

Dunya Mikhail and Isaac Rosenberg's War Poetry: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

This study explores some common themes in the poetry of both Isaac Rosenberg and Dunya Mikhail who are classified as poets of war. Both of them are distinguished poets who are able to explore precisely the emotional and physical cost of war and who are themselves regarded as eyewitnesses and members of its victims. This research paper adopts the descriptive and analytical approach in dealing with the subject. It offers the realistic images, outstanding visions and deep insights of the two poets into the inner self of humans with its different conditions during times of conflict, emphasizing the good reception of their works locally and universally. It also examines how their works capture the personal and collective suffering of individuals caught during and in the after-effects of conflict. It elaborates how they reflect on the violence of Iraq war and World War I; and how their depiction of war is not just a political event but as a deeply pervasive force touching the lives of people. The study additionally discusses the particular consequences of war and the suffering of people. Therefore, the paper ends with the conclusion that war poetry of both poets mirror the intersection of personal history with larger historical and universal forces.

Keywords: Grief, Loss, Memory, Trauma, War Poetry

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Introduction

This study explores profound thematic similarities in the war poetry of Iraqi-American poet Dunya Mikhail and British World War I poet Isaac Rosenberg. Despite differences in background and historical context, both poets offer vivid, firsthand visions into the devastating emotional and physical impacts of war. This comparative analysis aims to elucidate four shared themes in Mikhail and Rosenberg's works - loss and grief, memory and trauma, dehumanization, and the role of women. It examines representative poems from each writer highlighting how they give voice to war victims and challenge glorified narratives of heroic sacrifice and national loyalty.

Therefore, Mikhail and Rosenberg are poets separated by nearly a century and are from vastly different backgrounds but they share a common linkage, which is definitely the experience of war. Mikhail is a Kurdish poet who writes about the Gulf War and its aftermath, while Rosenberg is a Jewish poet who documented the horrors of World War I. Although the contexts of their poetry are different, there are still profound similarities in their exploration of the brutality of war, its impact on the human self physically and psychologically, and its lasting legacies.

Literature Review

This review will be offering some of the main existing studies on Isaac Rosenberg and Dunya Mikhail, and their poetry; and what other scholars have assumed about their work. As for Rosenberg, there are published research papers and scholarly articles on Isaac Rosenberg's poetry written by recognized scholars in the field of literary studies. Such articles and books are available through academic databases, journals, or publishing houses, and while some of them may be general overviews of his work, others offer in-depth analysis of specific themes, forms, or individual poems. Following is a list of such works:

- A book by Arnold Harvey about war, art, and literature published in 1998, which examines Rosenberg's representation of soldiers as victims of war, not heroes. It discusses the emotional trauma, physical suffering, and spiritual decay that pervades Rosenberg's war poems, especially those dealing with death and disillusionment.
- A book written by Jean Moorcroft Wilson published in 2009, which discusses how Rosenberg's poetry reflects his personal isolation, both in terms of his experience as a Jewish poet in a predominantly Christian society and his alienation as a soldier on the front lines. The study also explores the relationship between Rosenberg's poems and his personal letters.
- An article published in 2011 by Jon Stallworthy, a leading scholar on the poetry of World War I, explores three poets including Isaac Rosenberg's contribution to the war poetry genre. It focuses on

the unique voice Rosenberg brings to the depiction of World War I, emphasizing his vivid and often grotesque imagery, as well as his personal perspective as a soldier.

- An article by Neil Corcoran published in 2013, which explores Rosenberg's poetry, his life, experiences and his poetic style. It focuses on his poem, "Break of Day in the Trenches". This poem is considered as distinctive and highly celebrated poem he ever wrote at the front of the battlefield.
- A book by John H. Johnston published in 2015, which explores the development of lyric war poetry in World War I and deals with the shock of war as recorded in Isaac Rosenberg's works and that of other poets. It pursues the poetic voice of Isaac Rosenberg, emphasizing his use of vivid and unsettling imagery to express the brutality and futility of war. It also addresses Rosenberg's ability to merge modernist poetic techniques with the raw realities of trench warfare.
- An article by Jean Liddiard and J. M Wilson about Rosenberg as a 21st century war poet published in 2021 which traces how Rosenberg's poetry has influenced the development of modern war poetry, particularly in its unwavering realism and rejection of heroic war narratives. It looks at Rosenberg's unique voice in the context of the larger war poetry canon.
- An article by H. Copley published in 2022 embarking upon Rosenberg and Jon Silkin as Anglo Jewish poets. It contributes to the revival of Jon Silkin and his companion Isaac Rosenberg by investigating their position in the Jewish society and their connection to their identity and ethnic legacy. It explores the ways in which the two World War I poets showed their poetic uniqueness, combining two cultural inheritance and historical backgrounds; and outlining their association with other poets of their generation.
- A book edited by Lorna Hardwick, Stephen Harrison, and E. Elizabeth published in 2024, which places focuses on four major poets of World War I including Rosenberg. It offers a discussion of historical and literary contexts and analyzes the ways in which classical texts are used in World War I poetry and how readers may access and interpret them. It also discusses how the war poetry relates to the ecological themes and to human and environmental trauma.

All these research papers and books cover a wide range of themes in Isaac Rosenberg's poetry, starting from his portrayal of the brutal realities of war to his use of form, imagery, and his impact on modern war poetry tradition. Such papers and articles are key resources for exploring the depth and complexity of Rosenberg's work. Yet, for a more detailed understanding of his poetry, more studies are needed and that is why my study will be trying to provide a new contribution to deeply understand his poetry from a new perspective.

As for Dunya Mikhail, the Iraqi-American poet who has emerged as one of the most significant voices in contemporary poetry offers a distinctive perspective on themes of exile, displacement, trauma, and the aftermath of war. Her poetry combines personal experience with the broader geopolitical struggles of the Middle East, particularly focusing on the devastating effects of the Iraq Wars, the Gulf War, and the ongoing violence in her home country. This literature review will examine critical scholarship surrounding Mikhail's work, discussing the central themes, stylistic approaches, and broader literary and political implications of her poetry.

- A book by R. Abdulhady, E. Alsultany, and N. Naber published in 2011, which discusses how the Arabs are politically and culturally represented, signifying their role as supporting women's rights and defending their gender identity. It also highlights the Diasporas and multicultural feminisms. It predicts themes of memories, exile, belonging and resistance.
- A conversation with Dunya Mikhail by Sobia Khan published in 2015 in which she talks about her two identities of being an Iraqi with an Arabic culture and an American with a western new identity. Her poetry marks the political and social Iraqi experiences disclosing the truth and the fatal effects of war.
- An article by Erin Trapp published in 2018, which portrays the rights of humans to live normal life of stability and peace, referring to the dilemma of current attitudes of treating people as nonhumans leading to the destruction of humanity. It also reveals how poetry is used to defend and call for human rights, taking Mikhail's poetry as an example.
- An article by Lena Tuffaha published in 2019, which discusses the life of people in exile as revealed in Dunya Mikhail's poetry; and how the Iraqi poet talks about their inner feelings while living in a landscape away from homeland. It also highlights her feminine attitude advocating the rights of women.
- An article by Arwa Mohamed and Ali Saadon published in 2023, which explores how Dunya Mikhail adopted a type of poetry called tablet poetry, explaining its forms and style. It also refers to the first generation of immigrants and how they are affected by diasporic experiences.
- A chapter in a book by B. J. Mehta published in 2023, which describes the landscapes of pain and resistance as indicated in Dunya Mikhail's poetry. It elaborates the issue of gender and how it is depicted in the media of the Middle East and Dunya Mikhail's poetry. It also discusses her collection of poems entitled "In Her Feminine Sign" emphasizing how the feminine is symbolizing violence, death, and desolation.

- A research paper by AnsamAlmaaroor published in 2024, which examines exile, alienation, and belonging in some selected poems of Dunya Mikhail. It also highlights identity and its forms, theories of cultural identities, hybridity, and the postcolonial context.

Biography of Dunya Mikhail (1965 - present)

Dunya Mikhail is an outstanding Iraqi-American poet, born in Baghdad in 1965, and experienced the primarily tough effects of Iraqi regime, namely that of Saddam Hussein followed by Iraq War. In Iraq, Mikhail started her career as a writer. At Baghdad Observer, she worked as a translator and journalist. Her early work was initially published in Arabic, gaining recognition for its touching reflections on the personal and collective experiences. In 1995 and being afraid of the scrutiny of the regime at that time, she escaped from Iraq to Jordan and lived there for one year after which she travelled to the United States and settled there ever since (Lefferts, 2022).

After relocating to the United States, Mikhail earned a master's degree in Near Eastern studies from Wayne State University. Over the years, she has published several poetry collections and a memoir titled *Diary of the Wave outside the Sea*, which is co-translated with Elizabeth Winslow, exploring themes of exile, gender, and Iraq history and its politics. Currently, she serves as a special lecturer in poetry and Arabic language at Oakland University in Michigan (Lefferts, 2022). Therefore, her poetry introduces to the English-speaking readers an insight about the complexities of Arab life, reflecting both her Arabic literary heritage and her involvement with Western literary forms and culture.

In her poetry, Mikhail draws heavily from her own personal experiences growing up in Iraq during periods of war. Her personal involvements in war allowed her to convey the emotional impact of conflict with rare honesty based on direct closeness and eyewitness. Themes of identity, the trauma of war, the loss of homeland, and the struggle of being an outsider are widely explored in her poetry. Her work has gained international recognition through publications such as The Guardian, PBS News Hour, The New York Times, The New Yorker, and Poetry among others (www.blueflowerarts.com).

Mikhail's translations of Iraqi poetry into English help to bring the voices of her homeland's poets to a wider audience as well. While her symbolic representation often exceeds regional boundaries and makes her work accessible to the audience worldwide, it is still deeply rooted in her Arabic linguistic and cultural context. The merge of the lyrical beauty in Mikhail's poetry with the unpleasant realities of war points out her distinctive voice (Ali, 2019).

Mikhail is famous for her compelling and affecting works that delve into the motif of warfare. She believes that war is "a lose-lose case and there is no winner in the war because ... the killed one

dies physically and the killer dies morally, so they are both dead” (NPR, 2007). Her poetry is noticeable for its particular combination of lyricism, fable, and reportage. She employs simple revolutionist style, using irony and metaphor to convey profound truths about the human condition. Her work frequently delves into the lives of everyday individuals placed in exceptional situations, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Some of Mikhail's most applauded works include *The Iraqi Nights*, *Diary of a Wave outside the Sea*, and *The War Works Hard*. Her poetry got commonly critical approval for its fearless uprightness and flexibility of evoking sympathy and understanding and it is also translated widely. Mikhail has the ability to cross over the cultural divide between her native Arabic world and her adoptive American one and that is why she has acquired numerous awards for her writings; and this includes the UN Human Rights Award for Freedom of Writing and the 2014 Arab American Book Award.

At the end, Mikhail's biography can be summarized to the following key relevant details:

- Date and place of birth (1965 in Baghdad)
- Fled Iraq in mid 1990s due to threats from Saddam Hussein's regime
- Settled as a refugee in US, earned Master's in Near Eastern Studies
- Currently lectures at Oakland University in Michigan
- Early poetry published in Arabic, later in English translation
- Themes in her work: exile, gender identity, Iraqi history and politics

Biography of Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918)

Rosenberg came into the world in 1890 in London's East End, England. His parents were Russian-Jewish immigrants and that is why he grew up in extreme poverty but he was proud of considering himself as English and Jewish. He studied at the Shoreditch Technical Institute and later at Slade School of Fine Art, where his artistic potential was quickly recognized. His early works reflected his developing skills as visual artist and a poet who used to write poetry all the time until he died.

In 1915, Rosenberg volunteered for the British Army and was deployed to the Western Front. He served in the Royal Welch Fusiliers continued to write poems and send them back to England. When he was 27 years old, he was unfortunately killed in the battlefield in 1918 before the end of World War I (Herman, 2023). Therefore, Rosenberg who wrote about war was himself one of its victims as Gianna Russo et al states that war “robbed all hope from the semi-destitute Rosenberg who remains one of the most tragic and unfulfilled ‘trench poets’, killed-in-action (K.I.A.) during Germany's 1918 massive Spring onslaughts at the cusp of his artistic growth” (61).

Rosenberg was a painter who extremely liked the two painter-poets William Blake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Matalon, 2002). He had a particular interest in reading and writing poetry in

particular, and was by nature obsessed with English poets and artists. His scope of reading was remarkably broad for a young man whose way to access books was through his friends and the public libraries. His imagination was mainly fired by the Romantic poets such as Keats, Shelley, the poet-artist William Blake, and the Pre-Raphaelites. He also read the poetry of the 17th century metaphysical poets who were not as widely known as they are today like John Donne. Rosenberg had an aesthetic ideal love of art. A. Banerjee asserts:

He was interested in art. Initially he dabbled in painting and attended art classes at Birkbeck College, London. Through the generosity of three Jewish ladies he attended the famous Slade School of Art in 1911, where he spent the next three years. Though he was able to hang his pictures in small galleries and sold a few, he realized that his professional success would not lie in that direction. (313) Peter Risdon too asserts that Rosenberg “was also a painter of various themes- portraits, self-portraits, landscapes and figure scenes - and he had ambivalent feelings about whether to concentrate on being a painter or a poet” (63).

When Rosenberg started publishing his poems, he was not immediately recognized but when the war was initiated, the public started to respond to his poetry. When we take into account the fact that Rosenberg was a miserably poor, frail, tiny, a Jew, and a member of an oppressed minority at that time, it is no wonder that he attracts the readers’ compassion and sympathy with him (Jones, 2008). Despite his short life, Rosenberg is regarded today as one of the main figures of war poetry and his poetry is often categorized among the best created during World War I.

Isaac Rosenberg’s biography can also be summed up in the following main relevant details:

- Date and place of birth (1890 in London).
- Born to working-class Russian-Jewish immigrant parents.
- Studied art and poetry, admired Romantic poets like Keats and Blake.
- Volunteered for British army in 1915, served on Western Front.
- Killed in action in 1918 at age 27 during World War I.
- Poetry depicts harsh realities of life as a soldier during wartime.

Common Themes between the Two Poets

1- Loss & Grief

The theme of loss and grief is a shared issue between Dunya Mikhail and Isaac Rosenberg. Both poets sharply capture the destructive impact of war on individuals and communities. In Mikhail’s poem “The Iraqi Nights”, the devastating effect of war is exemplified, depicting the consequences of the Gulf War on individuals through the eyes of a grieving mother who is searching for her missing son:

My mother searches for my brother
In the rubble of Baghdad,
In the smoke of burning tires,
In the whispers of the dead, (Ls.1-4)

The First line immediately establishes the personal sense of loss and the use of possessive determiner “my” personalizes the tragedy of the single mother, emphasizing the poem’s affectionate and emotionally inspiring nature. The second line introduces the setting of the poem ‘the war-torn city of Baghdad and the use of the word “rubble” sets a miserable and gloomy tone, predicting the devastation that permeates the community and the capital city of Iraq.

Moreover, the image in the third line “In the smoke of burning tires” continues to paint a picture of ruins and chaos. This image reinforces the poet’s focus on the physical and emotional wreckage left by war to the extent that the smell of death is everywhere: “In the whispers of the dead”. This line reveals a sense of ghostly presence in addition to the prevailing weight of loss and the ongoing psychological disorders experienced by the survivors of war.

The crushing impact of war on families is also emphasized by the repetition of the opening line once again in the second stanza, which creates a sense of relentless searching and indicates the mother’s steadfast determination to find her son:

my mother searches for my brother
she walks the streets, her eyes blurred,
searching for a face, a voice, a name.
her hands, once soft, are now rough,
her heart, once full of love, is now empty.(Ls.5-9)

The mother is emotionally ruined while looking for her son with “blurred eyes”; suggesting a combination of grief, tiredness, and the disorientation of a city in complete demolition. However, the mother still has a desperate hope for any sign of her son; focusing on “a face, a voice, a name”. This detailed description suggests the deep personal connection and longing that fuels the mother’s relentless attempts of searching highlighted in her physical transformation where her soft hands have become rough; and confirming the harsh realities of survival and the hardships she has endured. The stanza ends with confirming the inner emotional impact of war by screening how the mother’s heart, which was once full of love for her son, has become empty and void because of his disappearance mainly due to war.

Moreover, the outer external impact of war on the environment is illuminated in the last stanza of the poem:

the Iraqi nights are long and cold,
and the stars seem to mock her grief,
she walks on, her steps heavy with sorrow. (Ls.10-12)

The focus here shifts to the harsh conditions the mother faces: “the Iraqi nights are long and cold” emphasizing the bleakness and despair of the aftermath of war; even the stars, which are usually associated with hope and beauty, are now seeming to “mock her grief”, and intensifying her pain. The poet in this line uses an eminent metaphor to express the mother’s sense of isolation and abandonment.

With the loss of her son, her persistent search for him, and with the fact that she is able to survive but she will live forever with sorrow and heartbreak as emphasized by her walking with “heavy steps” which convey the weight of her grief and the exhaustion of her journey. Hence, Mikhail in this poem stresses the enduring inner and external impacts of war, not only for those who are directly involved in combat, but also for families and communities left behind to handle the consequences of war.

Issac Rosenberg’s poem “Break of Day in the Trenches” paints an unforgettable picture evoking an alarming sense of loss. Rosenberg’s poem is a powerful evidence to the insanity and cruelty of war. He contrasts the beauty of the natural world to the grim realities of the battlefield, emphasizing the tragic disconnection between life and death in the trenches. The poem’s simplicity and influential imagery convey the profound sense of fatality and the permanent pessimistic impact of war on those who are left behind.

In the first stanza, the poet sets the breaking of the dawn as the scene of the poem, which signifies a new day and functions as a reminder of the cyclical nature of war and death: “the darkness crumbles away”. The verb “crumbles” suggests a slow and an inevitable process, hinting at the harshness of the conflict. Rosenberg personifies time as a “druid”, which is an ancient figure associated with both life and death; and thus emphasizing the ancient and almost timeless nature of war and its cyclical effect on humanity “... the same old druid Time as ever”.

Yet, there is something which can survive war “only a live thing leaps my hand / a queer sardonic rat”. ‘Rat’ is introduced here as a symbol of survival and resilience in the center of destruction. There is also a contrast between the rat’s ability of adaptability and the dead soldiers surrounding him highlighting the bleak reality of war. The use of the adjective “sardonic” suggests the

rat's cynical realization of the human tragedy unfolding around it; and perhaps adding a sense of ironic detachment.

A Poppy picked up by the soldier is a symbol of remembrance and sacrifice. It is also employed as a symbol of beauty and weakness inside the overwhelming devastation of the battlefield. Therefore, the speaker who is a soldier trying to hold a poppy: "to stick behind my ear" attempts to find beauty and solace among the brutal surroundings of war.

In the second stanza, the speaker addresses the rat directly, suggesting a sense of sociability and perhaps revealing a shared understanding of the war's ridiculousness "droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew / your cosmopolitan sympathies", and here there is a hint at the rat's indifference to human dissonance and the irony of the dissension itself. The use of the phrase "cosmopolitan sympathies" indicates that the rat, unlike humans, is not bound by nationalism or ideologies. The speaker confirms the rat's sense of dis-alliance to any side "now you have touched this English hand / you will do the same to a German"; but after rat's physical contact with him, which is a strange connection between two unlike beings, it will have the same ideology towards the Germans.

The speaker recognizes the rat's potentiality to cross the enemy lines: "soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure / to cross the sleeping green between"; and grants an agency and a sense of free will to the rat in order to go and at the same time emphasizing the arbitrariness of lifetime and demise in the center of war. The portrayal of "sleeping green" is beautiful and deadly image of the battlefield; a place where life and death exist side by side. The idea here is that everything will be affected by the deadly war either humans or non-humans.

The speaker imagines that the rat is mocking the human conflict or maybe it finds an amusement in the tragedy of war: "it seems you inwardly grin as you pass / strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes". He describes the dead soldiers contrasting their previous physical strength and beauty with their current state of powerlessness and death. Another dilemma for the speaker is that the rat, which is weak, is seen as having a greater chance of survival than the soldiers who are supposed to be strong and powerful: "less chanced than you for life/ bonds to the whims of murder".

Moreover, the speaker highlights soldiers' sense of helplessness, being victims of a system that has stripped them of their individuality and having control over their fate: "sprawled in the bowels of earth / the torn fields of France". The image of soldiers "sprawled in the bowels the earth" suggests humiliation and dehumanizing effect of war. The use of this phrase "the torn fields of France" is to set a specific geographic context and to highlight the impact of war on a specific landscape if France and the lasting destruction left on it by such conflict.

Again, the speaker directly addresses the rat, asking it to meditate on the human tragedy: “what do you see in our eyes / at the shrieking iron and flame”. Speaker’s use of the vivid imagery of “shrieking iron and flame” is to convey the intensity and brutality of the conflict and intensely describing the horrors of war. Furthermore, the speaker highlights the contrast between the peacefulness of the sky and the violence of the battleground, accentuating startling existence of war and considering the fear and despair of soldiers: “hurled through still heavens? / What quaver—what heart aghast?”

The persona returns to the image of a ‘poppy’ by emphasizing its connection to the human sacrifice and the ongoing cycle of violence: “poppies whose roots are in man’s veins / drop, and are ever dropping”. The repetition of word “dropping” strengthens the continuous cycle of death and the futility of war. Yet, a moment of hope is offered by the speaker by holding onto the poppy as a symbol of resilience and remembrance: “but mine in my ear is safe”. Then comes the final line, which underscores the bleak reality of the battlefield: “just a little white with the dust” meaning that even a poppy, which is a symbol of hope, will be covered as well by the dust of war. Ending the poem with the image of poppy ‘... a little white with the dust’, leaves readers with a lasting sense of sadness and the burden of war’s legacy.

2- Memory and Trauma

Another shared issue between Dunya Mikhail and Isaac Rosenberg is the theme of Memory and Trauma. Both poets address the enduring legacy of war, its influence on the psyche of individuals, and its motivation to shape personal narratives.

Mikhail’s poem “The Yellow House” explores the remaining trauma of war, how it offends memories and leaves behind a sense of broken identity. The speaker’s repetition of the metaphor of the “yellow house” stresses the remembrance of the house and the happier times associated with it, which are deeply sealed off in the consciousness.

Yet, “the house is not yellow anymore / it’s not even there / it is gone” (Ls.8-10) because it is destroyed by war. The house has gone as everything else related to it “like the laughter of children / like the scent of a jasmine tree/ like the stories of my childhood” (Ls.10-12). Therefore, the absence of the house with all its good memories reflects the fractured identity of the speaker with its unending impact of injury.

Moreover, Mikhail in her poetry portrays physical and psychological trauma inflicted by war. She vibrantly explores a devastating impact of war on the well-being of individuals by delving into the horrific consequences of conflict and exposing the brutal reality of violence with its lasting injuries. As

physical trauma is represented by the bodily harm caused by war, Mikhail graphically depicts the physical injuries of wounds, amputations, and disfigurement.

In Mikhail's poem "Her Feminine Sign", she focuses the physical injuries of war using imagery and symbolism:

the body that has lived through war, that has become the war
the body that remembers the lost parts, the broken body
the body that is a map of the war, a landscape of scars
the body that is a sign, a feminine sign. (Ls.1-4)

Mikhail's use of "the body" immediately establishes the focal point of the physicality of experience as it "lived through war" to emphasize the enduring nature of war's impact. Describing the body as an entity "that has become the war" is a powerful metaphor; as the body is no longer separate from the violence, but is saturated with it. A sense of fragmentation is highlighted when the body is personified as "remembers the lost parts" implying a lack of wholeness, both physically and emotionally.

Another literal and metaphorical description of the body's state of amputation is detailed in the phrase of "broken body". The body has also become a physical record of the conflict, every scar is a real testament to the terrible experience of war as if it has turned into a "map of the war" and a "landscape of scars" suggesting a vast and enduring impact on the body as well. The word "sign" employed by the poet can be interpreted as a symbol and a marker of identity; and describing the sign as "feminine sign" is another hint by the female poet to focus on the gendered experience of violence, and the persistence of women in the face of it:

a sign of strength, a sign of resistance
a sign of beauty, a sign of hope
the body that is a story, a story of survival
The body that is a testament, a testament to the human spirit. (Ls.5-8)

Despite the physical trauma, the body is able to endure and survive as it has an inherent defiance against the forces that sought to break it "a sign of strength, a sign of resistance". Yet, the enduring power of the human spirit is emphasized to find beauty even among destruction "a sign of beauty"; and this body has the potential for healing and renewal and the use of the word "hope" suggests that there is always hope even in the darkest times. As a result of its resilience, the body becomes a narrative "story" carrying the weight of experience and the "story of survival". It is an identification of the enduring human capacity to overcome adversity in addition to the fact that the body has become not

only a “testament” and a witness to the horrors of war but also to the enduring spirit of humanity in general.

Therefore, Mikhail in this poem has used the body as a central metaphor to explore a profound impact of war on individuals and particularly on women. A “feminine sign” is not just a physical feature but it represents the capability and resiliency endured by women in spite of their physical vulnerability. By focusing on the body’s scars, the poem stresses the lasting impact of trauma while celebrating the human spirit’s ability to find beauty and hope. The poem’s significance lies in its use of simple language and powerful imagery to convey a complex and deeply personal experience of war.

Yet again, the role of women in war and their resistance is taken into consideration in Mikhail’s poetry. Her poetry challenges traditional gender roles and reveals women as active participants in resistance and resilience in the face of war. According to Al-Athari, an Iraqi-American poet in her poetry collection *The War Works Hard* (2005) reveals an honest portrayal of the Iraq War from a woman’s viewpoint, a perspective seldom explored in war literature. Most works about the Iraqi war are written by men, focusing on male heroism at the front lines and their unwavering patriotism. These male-authored narratives rarely reflect the experiences of Iraqi women during the war, and when women do appear in such literature, their perspectives are typically aligned with those of the men, expressing only their resignation to the war (2008).

Mikhail, on the other hand, challenges the typical portrayal of women by depicting female characters who actively oppose war and its devastating consequences. Her poems feature mothers, lovers, sisters, and daughters who stand against the cruelty and unfairness of war. In some of her works, these women resist war by either directly or subtly criticizing its institutions and denouncing the leaders who advocate for it. However, there are some women portrayed in her work who find that a kind of protest lies in highlighting the fact that they are essential victims of destruction and loss caused by war; and thus refusing its sorrowfulness inflicted over them and their loved ones (Al-Athari, 2008).

Yet, the most significant form of protest against war in Mikhail’s work is the act of remembering after experiencing fragmentation. By recalling their broken memories and lives, women in her poems find a way to endure and discover hope in the darkness brought by war. Their resilience and capacity to rebuild their lives independently, free from the war and male influence, serve as a powerful and compelling statement of resistance against the war and its dominance over their existence. Therefore, Mikhail gives voice to the victims of conflict, particularly women and children and her works are often examined from a gender perspective, which offers profound insights into the overlapping of gender, culture, and politics.

the plunging limbers over the shattered track
racketed with their rusty freight,
stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
and the rusty stakes like sceptres old
to stay the flood of brutish men
upon our brothers dear. (Ls.1-6)

The second stanza begins with the image of wheels crushing the dead “the wheels lurched over sprawled dead”, emphasizing the tough indifference of war to human life to the extent that the dead are no longer capable of feeling pain “but pained them not, though their bones crunched” which is a stark reminder of their eventual death:

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of their allegiance “they lie there huddled, friend and foe-man”; suggesting that they are all physically inflicted by war though they are all humans “man born of man, and born of woman”. However, the continuous threat of violence is still over there “and shells go crying over them”; emphasizing the brutal reality of war.

In another poem by Rosenberg entitled “Returning, we hear the larks”, the emotional and psychological toll of war is emphasized; highlighting the difficulty of returning to a showing life of normality after witnessing war’s horrors. This contrasting image is clearly pointed out in the title of the poem “Returning, we hear the larks”. This title establishes a context of soldiers returning from the battlefield, a contrast already implied between the horrors they have witnessed in the battlefield and the seemingly soft sounds of nature.

The last stanza in Rosenberg’s poem is the most powerful and heartbreaking where “death could drop from the dark / as easily as song (Ls. 10-11)”. Here the soldiers’ hearts are broken not just by the loss of their fellows, but also by the recognition that they cannot escape the war’s outcome and its lasting impact on them, even during existing in the middle of natural beauty. Therefore, this bad experience of war leaves the reader with the inevitable and enduring fact that even in the face of natural beauty the scars of war remain deeply engraved on the human brain.

However, it is very important to declare that Rosenberg’s earlier poetry glorifies war and celebrates the heroism of the soldiers; considering the dead soldiers as national heroes who showed profound patriotism and deserve passionate remembrance. It is also significant to acknowledge that Rosenberg himself met the outbreak of World War I with patriotic interest as he enrolled himself voluntarily and with a free will to defend his country and that is why his poem “The Dead Heroes” written in 1914 seems extremely patriotic and associated with self-sacrifice. The poem celebrates the bravery and unselfishness of the dead soldiers, who are glorified as the very lifeblood of England. Their death is portrayed as a noble act and crucial sacrifice for the protection of their land:

their blood is England’s heart;
by their dead hands
it is their noble part
that England stands. (Ls.17-20)

In this stanza, soldiers’ blood, which is their very essence, is linked to the heart of England as the core of its being; and this is a powerful metaphor emphasizing their significant value to the nation’s survival. The use of the word “blood” is suggestive; evoking both sacrifice and life power and this

impressive imagery immediately draws the reader's attention into the idealization of loyalty and commitment.

The image of soldiers' "dead hands" is a symbol of their devotion; and the word "dead" is used as a continuous reminder of the cost of the war. The word "noble" elevates the soldiers' act of dedication to a heroic level, reinforcing the sentiment that their sacrifice is not just an act of courageousness, but also a moral imperative. The soldiers are represented as the foundation upon which the country's existence depends and without their self-sacrifice, their nation would be vulnerable and could possibly fall and never exist once again. In the last stanza of this poem, the focus shifts from the physical death of the soldiers to the enduring legacy they leave behind as they live in the memory and history of England:

England, they live in thee,
in thy proud fame,
to win Eternity
and claim God's kiss. (Ls.21-24)

The usage of verb "live" contradicts the literal meaning of "dead hands" in the previous stanza. This shift underscores the idea of immortality through their self-sacrifice, giving a light of hope out of the current tragedy. The idea of how the dead soldiers will live in the nation's memory and its achievements is further clarified by becoming a part of England's "proud fame"; and this phrase suggests that the soldiers' sacrifice does not only save England, but also elevates its honor and prestige among nations. Such deceased soldiers will also get eternal glory and will be eternally blessed by God.

However, unlike his earlier work as the above-mentioned poem, Rosenberg's later work presents a more complex and critical view of war, reemphasizing the deeper complexities and horrors of war. Compared to the patriotic passion in the earlier mentioned poem of "the Dead Heroes" where death is seen as honorable and brave, the following poem entitled "the Dying Soldier" written in the trenches deeply stresses the perceptible anguish of war and discloses Rosenberg's sudden disillusion about war and impracticability of sacrifice. It severely reveals the horrifying dehumanization and powerlessness that accompany the war's brutality, the lack of resources and the overwhelming cruel scale of the battle, leaving the reader with a sense of despair when finally realizing of the human losses of war. Rosenberg describes a wounded soldier during his final agonizing moments before dying:

‘water — water — O water
for one of England's dying sons.’
‘we cannot give you water,

were all England in your breath,'
'water! — water! — O water!'
fie moaned and swooned to death. (Ls.7-12)

Here, the dying soldier, desperate with dried tongue, cries out for water. The repetition of the word “water” emphasizes his severe sense of suffering, distress, misery, and the physical pain he is experiencing. The simple, repeated plea underscores his humanity and helplessness in the face of his close death. The soldier identifies himself as a son of England “for one of England’s dying sons”, signifying his nationalism and self-sacrifice for his nation. This line connects the soldier’s personal plight of suffering to the broader tragedy of war no one could provide him with a drop of water “we cannot give you water”, indicating the harsh reality of the battlefield, where even basic needs cannot be met.

Moreover, the sharpness of this tragic scene underlines the helplessness of those surrounding the dying soldier. It suggests not only the lack of resources, but also the intense nature of the battle that prevents them from assisting him. The soldier’s desperate need for water is expressed through the speaker’s use of hyperbole “were all England in your breath”, claiming that even if all of England were compressed into his breath, it wouldn’t be enough to satisfy his thirst. This depiction intensifies the imagery of the soldier’s extreme pain and the futility of the situation in particular and the war in general. The soldier’s desperate repeated plea for water, which is ultimately unanswered, foreshadows his inevitable end “He moaned and swooned to death”. The words “moaned” and “swooned” match the final stages of his agony, implying his feeling of pain and loss of consciousness. Ending the poem with “to death” leaves no room for hope and emphasizes the profound tragedy of a situation at the times of war.

Conclusion

While decades and continents still separate Dunya Mikhail and Isaac Rosenberg, they still share a profound connection through their poetic explorations of war and its devastating impact on the human spirit. Both poets utilized picturesque imagery, powerful symbolism, and a deep understanding of the human condition to convey the horrors of conflict. They both delved into the dehumanizing effects of war, emphasizing the loss of individuality and the manipulation of soldiers as mere tools in the vast machine of war. They also explored the destructive impact of war on the natural world, depicting landscapes damaged by violence and the loss of virginal life. They ultimately seek to assure

that the victims of war are humans and to challenge the glorification of violence; and hence their poems serve as powerful messages to the importance of peace.

While some of Mikhail's poetry focused on the ordeals of women in war, emphasizing their fortitude and determination in the face of adversity, challenging traditional gender roles and disclosing the ways in which women are unsettled by conflict, Rosenberg tackled the worldwide experience of war and its global wartime melancholy for both genders. Therefore, Mikhail described war in her poetry from a local and cultural perspective while Rosenberg, highlighting World War I, experienced by everyone, offered war differently and from a global perspective; yet they both share a common goal of bearing witness to the suffering of others and to inspire empathy and compassion for them.

Moreover, Mikhail's poetry continues to resonate with wide reaching readers who are interested in universal theme of grief, loss, memory, trauma, suffering and survival. Her ability to put her hand on the enduring human experience in all its complexity along with her innovative use of language and imagery has smartly established her place in contemporary world literature. Her poetry has contributed to our understanding of war and its aftermath, anguish, and the human condition in a similar way to that of Rosenberg's poetry.

Furthermore, both Isaac Rosenberg and Dunya Mikhail are distinguished war poets for their ability to recognize the emotional and human cost of war. Rosenberg's work is firmly rooted in his real experiences as a soldier in World War I, while Mikhail's poetry originates from a more contemporary context of exile and the trauma of the Iraqi and Gulf Wars. Both poets offer truthful images, exceptional visions and deep perceptions of the human psyche in different circumstances during times of struggle, and thus making their works universally relevant and timeless.

Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that while separated by continents and eras, Mikhail and Rosenberg's poetic portrayals of conflict's brutality resonate across borders and generations. Their uncompromising realism and empathy for those embroiled in war's chaos underscores war poetry and its continuing relevance as violent conflict persists globally. This analysis of enduring connections in their thematic preoccupations and stylistic approaches reveals both the particularity and universality of poetic responses to war and its traumas. Yet, a deeper understanding of their poetic vision and its significance will emerge as researchers continue to explore their works largely.

المستخلص

"شعر الحرب عند دنيا ميخائيل وإسحاق روزنبرغ: دراسة مقارنة"

احمد محمد احمد صابر

هذا البحث بعنوان "شعر الحرب عند دنيا ميخائيل وإسحاق روزنبرغ: دراسة مقارنة". ويتناول البحث بعض الموضوعات المشتركة في شعر كل من إسحاق روزنبرغ ودنيا ميخائيل والذين يعتبران من شعراء الحرب. فإسحاق روزنبرغ ودنيا ميخائيل شاعران متميزان استطاعا استكشاف الآثار العاطفية والجسدية للحرب بصورة دقيقة، حيث يُعتبران شهود عيان على الحرب بل ومن بين ضحاياها. ويعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج الوصفي والتحليلي في تناول الموضوع، حيث يعرض الصور الواقعية والرؤى المتميزة والتبصرات العميقة للشاعرين وتصورهما عن الذات الإنسانية وحالاتها النفسية المتنوعة خلال فترات الصراع، مع التأكيد على كيفية تلقي القراء لأعمالهما بشكل جيد على المستويين المحلي والعالمي. كما ناقش البحث كيف أظهرت أعمالهما المعاناة الشخصية والجماعية للأفراد الذين تم أسرهم خلال فترات الحروب وما بعدها. ويظهر البحث كيف تعكس الشاعرة عنف حرب العراق وكيف يسلط الشاعر الضوء على الحرب العالمية الأولى واثارها المدمرة؛ وكيف أن تصوير كلاهما للحرب لم يكن مجرد حدث سياسي بل كان بمثابة قوة شاملة أثرت في حياة الناس. ويناقش البحث أيضاً ما تلا الحرب من العواقب الشديدة والتي تسببت في معاناة الناس، هذا وقد خلص البحث الى استنتاج أن شعر الحرب لكلا الشاعرين يعكس تداخل الانطباعات والتصورات والتجارب الشخصية مع القوى التاريخية والعالمية الأكبر.

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