such a level of thematic congruity; the actual trauma experienced by each poet is unique. The type of trauma experienced by Owen is contemporaneous, dealing with the physical and psychological damage caused by war, especially the mechanised death of soldiers. The type of trauma experienced by Darwish is, on the one hand, one of historical uprooting, spanning several generations, and, on the other, one that is inalienable to the poet's personal and national identity. The type of trauma experienced by Owen is the individual suffering of the soldier caught up in the situation of industrialised warfare, while the type experienced by Darwish is the type shared by the people, themes that emerge with tremendous resonance in the later poetry by both poets.

3.2.3 “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” and “To My Mother”

In Owen's poem, the major imagery revolves around the sacrifice of the young soldier made by the older generation, symbolised in a biblical form related to the story of Abraham and Isaac. The old man's failure to swap the ram with his son, symbolises the resilience in the face of the proliferation of war, where a death toll is not a deterring factor but a certainty. Owen, in this biblical imagery, displays his dissatisfaction with leaders like Abraham, who call for the sacrifice of the young in exchange for the sake of continuing the death of an entire generation. In the poem, “half the seed of Europe” (16), the loss of the youngsters across Europe was devastating, and thus the personal trauma transforms into a greater societal tragedy. Owen uses this biblical reference to depict how countries futilely insist on continuation in the stubbornness of war, destroying the lives of youth even when there was a chance for salvation – the ram. It is a powerful attack against the leaders who sacrificed an entire generation for the sake of war.

Likewise, in “To My Mother,” Darwish articulates his need for the comfort and protection afforded by his mother, particularly in light of his grief over exile and displacement. The poem commences with an expression of longing for “my mother's bread” (1) and “my mother's coffee” (2), highlighting the profound relationship between nationalistic sentiments and maternal warmth. Nonetheless, the reassurance provided by his mother is more than merely a bond between two individuals; it embodies the collective experience of the Palestinian homeland and its people. In the third stanza, Darwish reflects on his experiences as an adult and chooses to return to the safety of the nest. These are general features employed as a metaphor for the homeland of Palestine, illustrating that the mother is distinct from the occupied, lost land. Darwish takes maternal affection to the level of national identity — “Because if I died/ My mother's tears would shame me.” (8-9). This line carries the grief of separation, and the grief of the Palestinians. This mother

is not only the personification of affection for each of the kids, but she is also an embodiment of a nation, which nurtures and enables. Darwish's recollection of his mother stands for the way memories of nurturing oneself function as an art of resistance and an art of living.

Thematic Comparison

Both "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" and "To My Mother" address the issue of trauma emerging from loss, as well as the complicated relationships between individual sorrow and mass destruction. While in Owen's poem, the concern with sacrifice is integral to his war poetry, focusing on the inability of war leaders to stop a meaningless war, regardless of the cost in lives. When the aged man chooses to sacrifice his son over an alternative, it refers to his heartless ignoring of individual life in favour of political and military plans. On the other hand, Darwish, in his "To My Mother", expresses the experience of trauma in terms of exile, loss, and displacement. In his poem, the individual's need for the warmth and comfort of his mother is more than an individual need, symbolising, rather, the need for a lost homeland.

Therefore, the figure of the mother, in Darwish's poem, is far more complex, becoming, rather, a symbol for the Palestinian homeland, its loss, and its collective experience of displacement. While repetition occurs as neurosis in Darwish, it occurs as a collective insistence, allowing Freud's theory to be displaced to cultural trauma. The need for the "mother's bread / My mother's coffee" (lines 1-2) shows the return to the mom as a kind of defense against exile that refers to Freud's manifest. Although both poems deal with themes that revolve around the concept of the trauma of sacrifice but in two different contexts, that of war in Owen's poem and that of exile in Darwish's poem, both poems explore the complex interwoven relationship between individual pain and collective pain.

3.3 From Trench to Exile: Comparative Patterns of Trauma and Resistance

Thematic Similarities

Both poets' comments on the forces that maintain trauma and repress authentic grief. Owen's poetry is well known for criticising the duplicitous power of institutionalised authority, militaristic leadership and nationalistic ideologies that celebrate sacrifice in the face of the horrific truth of trench warfare. His vivid descriptions specifically counter patriotic ideologies. Darwish, too, employs his poetry as political critique. Though his poetry arises from the broader framework of both occupation⁸ and colonialism, it also critiques those systems and narratives that sustain and are composed around dispossession and erasure.

Hence, Owen's constant repetition of incidents like choking, gas, and mutilation can be interpreted as an example of repetition compulsion as suggested by Freud's theories. Also, Owen's representation of the trenches and his preoccupation with the psychological aftermaths of battle establish a linguistic repository of trauma where nightmares and snatches of the sensory become a form of testament to the psychic destruction caused by wars. Such a form of writing as found in the works of Darwish delineates a territory where the mappings of memory and displacement are etched in the form of poetry itself, the repeated gesture of which seeks to inscribe the communal experience.

⁸ Occupation relates to the situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories. It is used interchangeably for Palestine.

Differences

Owen's trauma emerges from a specific historical event, World War I and reflects the psychological aftermath experienced by soldiers confronting frontline slaughter. The scope of his poetic trauma is bound primarily to the visceral experience of combat and its immediate emotional residue (Sowmya and Murthy 31–36). While Darwish's trauma is relevant to historical events, it also deals with long periods of struggle as a people the Nakba, the Palestinian cultural discourse, exile, and struggles with identity and nationhood. His trauma is not specific to one point in time; it continues over decades as a people.

In addition, the poetic world of Owen is mostly restricted to the period of the World War I (1914–1918) and its psychological consequences. His writing is traumatic in relation to that historical event, as part of contemporary conceptualizations of the long-term inner experience of war, yet still in the context of the Great War (Sowmya and Murthy 31–36). The temporality of Darwish is more comprehensive and continuous – it is based on historical trauma that goes through the experiences of pre-Nakba, exile later and struggle. His poems are retrospective, and current and prospective and his poems involve resistance and memory in a timeline that overwhelms particular moments of history (Gana).

Wilfred Owen and Mahmoud Darwish are the vocalisations that reverberate through the passage of time and the expanse of space. In the analysis of their poetry, it exemplifies the manner the aftermath of war and violence unfurls in the very subject matter and style of poetry itself. The poetry is a testament to the unimaginable scope of suffering and the absolute need to testify to that suffering, whether through the surreal meetings in the subterranean world or the shared cries of displacement.

Chapter 4: Siegfried Sassoon and Refaat Alareer: Poetry as Protest

Poetry may frequently constitute its own battleground, a space where people dispute the dominant discourses and the narratives that a poet expresses. This chapter explores the manner in which Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) and Refaat Alareer (1979-2023) utilise the potential of poetry as resistance to violence, construction of identity, and testimony to trauma. This chapter analyses three pairs of poem sets related to resistance, memories, and politics of voice. The role of poetry, for both poets, is then not only that of art but also one of protest, declaration, survivorship, memory, and the obligation of testimony. It appears, then, that their work resists the official discourse of the state that erases the violence while reaffirming the trauma.

4.1 Biographies of Sassoon and Alareer

4.1.1 Siegfried Loraine Sassoon

Siegfried Loraine Sassoon was born in Kent, England, in 1886. His education began at New Beacon School and later at Marlborough College, where “he became interested in poetry and began to write” (Atasoy 3). In the end, Sassoon went to Clare College, Cambridge, in 1906, but he didn't get a degree. He joined the Sussex Yeomanry Regiment later in 1914, and in 1915 he became a lieutenant in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He went to France in 1915 and got the Military Cross for being brave. He was greatly affected by World War I. He lost his brother in the Battle of Gallipoli and was hurt in the Battle of the Somme in 1916 because of shell shock. He went back to fighting in 1916 after being treated at the Craiglockhart War Hospital. He was hurt again in 1917. Amos et al. refers that, “His later years are filled with novels, biographies, and poetry, reflecting on war and its aftermath, themes he continued to develop in his work until his death in 1967.” His development as a poet is characterised by the fact that he moved away from patriotic descriptions of the war to

render it in a brutal and realistic manner.



Fig 3: Portrait of Siegfried Loraine Sassoon

Contributor: Unknown photographer

Date: c. 1914–1918 (World War I period, likely during Sassoon’s active service)

Source: Biographical information from Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siegfried_Sassoon

4.1.2 Refaat Alareer

Refaat Alareer was a critical intellectual who was an outspoken proponent of Palestinian resistance. He utilized his literary skills and cyber activism to disrupt the global discourse on the situation in Gaza and the Palestinian experience. Alareer was born on September 23, 1979, in the Shuja'iyya neighborhood of Gaza City, an important part of his formative experience. He continued his higher education in his specialization of English Literature. His education was not only an important aspect of his own personal literary contributions but also helped him in his profession. His martyrdom in the Israeli airstrike in December 2023 rendered him an enduring symbol in the history of resistance in Gaza against the Israeli occupation. His martyrdom serves as a stark reminder of the price of resistance. However, his ideas are a powerful tool in the hands of every person who follows him. His contribution through literary writing and cyber activism makes him an important symbol of the Palestinian people’s resistance.

Fig 4: Portrait of Refaat Alareer

Contributor: Unknown photographer

Date: Unknown (likely published prior to 2023)

Source: OR Books (publisher)



4.2 Speaking Against Power: Satire, Testimony, and Survival

Siegfried Sassoon and Refaat Alareer may be writing in different times and places, but both addresses closely the trauma of war and the cost of war on individuals and humanity as a whole. Though Siegfried uses strong doses of sarcasm and satirises the effect of World War I on both military and civilian populations, Refaat Alareer writes of the traumatic effect of war on Gaza under Israeli occupation and does that in a captivating sort of way that gives a counterpoint to the muffled voice of Palestine.

4.2.1. “Suicide in the Trenches” And “If I Must Die”

Sassoon’s early poetry about the war represents the initial idealism that he felt towards the conflict; however, as he experienced the horrors of the trenches, his disillusionment grew. In “Suicide in the Trenches”, Sassoon reveals the skepticism that existed between the public’s gullible response to the conflict and the horrific truth that the troops actually faced. It illustrates the following line: “You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye / Who cheer when soldier lads march by” (9-10). The poem explores the issue of lost innocence through the speaker’s depiction of a

“grinning” (3) boy who “slept soundly” (4) and “whistled early with the lark” (4). The vibrant portrayals of nature, youth, and joy sharply contrast with the subsequent stanzas that unveil the harsh truth of war, which extinguishes youth and laughter. He had become disillusioned by the war that he was fighting, which reflected the evolution that he actually underwent as he found himself witness to the bitter truths that characterised the trenches – the brutal death and violence that accompanied the conflict.

Similarly, Alareer's poem “If I Must Die” is famously known as an exemplary assertion for survival and remembering, as it states, “If I must die, / you must live / to tell my story” (1-3). The present community has to take upon itself the responsibility to speak through about the death of those who are no longer alive, to make it evident that they are not forgotten. The imagery of this poem, which moves gradually and physically through mourning and resilience, denotes “bid no one farewell/not even to his flesh.” then, “the kite, my kite you made, flying up above” (14). Here the kite becomes a symbol of remembrance and hope rising above the violence, almost like a spirit or legacy.

Thematic comparison

On thematic lines, while Sassoon portrays the consequences of trauma as self-annihilation, Alareer's text reverses death as an expression of resistance and survival. Following Alexander, cultural trauma is made productive when stories of suffering are interpreted as a common moral stance, and this is what Alareer's poem purposefully achieves about the Gaza conflict. The speaker defies the loss of identity through the incorporation of hope into legacy in his poem, “If I Must Die” that, “Let it bring hope, / Let it be a tale” (lines 18-19). Culturally, Sassoon criticizes a society that celebrates war while hindering the pain experienced by the soldiers. As an expression of

trauma, illustrates that the war's aggressively nationalistic rhetoric has devastated young, attributing responsibility to society.

4.2.2. “The General” and “And We Live On”

Another poem by Sassoon, “The General”, is not as openly critical of the war machine. But it nevertheless articulates how the author is becoming less hopeful about the war. The poem also shows how people felt about war in general at the time. Sassoon employs the element of dark irony to reveal the lack of concern on the part of military officials about the sacrifices soldiers made. Indeed, the general's careless words, “Good-morning; good-morning!” (1) suggest extreme contrast with the drastic outcome of his instructions. Sassoon's resentment of military officials stems from his general animosity against the bureaucratic unconcern he believed was causing unnecessary loss of life. In this poem, the tragic component of the irony consists in the contrast between the general's careless, unconcerned behaviour and the life-changing reality of soldiers. 'The General' consists of only two stanzas, the second of which is a single line, intentionally crafted for maximum impact as the murders of Harry and Jack are conveyed to us through that stark, straightforward statement that the general 'did for them both.'

Conversely, Alareer's poem, “And We Live On”, begins with “Another day in Palestine/ A day in prison/And we live on” (1-3). Here calls out the persistence of people under oppression, despite overwhelming violence. “...Despite Israel's very much identified flying objects / That we see more than our family and friends...” the constant presence of machines of violence becomes a haunting, almost everyday image of danger. The main idea is to tell the stories of the dead (martyrs) and is an important way to fight injustice and take back stories from the oppressors. Alareer uses

poetry to break imposed silence and provide an alternative, humanising archive to typical media portrayals, making the abstract suffering of Gaza personal and universal.

Thematic Comparison

In Sassoon's poetry, the General embodies a destructive self, detached from reality and driven by violent drive, as his optimistic power conceals fatal consequences, "He did for them both by his plan of attack" (14). Freud's concept of repression is demonstrated in the General's refusal of responsibility, while culturally, Sassoon critiques the way institutional authority narrates war heroically, making the deaths of soldiers' normative sacrifice. This fits with Alexander's contention that trauma occurs when social elites control narratives obscuring trauma. Indeed, contrary to the previous poem, Alareer's "And We Live On" proclaims the dominance of the life drive by virtue of resilience. Nevertheless, despite the recurring destruction, the assertion of survival functions as trauma within communal resilience that, "We know that we are human, / We know that we are alive" (6-7). Sassoon exposes how trauma is inflicted by authority through denial and misrecognition, whereas Alareer spotlights survival as resistance, consequently revealing how cultural trauma can either destroy or sustain communal identity.

4.2.3. "Base Details" and "O, Earth"

Siegfried Sassoon's another concise but powerful poem, "Base Details", critically condemns the British officers who remained secure during World War I while dispatching young soldiers to their deaths. The speaker envisions himself as a senior officer collaborating with fellow military officials at the base to determine which young soldiers will be dispatched to the front lines. His first line, "If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath, / I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base," shows the gap between majors and the soldiers they commanded. Then he says, "And

speed glum heroes up the line to death.” Sassoon blames the majors for the troops' deaths, not the fate. They are like murderers and overgrown children playing at war with a “puffy petulant face” (4), unaware of the great sacrifices their soldiers make. During the battle, the Major is “guzzling and gulping in the best hotel” (5), generally miles from the Front, unconscious of its true character as long as they are in charge. The last line – “I’d toddle safely home—and die” – is harsh in contrast to the remainder of “Base Details”. This poem is a self-centred and incisive portrayal of human suffering, concealed behind the utter absence of feeling attributed to the elite class. His rejection of the war, expressed through this poetry, also impacted the general view of this war, bringing into focus a general realisation over the senselessness of this loss of life.

Therefore, Alareer’s poem, “O, Earth”, depicts a miserable speaker whose existence, marred by conflict, has depleted them of tranquillity and happiness. They crave relief through unification with the land, even in death, to ensure that their grief continues to nourish life and memory embedded in the earth.

“O, Earth/ Hug me

And hold me tight/ Or devour me

To suffer no more.” (1-5).

Through these opening phrases, there is a definition of two extremes: acceptance or destruction. The speaker begs the earth to either give comfort or bring an end to their suffering, which shows great emotional exhaustion as a result of constant violence and war. The ground serves as both nurturer and grave. The poem transitions from a heartfelt appeal to a stark truth. “Guns are the words of humanity” (11) serves as a metaphor, that implements of violence have emerged as the predominant mode of communication in conflict regions such as Palestine. “For a soldier needs to

feel high” (14) this remarkable satire suggests that only something insincere or oppressive takes over for a fighter, an occupation victim, anywhere people find peace and freedom as well. The word “high” also connotes emotional elevation as well as drunkenness or desensitisation, hinting at desperation.

Thematic Comparison

Sassoon charges hierarchical power that manufactures trauma through misrecognition, whereas Alareer provides a counter-narrative that embeds death within collective endurance. Siegfried Sassoon’s “Base Details” brings out the death-infested psyche of the power-wielding officer class to externalise violence and shield themselves. Repression, moral disengagement, and the corrupt superego of the officers are expressed in the lines, “And when the war is done and youth stone dead, I’d toddle safely home and die—in bed” (27-28). In these lines, the officers come out as they shield themselves from the trauma of death inflicted on youth. On the other hand, Alareer’s “O, Earth” resignedly appropriates death through the life drive to seek continuity with land and people as one psychic defence mechanism against annihilation: “So take me/ Make me rich/ Make me dirt.” (5-7). This metaphor turns loss into an act of regeneration, framing trauma as communal meaning instead of erasure. By considering these pieces collectively, the poems juxtapose cultural trauma with reclaimed memory, highlighting how cultures either foster psychic breakdown or cultivate survival through meaning-making.

4.3 Remembering as Resistance: A Comparative Reading

Thematic Similarities

Siegfried Sassoon and Refaat Alareer wrote their works during two periods and in two situations. Nevertheless, in their poetry there is also a similar concept of resistance. Both poets

make certain remarks to the power structure which breeds violence, sufferings and injustices. The thematic power of the two poems is a powerful criticism of the institutions that perpetuate trauma. The condemnation of war leadership exercised by Sassoon corresponds to the condemnation exercised by Alareer towards the politicians who do not care about the fate of the Palestinians. Sassoon strongly condemns war leadership, while Alareer censures the international community that fails to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians.

Moreover, Sassoon writes a lot about the pointlessness of war and how war has the capacity to destroy hope, while Alareer writes about how Palestinian narratives impacts cultural identity and psychological well-being. According to Sprengel, “Despite a lifetime of confinement and oppression, [the writers] now have the tools to counteract attempts to block their voices” (40). This mirrors Sassoon’s use of poetry as an act of defiance. Bouali writes, “The poetry of Siegfried Sassoon serves not only as a reflection of personal trauma but also as a tool for the collective memory of a nation that sought to reconcile the horrors of war with the narratives of heroism and sacrifice” (55). Both poets deal with the human trauma of warfare. Although they have different experiences, both poets also write about the strength of the human spirit in the face of institutionalised cruelty in order to illustrate the strength of people who have experienced profound loss.

Furthermore, both Sassoon and Alareer consider the role of memory in acts of resistance. For both writers, it is not considered a passive reflection but an active political engagement. Sassoon writes these poems in tribute to his dead comrades, although he did not romanticise their death. This goes against the efforts of the state in utilising their sacrifice as nationalist propaganda. The statement, “Refaat was a man of profound empathy and indomitable spirit... [he] understood the dichotomies – not least because he studied them – and he denied them in favour of the universal

subjectivity of the Gazan” (Sulaiman & Aljamal 186), encapsulates the essence of Alareer’s work. It highlights his ability to transcend reductive portrayals of the Palestinian condition and instead assert the humanity of the Gazan experience. His work was not only an intellectual critique of colonial narratives but also a deeply personal act of resistance that resonated universally.

Differences

Siegfried Sassoon’s thematic approach toward war-related trauma within his World War I poetry emphasizes the fragmentation of the mind under war stress and the haunting memory that permeates such experiences. Through his poetry texts “Repression of War Experience” Sassoon adopts a dramatic monological approach that requires a soldier released from war and returning home to repress war experiences contrary to his burgeoning memory images triggered by mundane home experiences that overwhelm his attempts at repression through a documented emphasis on his split mind as a returning soldier exemplifying war-related stress and past traumatic events (Harrington). Sassoon’s poetry clearly explains that his concern for memory, repression, and war experiences is a manifestation of a broader concern within modernist approaches for war experiences with structure and word commitments segmented to reflect a mind segmented because of war experiences (Hemmings). Through his poetry text “Survivors,” Siegfried Sassoon has depicted graphic images of returning war veterans with psychic disconnections and haunting images of war experiences creating a gap for reintegration for returning veterans among their non-war experiences.

By contrast, Refaat Alareer’s thematic concern with trauma in “If I Must Die” places individual trauma into a collective socio-political narrative, so that personal mortality is transformed into cultural resistance. Indeed, scholarly studies of this poem stress that Alareer deploys the act of storytelling to preserve an existential collective memory and identity against

systematic repression — a personal story identifying with a communal endurance and a form of resistance (Hussein). In this case, the thematic reading counterbalances interior psychological fragmentation by indicating that Alareer's practice illustrates trauma as always already a part of being collectively occupied, the imagined transmission of one's story and belonging to survivors signifies resilience and continuity within violence and loss (Ali et al). Consequently, Sassoon's approach hinges on individual psychological trauma and linguistic articulation, while Alareer contextualizes trauma within collective memory and resistance in a post-colonial framework.

In short, the poems of Sassoon and Alareer offer a means of challenging the dominant discourse by elevating the voice of those who are left excluded from these systems of power. The poetry of Alareer relies on a literary tradition of resistance in utilising the language of sayings from ancient literary works in order to communicate the issues that exist in a besieged Palestine. Sassoon writes these poems in tribute to his dead comrades, although he did not romanticise their death. This goes against the efforts of the state in utilising their sacrifice as nationalist propaganda. In Sassoon's writing, poems cast doubt upon the institutionalisation of their own war experience.

Chapter 5: From Individual Pain to Collective Memory

This chapter discusses the relevance of war poetry in relation to trauma and memory in order to show its relevance in disparate historical events. It is important to note that this chapter is not intended to make comparisons between WWI and the Palestinian conflict in terms of historical events. This chapter articulates war poetry to be a universal and cross-cultural means of expressing collective traumatic experience. In particular, the war poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, along with the works of Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer, illustrates that war poetry is an element of cultural commonality that transcends individual wars, political backgrounds and timeframes and serves as an important venue for documenting the mental anguish suffered as a result of war, opposing dominant narratives created from the experience of war, and resisting the erasure of memory as it relates to war.

As such, this chapter addresses the main research questions posed by this study, namely to identify the roles of war poetry in documenting the effects of war on the psyche of individuals and on society, describe techniques utilised in the artistic representation of trauma through innovative uses of language in war poetry, and evaluate how modern war poetry interprets and articulates the impact of modern warfare on the individual and society at large. War poetry is therefore viewed as an ongoing, living tradition of continually evolving expression while also preserving its function of witnessing, documenting and opposing the destruction wrought by violence.

5.1 War Poetry as Emotional Archive and Counter - History

One of the most important shared functions of war poetry across historical contexts is its acting as an emotional archive and counter-history. This is clearly different from the governmental, military institutions, or dominant political powers' accounts of war. War poetry keeps the record

of lived realities of conflict as subjected to its violence. In the context of World War I, poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon challenged the patriotic myths that framed this war as noble or heroic. Their poetry exposed the physical devastation and psychological breakdown which the official wartime narratives sought to conceal. According to Paul Fussell, World War I poetry rewrote modern understandings of war when revealing the irony and brutality masked by nationalist rhetoric (75). Owen's poetry, in particular, denies the romanticised presentation of sacrifice while bringing to light the images of death, fear, and mental disintegration. Such are the functions of "Anthem for Doomed Youth", "Mental Cases", and similar pieces of poetry, as they are eyewitness accounts of the cost of war in terms of the emotional experience, which otherwise remains abstract and forgotten in the course of history. The poetry of Wilfrid Owen reflects the hypocrisy of the politicians involved in war as they condone it when they are not required to pay the toll. As a result, World War I poetry functions as an alternative archive.

In a different yet historically violent context, Palestinian poems have the same function. The poems by Palestinian poets Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer are not only statements of personal feelings, since they register the historical reality of displacement, occupation, and resistance. Darwish's "Identity Card", for instance, works as a poetic record of the Palestinian existence under colonial conditions. The repeated imperative "Write down! I am an Arab" insists upon presence in the face of bureaucratic and political systems designed to deny that. That poem transforms individual statement into collective witnessing, which instills historical trauma in the cultural memory. The poetry of Refaat Alareer continues to serve this archival role into the present, especially by being disseminated in international and online realms. "If I Must Die" is his poem, written shortly before his killing in an attack by Israelis, which depicts the role of storytelling as a moral duty: "Live to tell my story." This poem is a forceful declaration of the linkage between

surviving and remembering and of the resistant role of storytelling itself within a context where the history of Palestinians is constantly denied or attempted to be erased.

5.2 Trauma Beyond Individual Experience

One of the main points of convergence between the war poems of World War I and Palestinian conflict, war poems portray trauma as a collective experience instead of an individual one. Cathy Caruth describes trauma as something which is not sublated during the actual occurrence but is periodically reinstated through memory (4). The war poems depict trauma as something which is more than just the actual experience of violence; war poems have the capacity to go beyond the actual point of trauma in order to construct identities and memories.

In Owen's works, trauma is portrayed as being physically experienced by these soldiers who are left psychologically stuck within the memories of the war. In the poem "Mental Cases", the speakers are haunted by the images of violent acts that fail to fade away as time passes after the end of the physical battles. These soldiers exist in a state where life and death seem to converge since they fail to come to terms with the reality of the non-military world that exists outside the trenches of the war. Palestinian war poetry, on the other hand, embodies trauma as a condition that has been perpetuated through the generations. In the poetry of Darwish, trauma exists within the cultural memory and the national identity of the Palestinian experience. In works like "A Lover From Palestine" and "Identity Card", trauma has been expressed not only within the boundaries of a singular experience, a war that has taken place, but within the frameworks of a continuous experience.

The poetic efforts by Refaat Alareer include the idea that individual pain must also imply the existence of certain historical structures through the medium of his poetry, as individual pain

and loss must not and should never be separated from the politics that cause the pain and loss itself. These ideas and issues are also found in the works of Sassoon, where the poet criticises the reality that the issue of the war constitutes a moral and social failure, as evident in his satirical poetry, such as “Suicide in the Trenches” and “The General”. The idea that trauma has been suffered and must also be acknowledged and defined as a social reality is also found to exist within these poetries, as it suggests that the individual trauma has not only been suffered by the individual but also that it has become a social issue because it defines the whole society as well.

5.3 Poetry as Protest and Resistance

Beyond the archival and psychological functions, war poetry also acts as an organ of protest against political authority and moral complacency. According to Barbara Harlow, resistance literature does not just reflect political conditions but actively participates in them by changing consciousness (28). This role of participation in war poetry is evident in both World War I and Palestinian war poetry; however, the risks are different, along with the contexts of resistance. Sassoon's poetry is the embodiment of bold protest against the political machinery that prolongs war. His poems unmask the chasm that exists between those who declare wars and the victims of war. Sassoon refuses to subscribe to the rhetoric of heroism and sacrifice, instead pointing out the moral anomalies of warfare propaganda to the reader. The poetry of Owen consistently prevents any glorification and instead declares the essential reality of warfare as suffering.

Consequently, the war poetry of Palestinians, therefore, serves the purpose of some kind of resistance in even riskier and more imminent conditions. The poems of Darwish serve as a form of opposition to Palestinian narratives which deny them not just in a political declaration but also in a rebuilding of a Palestinian identity and their humanness. This is carried on by Alareer in his poetry where he places poetic testimony as an ethical imperative. It is a process of overwriting,

having recorded suffering in the midst of the siege, as well as asserting dignity and humanity even in the face of death.

Besides, such ethical positioning is befitting of the so-called empathic unsettlement of Dominick LaCapra that is an act of engagement with trauma, as it is one that perceives the suffering of another, which is taken to be a process that does not neutralise or appropriate suffering in others (Sanyal 302). In this sense, war poetry does not attempt or suggest closure but shouts out against being ignored and held responsible. Such poems resist silence and forgetting, therefore, they are dragged into the political and historical discourses in order to render poetry resoundingly an active resistance.

5.4 The Moral Stakes of Remembering War

The practice of remembering is pivotal to the ethical role of war poetry. In both traditions, poetry is a form of counter-memory, one that resists the consolidation of experiences that are hidden away in political narratives. The ethical value of remembering war in poetry can be grasped in terms of Paul Ricoeur's theory of memory. According to Paul Ricoeur, memory is a practice that is always already political, one that relies on the battle of whose history will be remembered and whose will be forgotten (Wiercinski).

Owen and Sassoon's poetry in World War I literature resists the dominant history's attempts to portray the deaths as heroic sacrifices. By refusing to use heroic language, Owen and Sassoon's poetry becomes a form of "counter-memory," as described by Ricoeur, which keeps alive experiences that dominant history seeks to erase from memory. The Palestinian war poetry also seeks to create a memory against a dominant history of forgetting, which is not accidental. It is a

forgetting that has been engineered as a result of the occupation. Alareer's emphasis on telling stories becomes a form of ensuring that the trauma is remembered rather than forgotten.

This ethical role can be further explained by Jeffrey Alexander theory of cultural trauma. As Alexander notes, cultural trauma can only assume meaning when it is told in the public space and is recognized as a collective. The tool used by poetry to accomplish this is the capacity to transform personal trauma into a collective cultural statement. This is done by poets of the First World War like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon as they reject the use of heroic language to talk about war in favour of its psychological effect, which pits the society in the blame of its effects. War poetry in these acts of remembrance undermines the discourse of legitimation of war. It makes the reader responsible regarding the ethical subtext of war not as a political phenomenon but as a human phenomenon.

5.5 The Living Tradition of War Poetry

Finally, the analogy between World War I and Palestinian war poetry explains that war and trauma will always remain topical in any historical circumstance. Though World War I is a completed historical cycle, its psychological legacy has a significant impact on the modern understanding of trauma. In its turn, Palestinian war poetry articulates that to others, war is an ongoing reality and not a thing of the past. This opposition shows that war poetry is a flexible literary genre that accommodates such new trends of warfare without losing its moral code.

Starting with the mechanical violence of trench war, war poetry evolves in reference to its form and spread. The tradition is continued in cyberspace by the modern Palestinian poetry, to a global and diasporic audience. This kind of evolution is a way of cementing the case made above, as far as the issue of war poetry is an open, living tradition, a process by which a set of

psychological truths are being spoken, and obscured by the more traditional forms of politicising. By means of the integration of the war poems by Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Mahmoud Darwish, and Refaat Alareer, it is possible to regard the war poetry as the transhistorical tool of collective trauma, ethical witnessing, and protest. This war poetry is still dynamic and adapts with the different war and the world it serves and its adherence to truth, memory and ethics stand the test of time. It is this incorporation that allows the final chapter to look back upon the overall significance of war poetry and how trauma, memory, and resistance are being represented and presented in the contemporary world.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Remembering War Through Poetry

Poetry provides a living testimony of witnessing warfare because it communicates what may not be possible through historical representation and political rhetoric—the witnessing of warfare subjectively. Poetry communicates meaning through metaphor and imagery, which cannot be reduced or represented. Poetry enables trauma to be expressed, remembered, and shared for both the individual and the collective body. Poetry is a form of resistance for marginalised voices, whether soldiers whose voices are silenced by wartime propaganda or the citizens who are occupied.

Additionally, the existence of war poetry gives readers a moral platform on which they can view the agony and not avoid it. War poetry is really significant because it is not only a platform for poetic expression, but it is also a platform for witnessing, mourning, and survivability, whether it is Palestinian or the First World War situation. The written word, therefore, is the mode by which the trauma is ‘worked through’ and transformed from pain into storytelling and from memory into survivability. In the comparisons between the war poetry of World War I poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon and the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Refaat Alareer, the paper has indicated that the war poetry is an evocative articulation of psychological trauma, despite the vastly differing historical context. This particular study does not compare the wars in terms of their magnitude, politics, and results but instead focuses on the role of poetry as a platform for the transmission of trauma in various wars.

The comparative analysis underscores the parallels in trauma experiences and their depiction throughout many time periods. Trauma in World War I poetry is conveyed through physical metaphors and harsh language, symbolising the brutal realities of mechanised warfare. The World war I poetry criticizes the idealised perception of combat about bravery. In contrast, the

Palestinian poetry articulates trauma resulting from displacement, cultural discourse, blockade, and the generational loss experienced. The pain of World War I poems arises from trench experiences, whereas Palestinian poems convey an enduring trauma that extends over several decades. Palestinian poetry and those composed during World War I exemplify the shared tragedy of both contexts, as seen by their lyrical structure and references to conflict, suffering, adversity, warfare, and oppression.

Despite some differences between the two states, they have a collective opposition towards celebrating war and instead focus on testifying to what occurred during these times of destruction upon man as human beings caught up in the carnage. The ‘pity of war’ to which Owen extensively refers resonates with the poetic laments of homeland and identity in favour of which Darwish speaks, and also with the protest poems of Sassoon, which resonate with the insistence of Alareer on remembrance, testimony, and accountability.

The psychoanalytic learnings from the poetry of World War I have application in the present-day conflicts, including the experience of Gaza, in the following way: the experience of “shell shock”, now understood better as trauma or PTSD, can ameliorate the present-day effects of violence, whether upon the soldier in the trenches or the civilian in the invaded land. The experience of the “shell shock” survivor seems particularly applicable in an age of warfare that includes airstrikes, surveillance, and the use of the Internet, in that the experience of fear, loss, and powerlessness produced in the survivor seems not all that historically remote from the present experience of, for example, the people of Gaza.

In choosing to interpret Palestinian poetry with the perspective of earlier poetry from wars, it becomes clear in this study that trauma defies the boundaries of time. The pity, despair, and anger found in Owen and Sassoon can also illuminate the psychic landscape of these contemporary

conflict zones by reminding the audience that it is not true that the advancement of technology has made our suffering less.

Limitations of the Study

Although this research undertaking gives a comparative thematic study between World War I poetry and the Palestinian poetry based on the theme of trauma, it is important to address some constraints. In this case, the poets considered in this research are selective. By focusing on these poets, such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Mahmoud Darwish, and Refaat Alareer, much of the material for the study is derived from these examples, while leaving many other poets, particularly female poets, as well as many of the less known or less highly respected poets, excluded. Many Palestinian poets featured in the study are represented only through their translations into English, which limits a full understanding of the context and themes underlying the work, while a limitation faced in conducting this proposed study is the temporal constraints placed on the text analyses of these works.

Since the research time is very short, it is only possible to analyse a few poems, and the broader historical, political, and psychological factors regarding the trauma are not comprehensively analysed. Furthermore, the research focuses on a huge historical and geopolitical difference when it compares the two poetic collections, which, although offering great commodity, might result in the simplification of the characteristic nature of the two wars. Finally, this research study focuses on the literary approach and is not supplemented with the psychological studies and the empirical research based on the interviews with the involved or concerned persons.

In conclusion, this paper has shown that the poetry written about wars is not only about the facts of war, but it also expresses emotions and experiences connected to war. The use of analogy

connects two historical events with the same cause and effects; a World War I poem and Palestinian poetry show an important commonality – although the nature of the war may change, the psychological effects of war are timeless and global. The role of poetry is to express trauma that has not been adequately articulated – converting that trauma into a memory, resistance and witness. Through their respective works, poetry will become less a genre of writing and more of a moral claim – as a part of the writing process, Owen, Sassoon, Darwish and Alareer will promote the memory, empathy and the need to confront the human cost of war. The poetry produced by those who were wounded by World War I, or in other words, those who lived through the war and were affected by it, will continue to represent the feelings of those who survived. The poetry produced by these wounded has survived and can be found today in the ruins of Gaza.

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