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**REPRESENTATION OF WAR AND PEACE IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH LITERATURES: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this paper is to help disseminate thoughts from literature that supports the notion that war is savage and cruel in a way that makes war-decision makers abhor warfare. This paper investigates the way war is depicted in two major English and Arabic poems. Although the poems belong to two different yet remote cultures, there is a major commonality in between. A close reading technique was adopted to investigate the major thematic debates between the two poems. Major ideas will be generated to reflect upon how Arabs and Muslims are normally accused of being extremists and fundamentalists, along with their Western peers view war and look at peace. The two poems are Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et decorum EST* and Mahmoud Darwish's *Peace Talk*. It is found that both poems condemn wars and condemns the means, techniques and procedures used to justify waging wars. It also argues against with what wise people say about peace, if you want peace be prepared for war.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Undoubtedly, war is irresponsible and irrational. Throughout history, though, war has been depicted differently. Some studies and poets have depicted war positively that it has some positive aspects referring it to other heroic deeds such as patriotism and enthusiasm; others depict it negatively with catastrophic consequence while others show neutral stances towards war. Here, we need no scientific evidence to prove that war is savage and brutal. However, this study aims at identifying the similarities and differences between the way Arabic literature and English Literature have looked at the concepts of war and peace and how they envisioned war. One famous Arabic poem whose major theme is war will be compared with one English poem that tackles the themes of war and peace. However, this paper doesn't aim to neither show which literature embraces war than the other nor which literature supports terrorism or, according to some schools of criticism, that certain cultures were spread with the force of the sword. Both poems will be closely read, analyzed and compared in light of their thematic debate that revolves around war and peace. A comparison /contrast method will be also employed to identify the poets' motivations, the historical

contexts, readers and poems' tone. In commenting on concepts of war and peace throughout Arab and English histories, Bernard Montgomery (1971) narrates stories of war and peace, especially critical ones related to big and world wars; he talks of great wars and battles that destroy nations and empires; ones that revives cultures and worlds and others that destroy nations and cultures. Montgomery explains how empires, cultures and dictatorships, along with their leaders, people's and heritage, were collapsed pushing their nations into either great victories or unforgettable defeats (3-4). War and peace, in short, are two major humanitarian traits. In the meantime, it is apparent that throughout history, whenever there are voices that call for war, there are others that call and embrace peace, calling for combating war and its ideals. Leaders and decision war makers who declare and embrace waging wars on others normally claim noble objectives and goals for war, viz, ending big wars, achieving great triumphs, and most importantly, conducting wars for humanitarian proposes. Ironically, the latter comes up with destructive consequences.

**Definition of War**

War in its literal meaning could have no more than one reading and definition: Cruelty and savageness by the use of power. It means 'combat' while combat is an efficient principle in the manifold activity" (139). War is therefore an

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act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds with having in mind the political object as the original motive of war (v). Winston Churchill mentions that the best but last reward he hoped to achieve was peace, a notion nobody knows but fighters. Ironically, most wars fought throughout history are always intended to come up with peace, justice and hope. Clausewitz further defines war as "nothing but a duel on a larger scale. In short, it is thus an "act of force to compel our adversary to do our will, especially when there is no application of that force". He further explains that it the use of physical force as a means of power and [medium] to impose will on the enemy, as an object (63).

### Warfare and Principles

To ensure peace and peaceful consequences, warfare decision makers state that "the principles of war preach that [you] must know what you are doing and that you must not overextend yourself (Dunnigian 12). Smart leaders, and, assumingly, decision makers, would love their people to follow them challenge the common saying, "if you want peace, be prepared for war." They claim that wars enrich some spiritual aspects and values for people; but they require unique leaders to arouse their enthusiasm. To arouse their enthusiasm, Montgomery argues that leaders should be equipped with high qualities of religiosity; sincerity and power to be able to convince them join wars with them. Decision makers of warfare normally, and throughout history, set noble objectives for war but they later develop them according to their political, financial and military purposes. Dunnigian further adds to the principles of war. In addition to the maintenance of warfare objectives, there are other principles, such as economy of force, security, flexibility and entropy. All in all, all these principles will, after war shock, "settle down to a steady grind". Although the concepts of war and peace may vary from one time to another, aspects of violence, cruelty and savageness remain there. However, most warfare expects peace right after war is conducted. Adihari (2004) states that

War is not only a means to maintain a states security unity, consolidation and peace and a tool to execute policies and to obtain various interests but also by increasing the geographical limits to the utmost to use it to enhance political power, pride and prestige [...] The causes of wars...are varied and the end may or may not justify the means. War to end wars has become an empty slogan.

The paper will be divided into three sections. Section one is twofold: one narrates the historical background of war in Arabic literature during the twentieth century and the other reviews the historical background of war in English Literature during the twentieth century. Section two will be a comparison and contrast between the two poems and approaches. Section three will be dedicated to elaborate on the commonalities between the two poems in their look at the concept of war and whether or not they are both intended to fulfill the same objective. In fact, a number of English and Arabic poets were considered war rejecters, dedicating most of their poetry for combating war horrible thoughts, depicting warfare in a horrible manner. Darwish and Owen are two useful examples in this regard. However, some schools of criticism have

accused Darwish of being a resistance poet, though most of his poetry talks about rejecting thoughts about war. An example is his poem, "Think upon others". The following excerpt supports my argument. The poem reads,

This translates into,  
When you engage in your wars, think upon others  
Don't forget who request and demand peace.

Apparently, this excerpt predicts that Darwish, among others, calls for peace that can't be obtained by war. He fully believes that peace can never be produced once people are engaged in wars.

### Theoretical framework

#### Arabic Poetry and Warfare

In the twentieth century, most literary trends looked at war positively. The human personality apparently is relieved in dealing with war and war concepts because they are representatives of victory, dignity and glory. Some poets, scholars and rhetoricians have made strong connection between war and poetry; they claim that they are inseparable as, poetry and war, engage in ideas and thoughts as they are strongly rooted together, especially during literary eras. Knights took for granted that verse is their own identity and medium of communication, especially at wars never accepted negotiations of peace as this would be considered coward behavior. Esquire knights needed to be poets first. Therefore, it is no wonder that a knight was equipped with poetic tongue, equipped with dynamic and intellectual forces together (Al-Lohaibi 2).

Poetry has always been adjacent to human beings, especially during wars, because through it poets can document, celebrate and embrace their patriotisms during crises and endless wars. Al-Jahez states, "Each nation depends on registering their good deeds and empowering themselves and their borders through the heritage of poetry" (71). Abu Hilal Al Askary further adds, "Arabs ancestry, dates, days, and events aren't known but through their poetry; poetry is Arab's Divan and the cupboard of its wisdom and the deduction of its literature and the store of sciences" (qtd in Al Bijnawi and Ibrahim 144). However, it was noticeable that wars had led to the scarcity of poetry. For instance, due to the nature of the reign of Jahili era, the whole era was loaded with wars as a means of life. Ibn Salam attributed the abundance of wars to the occurrence of endless wars such as *Al Aws wal Khazraj* (259) which took them long time, the thing that led to the scarcity of poetry those days.

#### Arabic conception of war and Love

The following poem by Darwish thoroughly elaborates on the topic of war and peace. The poem titled: *Peace Talk* reads, As a matter of fact, Darwish used a very open style for readers with simple language. Apparently, he uses straightforward language because he delivers his message to the world of oppressed, suppressed and persecuted. He implies that all kinds of society must read and understand his poetry. His poetry is not meant to entertain, but to teach, inspire and urge.

Apparently Darwish points out to the confusion and puzzlement in which decision makers place themselves and their countries. He emphasizes that they are always overburdened due to enrolling their people in endless wars, wars that make them unable to differentiate between what is allowed and what is tabooed or forbidden. His poem translates into, As for those who passed away in defense of their memories,

Of their fancy imagination,  
They will be rewarded by their Lord  
Either be gifted or punished for taboos,  
Taboos and excuses of acts,  
Taboos and excuses of acts,  
Oh! People! You miracle-makers and Masters!!  
You! Pyramids builder!  
I want you to aspire to our age expectations  
With silence and only silence!!

### [Researchers' Translation]

Here, there is a crystal-clear condemnation of decision makers of war and an explicit call for combating wars instead of nations. The technique he uses here is a sort of blaming these people to take a look back at their own taboos and to forget about all the patriotic memories by starting a new life of peace because not only people will be mad at them but also their lord. Also, there is a harsh critique of people because of their silence which negatively reflects on increasing warfare. He openly calls them to speak up and end wars. Wars that end wars are no longer convincing from the poet's perspective. In the meantime Darwish offers an alternative. He urges war-oriented people to forget about their past which is full of bloodshed and to look ahead in search of peace. As he believes that a past which is dominated by war-mentalities will come up with only one thing: violence.

### English conceptions of war and peace

Undoubtedly, the western world, based on human rights matters, will definitely call for ceasing wars. However, the means are different. Wilfred Owen theorizes about peace and war, but with a very sarcastic method and a brilliant technique. His poem reads as thus

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.  
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .  
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.  
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

In the poem, there I an apparent call for conquering and combating traditional thoughts of warfare and patriotism. It is a frank call for rejecting ill-fashioned war lies that urge youth to enroll in wars by joining army, being a noble cause to serve and defend ones' country. Owen sarcastically condemns war lies that make people believe in death for the sake of noble causes e.g., loyalty, faithfulness and patriotism. In the first excerpt, he compares fighters, infantry, to beggars, a metaphor to depreciate and underestimate their mission which is supposed to be a noble one when they first joined army. They look like homeless people, haggard ladies and useless figures. They are subject to death at any moment, due to purposeless objective. It is also apparent, throughout the lexical choice, that Owen doesn't feel optimistic; most of his selected words sound horrible indicating fear, carelessness, death, such as beggars, hags, curse, gas, ...etc.

### Conclusions

Ends may not justify the means. It is proved that all wars waged could have been evaded without a blood drop. However, most recent studies have shown that wars conducted in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, especially during the Arab Spring prove not fruitful. They were assumed to end conflicts, bloodshed and wars, but they only created chaos, disorder and homelessness. This study accordingly concludes that war is inevitable most often and therefore its consequences are going to be catastrophic. Both poets call for peace through narrating lots of damaging aspects of war. Also, both comment on the forgettable scenes and consequences of war. Most importantly, both argue that war has never ever been meant to patriotic but a sort of a call for suicide. In short, patriotism could be achieved and reached by peace and ending wars by educating new generations and equipping them with knowledge and disarming them from weapons.

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