

## **The war versus peace Language: a Study of Anti-war Language and Imagery in Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

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### **Abstract**

The 2003 war in Iraq has generated a great deal of controversy, debate, as well as literature and more specifically poetry. Ever since, poets have continued to contribute poetry that made clear their refusal and objection to military strategies or even support and encouragement of war practices. In the case of the 2003 American war in Iraq, the pro-war is highly subordinated to the anti-war poem. Books were published before and after the war broke and websites team with poems contributed by thousands of conscientious objecting poets all over the world. This study concentrates on the anti-war poetry contributed namely by American poets. The selection of poems display viewpoints that are unanimously hostile to the war but various in the methods and strategies these anti-war views are poised. Poems by David Ferri-Smith but also by David Siluk, Charles Bernstein, and others are tackled in the current study.

### **Introduction**

There is a belief that great literary production is triggered by such traumatic events as wars. This statement is not beside the point for what is more instigating than a devastating war that pulls the world down and creates the need to resuscitate it afresh from scratch. The war and its atrocities are the ultimate wake-up call to which humans are attentive and the creative mind is most. Wars have always generated a diversity of reactions. Between conscientious objection and zealous glorification, the reactions oscillate and in its turn, each branches out and ramifies throwing an entangled web of shadows of gray and light. Or, between wild brutality and barbarian ritual on one hand and romantic adventure

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

and sport on the other, the war question seems to breed ideologies, opinions, dogmas and creeds.

In poetry, the war always features tremendously massive. The war poetry, whether it stems from first-hand knowledge of the war or from theoretical assumptions or even romance, has flourished and prospered beyond measure. The anti-war poetry has been always among the most passionately influential and painfully credible. Its power and truthfulness manage to turn the poetical milieu upside down sending to their death traditions and practices and giving birth to new ones. Its spirit of acrid credibility and sordid confrontation not to mention the preoccupation with nightmarish images of death and annihilation sends every other thing beside toppling down.

The modern war is not an exception in the controversy it creates. Again poets fall into at least three warring categories. There is the one that adopts a pro-war ground where war is still clad in its antique glorious robes. At the other end, there is a second schism that takes an anti-war stand where war is stripped of its heroic façade and probed as an anti-human action. The third stands in the middle refusing to interfere neither supporting nor condemning, a silent column. The present study investigates the way poetry questions the war and focuses on anti-war poetic contribution. The main selection is basically from American non-combatant anti-war poetry, in which theme-oriented arguments are briefly sketched as follows:

- Poetry intended to backlash political decision-makers, policy designers and on top bellicose supporters. In this type, economy, oil, and Middle East riches are catch phrases. This type invests the infusion of anger, resentment, outrage and acrid, caustic sarcasm in the poem crucible.
- Poetry that spells direct experience written by either veterans or by soldiers serving in the war zones. Veteran poetry is often marked by anguish, grief, and even regret. Soldiers, the objectors among them, are not deaf to what casualties the war entails.
- Poetry contributed by non-combatants and written in sympathy with war victims. Innocent casualties are lamented and death tolls are condemned. It awakens pity and compassion and helps rally objectors around a noble cause.
- Poetry that portrays the awkward, clumsy position of soldiers stranded in war zones away from home and family.

The present study is rather selective since of the thousands of poems available globally, it assumes the examination of a handful. It is regrettable that

the rest has to be left out and the study is all aware of its predicament. However, in any small-scale study like this one, the elimination is only inevitable, but highly recommendable. The poems selected are rather representatives of the different strands and various streams in the 21<sup>st</sup> anti-war verse. Nevertheless, the choice falls on those charged with symbolism and rich in war imagery. They probe the subject of war with a stringent awareness of their limitations and a stark consciousness of their isolation in the middle of a world replete with media jargon and torn apart by the clash of opportunistic interests. In addition, the study also aspires to examine the alleged deficiency of anti-war poem, namely, the so-called flagrance and sentimentality (Kendall, 2006:238).

### Politics and poetry

*War is the opiate of the politicians.*  
Bernstein's 'War Stories'

In response to being called one of the girly men for adopting an anti-war stand, Bernstein contributes his '**The Ballad of the Girly Man**' to mock, deride, and penetrate the way politicians react to opposition, which they wave aside by simply denominating it as cowardice. Politicians and poetry seem to never meet half way. He paints a mournful world of untruthfulness shrouded with fear and tears where: *A democracy once proposed/Is slimmed and grimed again/By men with brute design/Who prefer hate to rime.* A tone of sheer desperation and concession rules as: *Poetry will never win the war on terror/But neither will error abetted by error.* Bernstein probes deep to comment on the atrocities committed to advance political agendas where lying and deception are the chief accomplices. In the concluding lines, he affirms the pride of the girly men's stand for as girly men, he suggests, '*we would never lie our way to war.*' The poet keeps on negatively delineating politics and political terminology. As such, the relation between poetry and politics seems to be as turbulent as ever. Ideologically speaking, the poem exposes two opposed camps: one is with and the other against warfare. The latter is overtly delineated negatively either directly by 'brute men' for instance; the former 'Girly men', despite the derogatory connotation of denomination which serves ironic ends, is positively but covertly marked simply by opposing the latter. The negative delineation of the one sets off the positive nature of the other. So, while the pro-war camp is made up of *brute men* who prefer hate to poetry and make errors and commit more errors to remedy the first ones and who lie unscrupulously, the anti-war side is made up of men who are subject to the derision of the first camp, but nevertheless contribute poetry that promotes truth. In this manner, the ideological equation of opposition gains momentum.

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

The voice of resistance or dissent seems to have born in the abyss of war itself among voices of bigotry and violence. There are voices that cry against war and strive to stand out and be signaled out among voices stronger perhaps and more articulate that glorify it. This is why, in the oldest war literature, namely, *The Iliad*, Homer did not refrain from telling about a single soldier, Thersites, who perhaps stands for the majority, denounces the war and accuses its leaders of reaping profit at the expense of rank and file (Metres, 2007:1). Thersites as a name is hardly capable of standing when great names like Achilles, Odysseus, and Agamemnon are in constant mention as paragons of masculinity, virility, courage and persistence. Yet, the statement he makes reverberates as a voice of dissent and resistance in the face of military tyranny. Literature, thus, is aware of the uneven scales of the war where one party thrives and grows stronger and richer in power and fame while the other diminishes and suffers vitiating, distortion, amputation and even extinction. A minority feeds and grows fat on the bloodshed of a will-less majority. In *The Iliad*, Thersites is seen as beaten and hauled by Odysseus for daring to demoralize the soldiers. The only voice of resistance has to be gagged by force and the battle went on (Metres, 2007:2).

'Poetry is,' Childs (1999: 158) maintains, 'bound up with the realm of aesthetics, even if it is also inseparable from politics.' The relationship, hence, between politics and poetry/art is too complex to make a clear statement about. Wanda Coleman, a poet of black Slavic roots announces that 'when I sneeze it is political' (Infante). The relationship is not at all friendly though. History records that poets target and are targeted by political regimes even the most acclaimed liberal and free among them. Poets are even more powerful ambassadors than the keenest politician, a reason why perhaps Chile appointed Pablo Neruda its ambassador in France between 1970-73 (Browning, 2006:7). Poetry have always reacted with and responded to moments of political turbulence, for instance, the poetical production that accompanied and followed the French and American revolutions.

Aeschylus tells as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C that truth is the first casualty of the war (Wilner, 2004: 39). In the modern age with the vast technological arsenal where direct contact is abolished and fighters do nothing more than press buttons so that millions die, the truth is easily disguised. The targeted enemies are dehumanized and 'the language of propaganda' as Browning insightfully (2006: 6) depicts 'demonizes whole peoples' –the Axis of Evil for instance- 'and deadens us [Americans or Allies' peoples] to the effects of policy decisions.' The accidental death of the innocent is denounced in the media as collateral damage. However, Browning continues: 'poetry wakes us

up.' While the military power is given priority by the government, poets and anti-war activists invest the power of the word (Browning , 2006: 7).

Chattarji (2001:1) remarks that there has been always a contradiction between American ideals such as freedom and democracy and what is practiced on the ground. The United States has always 'narrated itself in terms of a paternalistic, messianic mission.' The fact, bitter as it must be, is that policy-making is triggered by diverse interests that make it blind to the preached ideals. Bush himself unwittingly told wounded soldiers he was visiting in April, 2003 that he reminded soldiers and their families that ' the war in Iraq is really about peace.' ( Nicholls, 2005: 12). This is what Brook describes as 'empty language.' The language of contradiction is manipulated to blur the barrier and block the gap between war and peace (in Nicholls, 2005: 13). It is this awkward absence of consistency and concord that poetry manipulates in its best. Political poetry hammers at the lack of conviction and the prevalence of contradiction displayed by policy makers. Through its medium, poetry aspires to disillusion people of the surreal dream of saving the world, liberating the oppressed, and inspiring hope world-wide through military intervention.

### **Modern Anti- War Poetry**

Owen (in Longley, 2005: 57) affirms, "All a poet can do today is warn." W.H. Auden has also declared that 'no words men write can stop the war' (Kendall, 2006: 240) since 'poetry makes nothing happen' (quoted in Dowdy, 2007: 1). Thus, the utility of anti-war poetry is highly questioned in the past as much as the immediate present. Many critics are very skeptic as to the ability of poetry to address the world's arising challenges and the devious political strategies devised to meet them. This is why perhaps, Kendall (2006, 238- 57) and Wheatley (2007: 653) take some anti-war poets, namely, the non-combatants and their anthologies to task. Haughton (2007: 422) makes a reference to Graves' caustic remark that 'living poets' compilations deal in 'marketable sentiment' aroused by public events such as the 'outbreak of war or victory' and that 'the valuable war books were written after the Armistice' quoting Edgell Rickword. Hence, war anthologies are almost condemned as emotional outbreaks of anger and passionate ruptures. In his **War Stories**, a poem that argues the pros and cons of war, Charles Bernstein (2006: 151) wittingly declares: *War is an excuse for lots of bad antiwar poetry*, and it is *'poetry without song.'* It is the poet's honorable mission and sacred duty to challenge the world's predominant dogmas and rebel to effect change. The 2003 war has intrigued poets whose agendas propel them to take a stand whether with or against.

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

Whether the anti-war poetry is sentimental, flagrant or exemplary of poetic rage in contrast to Owen's proclamation that it is imperative that the war poem is 'a matter of experience,' and the poet's mission is 'to keep truth alive' (Kendall, 2006:238), anti-war poetry is a prerogative since World War I. It exists as a voice of dissent, resentment, sympathy and compassion whether telling the war story from the point of view of soldiers, victims, or outsiders. Kendall (2007: 240-1) remarks that poetry could not change the political or military reality as '[anti-war] poetry fails to serve democracy, as well as its own well-being, if it adopts democracy's failings by stooping to the linguistic crudity of the political realm.' Pro-war poetry during the war in Iraq falls in almost the same categorization where its single virtue is its 'near-invisibility': 'But the problems which afflict it—the sanctimony, the opinionated doggerel, the fundamentalist assaults on other positions, the refusal to countenance complication— make pro-war poetry the mirror-image of its more celebrated rival.'

The 2003 war has generated an ongoing fire-storm of anti-war poetry ever since Laura Bush called for that symposium on 'Poetry and the Voice of America' inviting several of the country's most acclaimed poets. Some of the guests invited such as former US poet Laureates Rita Dove and Stanly Kunitz planned not to attend as a kind of silent protest against the oncoming war. Other guests on the list like Sam Hamill determined to seize the opportunity to rally the public and make a political statement against the then oncoming attack on Iraq in an attempt to launch poets against the war movement akin to the Vietnam days. With the aid of the internet, poems poured out as poets, activists, veterans, and current soldiers posted their poems. The symposium was cancelled but the firestorm it created continued to expand. The backlash was beyond expectation and the cancellation made it even worse notwithstanding the statement the white house issued about respecting the public opinion.

Sam Hamill's website [poetsagainsthewar](http://poetsagainsthewar) receives contributions almost on a daily basis up to the present moment registering refusal, protest, and lamenting the suffering the war continues to inflict on all scales and on both sides. Other anthologies carry affiliate titles such as **D.C. Poets Against the War** (Browning, 2006:7). Todd Swift's **100 Poets Against The War** was 'timed to appear on January 27, 2003' on the day Hans Blix handed his weapon inspection reports to the United Nations. Matthew Hollis and Paul Keegan compiled poems on a rather smaller scale to emerge in **101 Poems Against War**. While Swift's anthology confines itself to portray the horror of the eminent war, Hollis's and Keegan's digs deep and establish connection with many other wars. In this anthology, Smith (2003) remarks, the poems compiled belong to a diversity of historical time and countries across the globe. It includes classical poems but

also poetry contributed by German, Arabic, Vietnamese poets. In the domain of individualistic endeavour, David Smith-Ferri published his Iraq poems under the title: **Battlefield Without Borders** (Haley's Publishing) with an introduction by Kathy Kelly. This war seems to have irretrievably made itself a sworn foe: poetry. As one army marshes to fight the war, an army of poets and poems likewise marshes but rather in the opposite direction.

### The 2003 Anti-War Poem: War Language and Imagery

In his 'War Stories', Bernstein confers upon the war a schizophrenic nature and dwells on its controversial duality. Through implementing contrast and juxtaposition, there are always at least two angles of vision to perceive war from among the potentially numerous other constellations. The war exposes a polemical ethical duality, as it comprises divergent contradictions and opposed polarities. As such, the war is simultaneously good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral, logical and illogical, necessary and extravagant and so on the list goes infinitively. This double polarity and chameleon-like property the war is marked with depends on the perspective that orients the vision and the nature of opposition or struggle that ultimately legitimizes or illegitimizes warfare:

War is a slow boat to heaven and an express train to hell.

War is either a failure to communicate or the most direct expression possible.

War is the first resort of scoundrels.

War is the legitimate right of the powerless to resist the violence of the powerful.

War is delusion just as peace is imaginary.

This is how the war as a concept and practice is hyperbolically deliberated through metaphors. Even a cursory examination of the vocabulary items operating in the poem and establishing its imagery, can identify two opposed sets creating two warring poles through implementing juxtaposed contrasts. Despite the attempt to even the scales, the negative mood of hostility outweighs the positive one that promotes alleged legitimacy and righteousness. No reason good enough, the poem concludes. exists to justify violence and so the equation is always off-balance. Hence, there is, on the one hand, the dominant mood of hostility, wickedness and viciousness triggered by such words as **hell**, **slow**, **failure**, **scoundrels**, **violence**, **delusion** and **imaginary** (in its negative sense). On the other, another lexical set subsuming such words as **heaven**, **possible**, **legitimate** and **right** conveys an undertone of hopeful endeavour. The two opposed lines of argument proceed neck to neck in an absurd parallelism.

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

However, a closer examination of the vocabulary used affirms different insights as to the utility and alleged legitimacy of war. While the war is a 'slow boat to heaven, it is 'an express train to hell,' welding metaphor, contrast and in the long run irony. There is, then, no real winners and no genuine achievement. In all, the poem seems to argue against war-indulgence even in terms of the so-called legitimate war. The war's legitimacy is defined in terms of the absence of power balance. The powerless may be licensed to wage war to resist the powerful though there is no guarantee that it will bear no bitter fruits, hence lending further evidence of the inescapable duality. Further, the distinction between the natures of war and peace is by no means clear-cut; it is blurred altogether. War and peace are insightfully described in terms of insubstantiality as 'delusion' and imaginary' respectively. Even then, the pernicious nature of delusion, hence, war, confirms its negativity in contrast to imagination, a force highly priced poetically, creatively, as well as aesthetically. While war is sickly and spiritually enfeebling, peace is the epitome of creative faculty even if unattainable or even if it is anemic and precarious.

The war, ultimately, is rather a very messy, fuzzy, and anarchic business made up, nevertheless, of beauty and ugliness, of terror and mercy, of hate and compassion, and of logic and absurdity. It exposes an ongoing conflict that remains unresolved:

War is the reluctant foundation of justice and the unconscious guarantor of liberty.

War is the broken dream of the patriot.

War is the slow death of idealism.

The definitions continue to wind up hammering on the insidiousness of warfare. Even when war as an abstraction is endowed with some credit, it is still lacking and imperfect. There is always a blemish or blot on its escutcheon! The poet resorts once again to word play where the war's stand is defined in relation to the highly honoured and cherished human values of **justice**, **liberty**, **patriotism** and **idealism**, which have, for ever, been catchphrases recruited in warfare and highly estimated by humanity. Again, contrast is employed for while the war may contribute to the achievement of the so-called institutes of justice and liberty, it does so only reluctantly and unconsciously and the equation is thrown off balance once again. War, in conclusion, shatters the patriot's dreams and makes sure idealism perish slowly under its impact so that humans would have no ideals left to cling onto, sublimate or maintain. Thus, the war breaks as it claims to build and annihilates in the attempt to create and produce.

On the one hand, the poet endeavours to make a seemingly impersonal stand that is emotion free even though the poet has announced his position clearly and openly in his *Girly Man*. As such, the poem makes claims as to voicing its assessments from a detached, observatory stand where the vision is clouded with a personal involvement next to none, perhaps to do the opposed pro-war side some credit. On the other, it affirms the inevitable corollary that no matter how hard one tries to keep the two sides balanced by arguing on behalf as well as against war, the final outcome condemns war ultimately. Further, no matter how appealing and admirable the poem's objective stand seems to be, it is only another devious way of making a clear and candid statement in opposition to warfare. Instead of advocating warfare or else condemning it, the poem chooses both as a superficial compromise though by no means falling between two stools. The war involves typically two opposed sides engaged in a fatal conflict and hence, it is not easy to maintain a non-biased attitude. Nevertheless, it is perhaps possible to assume the attitude of each side apart from the other, a situation that seems to embody the poet's surreal attempt at objectivity in his *War Stories*. There is after all some legitimate and inexorable war involvement or so the poem suggests. In all, there remains an air of deviousness and indecision about the poem where the interpretation relies to some extent on the reader's stand.

However, not all war poetry employs deviousness and indecision. The chameleon state of uncertainty and suspension is by no means the rule. Some has definite contours either with or against. David Smith-Ferri epitomizes war in his '**Anywhere USA**' as follows:

Adults speak dully of *honor* and *service* and *heroism*,  
while the impeccable, honorable war,  
like a mafia don,  
snaps its cufflinks,  
narrows its eyes,  
and, flanked by body guards,  
rides our streets in a limousine,  
unseen behind dark and bullet-proof glass.

In spite of the positive onset where war is equated though rather in derision with honour, service and on top heroism- an opening that intertextually echoes a similar vein in *War Stories*, the central metaphor the poem invests and its imagery pivots on is one of the most negative and hostile type. Further, in contrast to Bernstein's *War Stories*, Smith-Ferri's references to adult human ideals are profoundly ironic. The poem simply depicts the war in the rather classical image of a mafia don that embodies sheer evil, criminality and unscrupulous profiteering and develops a set of values peculiar to their bestial

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

ambitions. The reference to the mafia don pokes mockery at the people behind the puppet show, i.e., people who pull the strings while sitting comfortable and safe far away from the death zones. The war is the making of gangsters who reap benefits and gain power as the war goes on. Hence, the war is demonized and stripped of legitimacy and autonomy to emerge as an unlawful tool in the hands of a destructive handful. The monopolists have different labels and denominations; they could be mafia dons, oil lords or gluttonous millionaires alike. Warmongers wallow in luxury and are 'flanked' by bodyguards where the bodyguard idea is both literal and metaphorical. They are immune to the law and well-guarded against war atrocities. Smith Ferri's poem promotes candid hostility against warfare and warmongers and manipulates acrid sarcasm against politicians.

David Siluk depicted the war in Iraq in his '**Gluttonous Guns**' through the animistic imagery indicated in the title. The poem does not directly name a specific agent as responsible for the war going on; it condemns the war arsenal investing the guns' gluttony metaphorically:

Look at the hot, Gluttonous guns of the war  
Swift they go, to kill our dearest ones;  
Brothers, and dads, sons and husbands:  
Swift we go to the pitiless call of war!

Siluk's poem hammers on the direct involvement of the addressee and opens with the imperative 'look' inviting or even commanding the unaware or rather the blind-folded to be on the alert. These guns are not targeting strangers only, i.e., people that the readers are oblivious of and indifferent to, but also they could backfire doing irretrievable harm to families, friends, and relatives. They kill indiscriminately as they kill swiftly. But those gluttonous guns, the reader will perceive of, are only symbolic of those few who pull the strings and monitor the lethal show. It is simple logic; they are the tycoons the war keeps feeding. Thereupon, the poem targets political institutions, decision-makers and all war-profiteers who keep it stoked up. It points accusing fingers at owners of oil companies and the world millionaires whose gluttony and greed can never be quenched. It is gluttony (one of the seven deadly sins!) that plagues the world and leads to its ruin. 'The hot, gluttonous guns' of the first line are equated with the 'gluttonous, greedy millionaire' of the poem's closure. Just like Smith-Ferri's Mafia dons, gluttonous war-mongers are no where to be seen in the war-torn scene. They are backstage collecting profits while secure in their luxurious homes:

I don't see one, not one millionaire there?

## Al-Hajaj

Not one gluttonous, greedy millionaire!...

Siluk even gets more personal when he tries to shift the perspective to the troops fighting on 'the gluttonous sands of the Iraqi war,' investing linguistic as well as thematic parallelism. This poem infuses both political criticism and the poetry of compassion. Though the soldiers are sent on brutal missions and trained to kill, they do not get through their brutality intact. This war costs lives on both sides and the Americans pay very dearly as well. They have their share of anguish and pain. They are hoisted with their own petard. Moreover, they are individuals that have awe-stricken families waiting for their home return. But the gluttonous sand, in parallelism to gluttonous guns and millionaires, devours unrelentingly leaving families 'wailing and weeping.' Death continues to reap lives, but the fight, inattentive, and indifferent, continues over 'this pot of crickets.'

In a vein so akin to Smith-Ferri's Mafia don, Siluk delineates the war in the same candid manner describing it as a beast employing an animistic metaphor and resorting to negative imagery:

War, war, war, and hark to the beast of war —  
High, and near, low and clear, clear, clear:

The war is a predator turned loose to prey on humanity. Its call is distinct and clear and people are no deaf to its bestiality. Unless they choose not, people can not fail to detect it distinctly. The animal nature of the war is promoted and the undercurrent of the statement is that humans have stooped or been reduced to that bestial procedure. People should open their eyes and ears so that they may recognize danger- the apostrophe 'hark to the beast', hence exert efforts to eliminate it. The poet here warns, as he should, that the war is a beast that sets forth for its kill and its hungry cry is all ubiquitous encircling close by and distinctly clear. The parallel recapitulation of the onset line with **war** repeated three times and the termination of the next line with **clear** likewise repeated copies the emphatic warning undertone the poem seems to articulate. The lines encode a clear propagation of warning though the tone is more instigating than rebellious.

The reference to the waiting and/or mourning families in **Gluttonous Guns** is echoed in the waiting father in **No Letters**. Nostalgically, the father reminisces about his son's deployment to 'this far off place called Iraq—', which echoes non-commitment for what could Iraq in essence matter to a father like him? He recalls his son's words: 'I'm going to Iraq to fight for freedom,' a cogent declaration that must have left the father speechless. The father waits 'for the mail each day' engrossed in morbid thoughts concerning his son's fate if the letter fails to come. His son's correspondence from the pernicious war zone is

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

his survival signature. Today, however, a letter arrives to keep the father posted on the warfare, but it proves ironically erroneous and tricky as it carries the long-feared news:

I got a letter today—it said:  
They fought a great battle by Baghdad;  
And many lost their lives, I guess—  
And the truth of the matter is, it is  
My son was among the dead!...

This is the predicament of many parents who likewise received similar death letters. The father is aware that his life will not be the same from that day on for his 'nights are long and thin.' The only consolation the father musters is an illusionary thought that his son died for a noble cause: *But he proved to be, noble and true/who fought for hope and freedom?* The father, nevertheless, already entertains doubt about that; hence he questions its validity. However, at heart he realizes that this is a mere wretched, awkward consolation. The father sinks into denial as the only psychological mechanism left to him to ward off breakdown. The poem is a case in point for poetry of pity that foreshadows the agony of families whose dear ones take active service in the war and jeopardize their lives around the clock and many of them die ultimately. The last line: *For a country that owes him everything*, does not diverge or swerve from the poem onset where the picture of Iraq as a country lying across the globe is clouded with mystery and darkness. While the speaker commences with clarity of mind adhering to a very simple logic in his **Gluttonous Guns**, as the woe-stricken father, he loses that candour and meanders into naivety if not absurdity. However, he could be merely mumbling what so many parents keep telling themselves as grave losses like this one befall them.

More poetry of both indignation and pity features in David Smith-Ferri's book of verse '*Battlefield Without Borders*' published in 2007. Smith-Ferri has been visiting Iraq and meeting Iraqis since 1999 interviewing them considering it important to know what and how they think. In a language that is accessible and powerful and a voice that is grounded in true experience, the poems portray his encounters with Iraqi people over a decade or so. In these poems, Smith-Ferri's creative intelligence and shrewdness focus on the pains and agonies inflicted on people by the insidious forces of the war, which often cause people to shrink in fear and dismay. So, his has been a very onerous job as he has to approach those sufferers and win their trust not to mention persuade them to relate their stories. He introduces these people to the American and Western readers so as to cure the latter of their detachment and extricate them from the reliance on media clichés and stereotypes. The poems range from those that

portray the brutal military procedures and their tragic corollaries to those depicting suffering Iraqis. Iraqi names: Ahmed, Ali, Haider, Hassan, Muna, Abeer and many others reverberate along the poems establishing connections with all humans on a global level as the poems appeal to human best instincts: compassion and fellowship. The poems introduce a panoramic but meticulous perspective in contrast to the general, blurred picture the military propaganda produces.

He invites readers to dwell on the dramas of real people of flesh and blood who are tossed up and down by the war and who could be deemed by the West as potential enemies. Croken points to the poet's success as he:

transforms a hazy crowd of very foreign foreigners into a collection of individuals who are extremely relatable and very much "like us." In the world of "Battlefield," people have been turned back into people, and, consequentially, the doors to empathy and communication are swung open. (2008)

As the poet re-humanizes these individuals who have been mechanized and dwarfed so far, Iraq is no longer 'a theoretical quandary. It becomes personal, intimate, active.'

The prevalent tone of his poems is sympathy and compassion towards the victims, but anger, shame and disgrace feature very prominently in between the lines in relation to warmongers. The poems dedicated to Iraqi war victims place their heroes in their factual contexts. They introduce those strangers with their different language and cultural norms and make them accessible to the average person on the other side of the Globe. The poems in the collection vary between those which portray the anguish and suffering of Iraqis uprooted because of the war and its aftermath episodes of violence such as '**First Day in Amman**' to those that concentrate on the activists as they watch scenes of pain and agony such as **Bert Sacks, Cindy Sheehan, They Reach Us** and **The Unmistakable Imprint of Love**. Some of the poems depict human predicaments rather pensively or even philosophically as in **I was the Earth**. However, there are other poems like **Anywhere USA**, where the poet pays tribute to the families of the soldiers that, in his opinion, deserve sympathy too.

The issues of war and suffering and the wrath accumulating in reaction are portrayed in two more poems which are '**First Day in Amman**' and '**Cindy Sheehan**'. The first tells about the suffering of an Iraqi individual as he recounts his own traumatic story stoically. Ahmed goes beyond mere pathos to emerge a towering figure of tolerance, imperturbability and aplomb or at least so does the sympathetic narrator picture him. As the poem's subtitle indicates *Ahmed*

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

*speaks*, it is Ahmed 's voice that rings in the poem which is the voice of true misery and authentic experience. the poem steers the readers away from the mainstream of anti-war poetry, studied above, to focus on the war aftermath:

My left ear does not work  
thanks to a car bomb,  
and my right eye  
thanks to a metal fragment lodged in its  
cornea.  
Day and night, an echo of that bomb  
rings in my ear --

The poet manages to capture Ahmed's tone and the simplicity of the almost indifferent matter of fact method where the address is overt, the syntax and the vocabulary are simple and direct. The irony in 'thanks to a car bomb' is both bitter and caustic. The car bomb reference, a contingency by itself, dims off but simultaneously delineates all those responsible for the tragedy. Ahmed is obsessed, he tells, with: *the voice of the bomb/ in my ear/and in my eye, one of its ten thousand teeth*, which seems to haunt him day and night tenaciously. The car bomb is his ten thousand teeth hydra that stalks him asleep and awake, hence the poem's main imagery which does not deviate in essence from the conventional portrayal of the war and its evils in terms of animistic metaphors. It is the voice of close death (hence voice as if an animate entity and not sound), which he escaped miraculously. Like many other Iraqis who are disturbed deeply by the car explosions taking place every single day, at times, in dozens, he falls prey to neurotic traumas. The tape-like car explosion is played on the back of his mind over and over again. He acutely feels like that bomb was his death sentence left unaccomplished; it ended him one way or another though. But still, the speaker would rather shrug his shoulder off his physical injury and play down his mutilation if compared to the spiritual and moral loss. The deaf ear and blind eye are mere scratches whose damage goes only surface-deep in analogy with graver issues that matter for eternity and posterity. The country has lost its substantial energy, Ahmed regrets: *Moving downriver,/ Only a reflection of Baghdad/ Today*. What remains is a shadow-like land of disturbed existence and a floating reflection of what it once was.

The simplicity even has a stronger stamp towards the end of the poem where Ahmed's awareness radiates to nail down the Country's real plague, but again the speaker talks in riddles that the reader will not find them tasking to ascertain and interpret. Ahmed, a typical average Iraqi, sums the preposterous situation very directly. He tells the American that he will not be able to make head from tail of the awkward situation unless he takes active participation: *For*

## Al-Hajaj

*that, you must look at my/ hand/ and take it/ and come with us to dinner/ and eat shawarma.* Ahmed does not naively assume that the stranger might be 'like us' not even if he could cast off his foreignness:

Laugh with us.  
Talk with us.  
Think with us, habibi,  
about how to extract the worm  
eating the heart of my country.

Rather, he repeats shrewdly and emphatically that the stranger for all his genuine sympathy and care can be '**with us**', i.e., share them their misfortunes! The Iraqi colloquial 'habibi' abridges the gap and crosses the barrier that suspends the whole matter effecting friendliness and companionship. Ahmed's suggestion offers a compromising method where the obstacle might be overcome through the invitation and hospitality of one speaker and the consent and willingness of the other offering thus a middle-course footage. To meet half way is what the poet targets when he focalizes Iraqis and offers their predicaments to the sceptical and suspicious Western reader. Ahmed suggests procedures where the sympathetic foreigner can show compassion and achieve a sort of mediocre empathy for no one can understand the full range of the excruciating experience of uprooted and dislodged Iraqis. Ahmed does not seek pity, which he would have deemed insulting. Rather, he seeks understanding and communication that seems to be blocked by the horrible acts of violence on both sides.

However, for all his candour and awareness, Ahmed fails to identify and name the core of evil inflicting the country; hence the worm –metaphor which suggests sickness and hints at the parasitic profiteers bringing the country to ruins. Still, he invites the Westerner to share the burden and to think how to 'extract' the worm and cure the body. It is an open call for those whose countries have hands in the predicament to make a move towards relieving it. It is not Ahmed's call only, but also the narrator's, backstage, in a latent attempt to rally more active opposition.

In '**Cindy Sheehan**', the situation the poem portrays differs altogether. The poem is a one-side dialogue where Cindy addresses George who could be none but George Bush whether father or son and this is why each of the first three stanza opens up with *Look at me, George*. They are both cut of the same material inflicting destruction and pain. As to Cindy herself, she speaks in the tongue of all active pacifists and on behalf of aware humanity. She is a typical American who has gone under the war wheel and been crushed and metamorphosed morally by its destruction. She is a mourning mother, but

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

speaks on behalf of all war objectors. She is a war victim herself whose life was transformed suddenly and absurdly. Cindy addresses this George in a menacing and retaliating tone as she declares:

Look at me George.  
I'm the oncology lab report,  
The malignant truth metastasizing  
Every time an American soldier is injured or killed.  
I'm in your lymph nodes, your bone marrow, your lungs.

The speaker points accusing fingers at that George who is responsible for all the miseries of the war. This intermittent war ever since it was waged in 1991 has been killing people either directly in the battlefields or indirectly through malignant tumours caused by depleted uranium and radioactive weapons; hence the medical metaphors. The medical terminology which abounds not only in this poem but also in many others, comes in the line with the poet's active involvement which takes him to hospitals where he observes the lethal effects of modern war arsenal. Cindy becomes his articulate conscience- as George seems to be inattentive or oblivious, a hideous encumbrance, a big sticky clot, i.e., a tumour, on his peace of mind, and the stamp of guilt and culpability. She sloughs off her human skin and dons an everlasting ache that promises to haunt the prosecutor over history and space regardless of his nonchalance and denial.

In a significant biblical reference to the Joshua Tree- a tree with tangled branches that grows in the American wilderness and is said to represent the Old Testament prophet Joshua praying, Cindy employs the tree imagery significantly. Like the Joshua tree, she promises to continue to grow larger, stronger and more persistent in defiance of the existing milieu: *Look at me George./I'm the Joshua tree, gnarled and spiked*. Likewise, Cindy bears her scars proudly. The tree metaphor features prominently in another poem by Smith-Ferri: '**Bert Sacks**' where the eponymous Sacks '*traded his engineering career /to become a tree, /and spreading his limbs /found he could span the globe, / Seattle to Basra*. Next to the Joshua tree, Cindy continues to quote such natural images of forbearance and survival as hold on to life against all odds and despite adversity:

I'm the Bristlecone two miles above sea level,  
Thriving on adversity: you can't outlast me  
I'm the river you can't dam,  
The flood you can't check'  
The voice with ten thousand faces.

## Al-Hajaj

In spite of grief and loss, Cindy and her likes continue their fight against all odds so that the voice of resistance will never be muffled. Hers is barely the voice of pacifism but the voice of judgment pointing to the murderer, a voice that cannot be gagged but it reverberates infinitively. She is the certainty that the struggle goes on and the burning reminder that the blood of the innocent on George's hand does not wash off, hence the blood-stained hands imagery. While the hand-gloved George flatters himself on that he managed to go past the war issue intact and hands-clean, Cindy assures that his hands still carry the stain. She is the stringent menace to amnesia and will not allow the crimes to go into oblivion. The last lines of the poem are tinged with persistent impeachment, fearless delineation and a vow to haunt the murderer mercilessly. She promises revenge her way, of course, and threatens to hunt the culprit eternally:

I 'm the indelible blood on your  
Hands, George.  
Take your gloves off, and look at  
Me.  
I'm the pursuer, and you're the  
Prey.

The severe lampoon leveled at those held responsible for the human catastrophes assigns the poem to the political camp with its semi-trial formula as Cindy prosecutes the criminal whose mien and demeanor seem to betray no sign of remorse or regret. The blood of thousands perhaps even millions spilt on both sides is on the hands of a bunch of profiteers who seem oblivious of what their hands brought on the world. Notwithstanding, Cindy and other active pacifists have blazed a trail for others to follow into their steps. Taking cues from Cindy, they will be always hot on the trail of the murderers like a persistent hunter chasing down its prey. Warmongers believe themselves invincible hunters, hence the hunting metaphor. The rules of the game could change and turn upside down where roles are reversed and the once hunters are being hunted fiercely.

## Coda

Despite the scepticism entertained by critics and observers in respect of the quality of anti-war poetry, the anti-war poets continue to contribute anti-war poetry that examines the insidiousness of warfare. To brush it altogether aside as inadequate or emotional or even irrational is rather impetuous. It is undeniable that the poets speak about the war fiercely and condemn its atrocities with zeal and ardour as the anti-war poet finds it very onerous to stay unaffected and

**The war versus peace Language: a Study  
of Anti-war Language and Imagery in  
Selected Poems on the Iraqi war**

biased. The poets feel it urgent and honourable to take sides and proclaim a stand in opposition to the status quo.

It is beside the point to look at the anti-war poetry as the outcome of a momentary emotional density or the outburst of fury. It is better looked at as a humans' stand made whether collectively or individually in the face of this disruption of human code. That it is the outpouring of anger, rage, bitter frustration and resentment is neither deniable nor even tenable. That poetry should flow out of sober, balanced, and nonbiased experience is rather far-fetched. Poetry has always been, in its essence, the overflow of emotion and there is no logic in denying war poetry that very axiomatic feature.

Further, it is very hard to make an unemotional stand when the poets lend their support to the weak and oppressed and are then demanded to stay rational and detached. The language that addresses the disasters befalling innocent people and speak on their behalf must eventually overflow with emotion. Even sentimentality could be forgiven in this case and perhaps even endorsed if poetry is intended to fathom out human misery and wretchedness. If the anti-war poetry resorts to a language that in itself copies the status of struggle and opposition, again it is very legitimate. A warring language is required to promote the struggle against war. It is a language that shatters passivity and insipidity and embarks on active and forceful contribution. According to the anti-war poets, it is the duty of poetry to expose reality regardless of how shameful, compromising or bitter even by resorting to the absurd and surreal. Drastic problems need to be treated with drastic measures and serious procedures. The anti-war poets are fully aware of the predicament but against all odds they still protest and condemn. Their poetry is the bitter antidote of awareness and authentic, traumatic experience that does not need to please as much as cure and heal no matter the pain that experience inflicts.

The poems examined in this study show an array of methods and strategies to demonstrate refusal and register protest. Whether they employ violent lampoon like Smith-Ferri's '**Cindy Sheehan**' or the violent tone is played down in preference of peaceful, though sorrowful meditations like '**No Letters**', they all converge in the themes they promulgate. The poems (**Girly Man/ AnyWhere in USA/ Gluttonous Guns**) sometimes condemn the war ironically and/or satirically ridiculing the absurdity of the allegations the warmongers use to justify their warmongering and to win the public over to their side. The anti-war poem is designed to swerve the public back to rationality and sound judgment.

The imagery invested in the poems above studied hinges on the portrayal of the inhumane and bestial nature of the war. Whether it is a mafia don, a wilderness beast, or simply a gluttonous weapon, it dehumanizes and brutalizes. War violence is the ten- thousand teeth nightmare with which Ahmed is haunted and the worm consuming the country's heart altogether. More imagery is employed to expose the criminality of those who feed and grow strong on war practices. They are the brute men and scoundrels in Bernstein's poems and the mafia dons in Smith-Ferri's and the gluttonous millionaires in Siluk's. Imagery is further employed to throw the light on active pacifists who are ridiculed as girly men by their opponents, Yet, they are the Joshua tree whose shade extends from one end of the globe to the other and the Bristlecone as well as the blood stain on the murder's gloved hands and the tumour metastasizing to remind humanity.

Bernstein, Smith-Ferri, Siluk and hundreds of eminent as well as amateurish poets contribute political and anti-war poetry out of necessity. With their hindsight, they sense the urgent need and the ample opportunity to put poetry into active service to humanity and they do not hesitate. That some of the anti-war poems do not live up or even come close to the exemplary pieces of impeccable writings of renown in the field is neither deniable nor tenable. Nevertheless, some poetry could be mediocre, some could be unaccomplished, and some other poorly, but a good deal may be steps ahead of its time and the recipients of poetry of that time. It may need a less biased or involved reading audience to pass an objective judgment on and pronounce whether it has any merit.

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لغة الحرب ضد لغة السلام: دراسة لصورة ولغة الحرب  
في مختارات من الشعر الأميركي المعاصر  
المناهض للحرب في العراق

أفرزت الحرب على العراق عام ٢٠٠٣ الكثير من الجدل و النقاش فضلا عن الكتابات الشعرية. إذ حاول الشعراء الإسهام عبر قصائدهم التأكيد موقفهم الرفض أو الداعم للاستراتيجيات العسكرية التي غالبا ما يتبناها الغرب. فيما يخص النوع الاول، فقد ظهرت العديد من المجموعات الشعرية وأنشأت الكثير مواقع الانترنت التي نشرت و لا تزال تتشر ذلك الكم الكبير من القصائد التي أوضحت موقف شعرائها الرفض للحرب و الداعم للسلام. يركز البحث الحالي على دراسة هذا النوع من شعر الحرب و الذي أسهم به الشعراء الأميركيون ديفيد سميث فيري و تشارلز بيرنستاين و ديفيد سيلك.