

The Ugliness of War in the Perspective of the Speaking Dead in the poems of Wilfred Owen and Sherko Bekas

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Abstract

War and its ugly consequences have always been and are still a rich source of inspiration for poets. They try to convey their message about peace, equality, and justice in a realistic and chilling way and they try to bring to light the gruesome experience of war, they do not glorify war. Thousands of young men left their homes with the conviction that war was honorable and glorious. However, those very few who survived the war, returned changed, wiser, and more cynical, they experienced the horrors of the war first hand. Many turned to writing or became artists, trying to escape from the trauma of war. The name 'war poetry' might be misleading somewhat, because it is actually the anti-war poetry, it is an attack against the whole ideology of nobleness of war.

Those anti-war poets try to depict the sick-of-war people in the truest way. In their lines of verse, they bring out the damages caused by war. War reaches many fields of life of which humanity is the most prominent and most sensitive; for instance, human costs have always been the largest.

The researchers aim at showing the ugliness of war in the perspectives of the English poet Wilfred Owen in his "Strange Meeting" and the Kurdish poet Sherko Bekas in his "Goristani Chrakan" (Graveyard of Lamps). The authors first try to pinpoint the imaginary journey the narrator starts into the tunnel of death in "Strange Meeting" where he meets the enemy he had killed the day before. Next they accompany the second narrator in his journey to the underworld where he depicts the dead in, according to Sharifi (rudaw.net), a "panorama of humanity" in "Goristani Chrakan" where he escorts a female spirit and victim of a notorious genocide. In the last section, the authors identify the points of similarity and difference between the two masterpieces.

Keywords: comparative, poetry, war poetry, anti-war poets, speaking dead, Strange Meeting, Graveyard of Lamps, imagery, sound effects.

1. The Two poets

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) was killed in the battle field trenches only a few days before the armistice that put an end to World War I. He showed more promise than any other English poet of his generation (Gwynn 593). In less than two years, he wrote all his famous antiwar poems of life in the trenches. "The army changed him from a competent minor poet with little to say into a powerful voice of pacifism" (Kennedy and Gioia 533). Among his best-known works – most of which were published posthumously – are "*Dulce et Decorum est*", "*Insensibility*", "*Anthem for Doomed Youth*", "*Futility*" and "*Strange Meeting*".

Sherko Bekas (1940-2013) was the son of the great Kurdish poet Fayak Bekas. He suffered political persecution and was banned to the Iraqi desert for three years following the publication of his poems. He is a pioneer figure in modern Kurdish poetry. In 1970 he introduced a new poetic style, called "Ruwanga" (vision). The translated poems in his collection, "*The Secret Dairy of A Rose*", "*The Cross, the Snake, the Diary of a Poet*" introduce a new style called the "poster poem", a term originating from sculpture and painting into the Kurdish poetry. During his exile in Sweden, he published multiple volumes of poetry in *Diwani Sherko Bekas* (1974-1986).

1. "Strange Meeting"

Wilfred Owen is the best-known English war poet who described the horrors of war to people who stayed at home. He knew the suffering of the soldiers who were bleeding to death, and were in danger and pain as he was a soldier himself and unwillingly got involved in the war (Thornley 2). His poem is about a First World War soldier who confronts a spirit of a dead soldier's soul. The opening lines of the poem tell the reader of the soldier's relief

as he escapes the battle field and later meets a dead soldier of the opposing party, and that is when he realizes where he actually is. The spirit tells him that war is a waste of one's life. The spirit tells him of the harshness and cruelty of war:

*It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.*

The poem is written in the first person; one can assume that the narrator is Wilfred Owen himself and the poem is Owen's private journey into the down world. It is the story of two soldiers from two enemy parties; a killer and a killed one, both are involved in a nasty war. It is a strange meeting because "such reconciliation between enemies", according to Silkin (qtd. in Al-Douri 154), "is not customary". It reflects their meeting which is made through immortality and hell where 'encumbered sleepers groaned'. It is that moment of mutually recognizing their common inhumanity and that in killing another one kills himself. The poem is a short elegy lamenting a soldier's participation in World War I. the poet had what it took to stop future wars, but was killed before he could put his plan into action:

*Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.*

His views seem to be a fantasy of a man sick of war who feels out of place and time and feeling uneasy being in an underground trench carved out of a gruesome war, full of people he had possibly killed.

2. "Goristani Chrakan" (Graveyard of Lamps)

Sherko Bekas's "Gorestani Chrakan" (Graveyard of Lamps) is the tragic chronicle of Anfal which was committed by the former Baath Regime against the Kurdish nation in Southern Kurdistan, or the Kurdish holocaust as described by Bekas himself, where more than 182,000 civilians (mostly children and women) were buried alive. It is a long narrative poem that speaks of humanity, of the mass death of human beings, birds, animals, nature itself, and of the lack of morality of the murderers. The narrative poem describes an imaginary journey:

*A new journey
To the kingdom of ash cities
To the kingdom of silent quarters and streets
But full of sleeping people*

Full of sleeping songs..(13)

The narrator says he is going on a journey to the underworld:

*This time, I am not going so far
But I will descend deeper and deeper
Toward the underworld I head
I will move down and stare
At the place
Where I see death face to face!(17)*

The narrator is escorted by a female spirit called Kalleh who claims to be from Zinaneh which is a small village in Sangaw district in Sulaimani city, Southern Kurdistan. The village was attacked by the former Regime in 1988 and twenty four of its inhabitants were lost in the Anfal process and the whole village, like most of the Kurdish villages, was burnt to the ground:

-Tell me: How should I go?! With whom?!
-With me!
If I do not lead you
Neither the horse of mythology nor the deer of dream Neither the bird of poetry nor the wind
of the sorcerer Would know about those numberless deaths.
Follow me □
Here, catch my hair
I am a woman from Zinanah
My name is Kalleh
I know the incidents of hell and hell's men,
I know the verses of doomsday and resurrection, of separation and broiling
And of coming up from the underworld...(23)

She tells the narrator of the atrocities she has been through, she tells him that she has been in the bed of death within the ashes of underworld and she has come back from there to tell the horrible stories of death and destruction. The poet talks about Topzawa, a small Kurdish village, like thousands of Kurdish villages perished by the Baath regime during the Anfal process; it is located in the southwest outskirts of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. It has been used as a camp or prison where the villagers who were trucked away from their burning villages by the Iraqi army during the Anfal were stuffed leaving them in bad condition where hundreds of infants and elderly people died of starvation (Black 209).

3. The Two Poems: A Comparative Study

The two poems have a lot in common, yet there are significant differences. The researchers try to illustrate them below.

The narrators, in both poems, start an imaginary journey to the underworld, speaking with the dead. In Owen's poem, the narrator meets a dead soldier's spirit whom he had killed in the battle field

I am the enemy you killed, my friend.

I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.

They were enemies when in life, but they have become friends in hell since they had no choice rather than being a killer and a killed one, they share the same destiny. Death has made them allies, and before they sleep forever, they can talk, and agree on the horrors of war.

In Bekas's poem, the narrator follows a female spirit of a dead woman who has come from the other world to tell the narrator of the horrible stories of death. Both are victims of the same enemy.

Hopelessness is a prominent theme in both poems; Owen and the spirit mourn the hope that died with them. He says:

"None," "said the other, "save the undone years,"

"

The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,

Was my life also;.....

He feels sad for the years undone by the ugly war; the pity of war is still untold, he feels sad for the loss of hope. And Bekas, in his turn, says;

Your songs like the dress you wear

Are worn out, your hopes,

In front of your bones, are smashed (24).

The imagery of lifeless soldiers is shown clearly in Owen's poem:

Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared

*With piteous recognition in fixed eyes, Lifting distressful hands as if to bless. And by his smile,
I knew that sullen hall*

By his dead smile, I knew we stood in hell

To probe reflects the idea of exploring and discovering, the word 'probe' can also be referred to as an instrument to check the temperature of food (eliteskills.com). Owen might have used this word to portray the image of dead soldiers as mere dead cold meat. The line shows a sense of death; it symbolizes the dead soldiers' bodies as cold and numb flesh being checked to see if it is warm and still alive.

Bekas depicts the dead as if they are full of life. In his second verse, he describes the image of a man who has found the remains of his dead wife, a number of white bones with a pink necklace and one glass bracelet. The husband was confused; he bent down and blew on the skull of the skeleton and that made the skeleton speak:

-Oh! My man

I haven't been exposed to this breeze for a long time!

The necklace □

In the man's hand □

Started to move □

And said:

-It's been so long. □

Since my lady has been sleeping

I've become so large to her neck

Yet she didn't wake up, and you didn't come!

Although both poems are almost completely monologues, there is some dialogue and narration too.

Concerning the sound effects, in Owen's poem, *Strange Meeting*, the whole poem is written in pararhyming couplets. Pararhyme or double consonance is a unique aspect of the poetry of Wilfred Owen. It is obvious in the poem –For example: "*Then, when much blood had*

clogged their chariot-wheels, I would go up and wash them from sweet wells". Key words and ideas are linked here together by this double consonance, without violating the meaning and solemnity of the poem. These two lines of the poem end in similar sounding words, as does the rest of the poem to give an awkward feeling throughout the poem as the poet is not in his natural world, he feels estranged.

Sherko Bekas's poem, a long narrative poem written in the form of free verse, has not lost "lyricism despite the fact that it is anchored to the immediate lived experiences and everyday language" (Rudaw.net). He uncovers the aesthetics of the Kurdish language and cultural history by turning everyday words and grammatical constructions into the most abstract yet tangible observations, literary images, and experiences. In *Goristani Chrakan*, clothes, mountains, hills, the soil, the cities, and everything, even killing and torturing are speaking metaphorically; the characters in the narrative speak in the language of poetry

Concerning the tone, in *Strange Meeting*, as in *Goristani Chrakan*, it is different for each speaker. It is a dreamlike tone, a distant one. The somber tone used to describe the sleepers or the dead contrasts with the sense of the supernatural created by the 'dead smile' and the 'sullen hall' of Hell or by the 'verses of doomsday and resurrection, of separation and broiling/ And of coming up from the underworld.'

Conclusion

The significance of these two masterpieces lies in their visionary approaches to the theme of war, its ugliness, its destructive consequences and the horrible thoughts it leaves in the minds of those who were involved in it directly or indirectly. For them, war is an unnatural, meaningless, foolish, brutal, enterprise in which there can be no winners, it is not a noble, heroic enterprise. "A Strange Meeting" and "Goristani Chrakan" are both nightmares in which Owen and Bekas imagine what breathtaking incidents happen after death, and all is told by the speaking dead.

The greatness of these poems lies in the poets' use of language, imagery, and rhythm. Their use of the sound values empowers the poetic diction and the symbolic imagery for the sake of creating gruesome, disgusting image of war and warfare. These two masterpieces give both Owen and Bekas a remarkable position among anti-war poets in the world literature.

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پوخته :

نهم توپژینه و هیه دهرباره ناشیرینی جهنگه نه پرووانگهی مردووه قسه که رهکان له شیعی و لفرید نئوین و شیرکو بیکهس. جهنگ و دهرنه نجامه ناشیرینهکانی هه میشه بوووته نیلهامی شاعیرهکان که ههول نهدن بوگه یاندنی په یامی ناشتی و یه کسانی و داد په روهری به شیوهیهکی واقعی سرکه ر و نه یانه ویت پرووه قیزه ونه که ی جهنگ به خه نه پروو. نه و سه ربازانه ی که له جهنگدا به سه لامه تی گه پانه وه گورانکاری زوریان به سه رداها ت، ژیرانه تر و ره خه گرانه تر بیر ده که نه وه چونکه ترس و دله پراوکی جهنگیان چه شت بوو، زوریه یان پروویان له نووسین یان هونه ر کرد بو دهربازبوون له دیوه زمه ی جهنگ.

نووسه رهکانی نهم بابه ته پرووی ناشیرینی جهنگ پیشان نهدن له پرووانگهی شاعیری نینگلیزی و لفرید نئوین له شیعی "دیداریکی نامو" و شاعیری کورد شیرکو بیکهس له شیعی "گورستانی چراکان". نووسه رهکان له سه ره تادا گه شتیکی خه یانای به رجه سته ده که ن که تیایدا حیکایه تخوان گه شتیکی ده ستپیده کات له یه کیک له تونیلهکانی مه رگدا له شیعی "دیداریکی نامو" کاتیکی حیکایه تخوان چاوی به دوزمه که ی ده که ویت که له رژی پیشووتر کوشتبوو. دوواتر نووسه رهکان هاوسه فهری حیکایه تخوانه که ی شیعی "گورستانی چراکان" ده بن له سه فهره خه یانایه که یدا بو دوزخ له وی وینه ی مردووه کانمان بو ده گوازیته وه و نه ویش ده بیته هاوری سه فهری رچی نافرته تیکی مردوو که قوربانی جینوسایدی نه نفالنه به دناوه که یه.

له به شی کۆتاییدا توپژهرهکان خالهکانی لیکچوون و جیاوازی نیوان نهم دوو شاکاره ده خه نه پروو. ووشه کلیدییهکان: بهراوردکاری، شیعر، شیعی جهنگ، شاعیری دژه جهنگ، مردووی قسه که ر، دیداریکی نامو، گورستانی چراکان، وینه ی شیعی، کاریگه رییه دهنگییهکان.



ملخص البحث:

لظالما كان الحرب وعواقبه الوخيمة مصدرا لالهام الشعراء حيث يحاولون عن طريق قصائدهم ايصال رسالة السلام و المساواة و العدالة بشكل واقعي مرير، و اظهار الوجه الدميم للحرب. والذين خرجوا من معمعة الحرب بسلام اصبحوا اكثر بلوغا و ارشد تفكيرا والذع لسانا لانهم ذاقوا مرارة الحرب حيث اتجه العديد منهم نحو الكتابة و الفن للتخلص من كابوس الحرب. تحاول الباحثتان بدورهما اظهار الوجه القبيح للحرب من منظور الشاعر الانجليزي ولفريد اوين في قصيدته "اللقاء الغريب" والشاعر الكوردي شيركو بيكيس في قصيدته "مقبرة الفوانيس". في البداية تحاول الباحثتان تجسيد رحلة خيالية للراوي في احد انفاق الموت حيث ترافقان الراوي في سفره حيث يلتقي عدوه الذي قتله في اليوم السابق ثم تقوم الباحثتان بمرافقة الراوي في قصيدة شيركو بيكيس في رحلته الى الجحيم حيث يرافق الراوي بدوره روح امرأة ميتة وهي احدى ضحايا عمليات الانفال السيئة الصيت. في الجزء الاخير من البحث تحاول الباحثتان اجراء دراسة مقارنة بين القصيدتين حيث تعرضان اوجه الشبه و الاختلاف. الكلمات المفتاحية: مقارنة , شعر , شعر الحرب , شعراء ضد الحرب , الموتى الاحياء , اللقاء الغريب , مقبرة الفوانيس , الصورة الشعرية , المؤثرات الصوتية