Poetic Speech Analysis of Metaphorical and Literal Uses in War Poetry: A Study of Selected Poems by Wilfred Owen

Waleed Shihan Muslih and Meethaq Khamees Khalaf

Abstract--- *The present study aims to demonstrate the way by which the use of words helps bringing to the front strong poetic effect. In addition, the study deconstructs the structures of the poems showing the significance of the word usage that generates striking impact. By metaphorical and literal uses, words function within a linguistic system creating a direct effect to the reader. So the reader finds himself part of an overlapping structure in Wilfred Edward Salter Owen's (1893 –1918) war poems. Furthermore, two of Owen's poems: "Strange Meeting"(1919) and "Insensibility"(1918) has been tackled in this study. Accordingly, the paper concludes that the complexity lies in the figurative use of words, that is, they are contrasting literally.*

Keywords--- Metaphor, Poetic Speech, Post-Structural Theory, Reader, Usage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Owen's poetic style is best known for his use of half-rhyme, which gives his poetry a dissonant and questioning quality that shadows the recurring themes of his poetry. Nevertheless, it stills unknown that the language in Owen's war poems is a direct one. Equally important, the present paper is a post structural study aims at showing the way in which language and words are used in two of Owen's poems: "Strange Meeting"(1919) and "Insensibility"(1918). Besides, the only way to understand these meanings is to deconstruct the language systems which produces the strong poetic impact. Moreover, the study is based on the post-structural theory since the analysis of the given two poems approaches Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) theoretical rule that the meaning of a word depends on the word that proceeded and the one that fallows. Otherwise speaking, words work and function inside a language system. Finally, the paper reached a conclusion that Owen's use of words is, mostly, a natural one in that the meaning of words is suggested by actions, sounds or gestures rather than by their figurative references.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies approached the poetry of Wilfred Owen, but, in the present study, the focus will be on the power of the poetic language and the use of words. Mahmud (2007) studied the experiences of futility, fear, and dehumanization that the poet himself experienced in the war. His study concluded an insight to Owen's atmospheric and groundbreaking writing, which can be viewed as an assault on Georgian romantic values and this is why Owen is a modernist poet. Another important study by Letteren and Astrid (2014) who dealt with the poets' strategy in portraying the pain and agonies of war. The study concluded that both Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) focused on the Romantic music, they also voiced concern about the insufficiency of language and the difficulty of translating pain into words due to the resistance and inexpressibility of language in communicating the

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pains of war, that is the anti-war poets struggle to use symbols, images and even the patterns sounds and rhymes. They used symbols suggestively through a face or a mouth, or by using biblical symbols such as the death of Absalom.

While the research by Kousar, Sarfraz and Qasim (2016) entitled "Expressionist Analysis of Wilfred Owen's Poems: Anthem for Doomed Youth, Dulce Etdecorum est, A Terre, Futility and Strange Meeting" tackled the use of metaphor, creative volition and inner monolog to explore expressionism. The study found out that Owen uses a rather fabulous tone to bring the realities of war to his reader. He refuses all romantic ideas of courage, valor, and patriotism calling them old myths. Finally, Abdul Mutalleb and Hamaddneh (2019) studied Owen's poetic production before and after the first world war in relation to the poet's biographical details. The study concluded that the poet attacks the politician whose opinions are the reasons of the bloody struggles and the main causes of the war. However, the present study is different from the previous studies in that it shows how the use of words generates strong and direct poetic impact. It concludes a problem in the relationship between the words and their figurative meaning.

III. POST-STRUCTURAL THEORY

Post-structuralism is a production of philosophy and literary theory in the late twentieth century. Particularly, it is linked to the work of Jacques Derrida and his followers. Equally important, Post-structuralism provides a way to research how knowledge is created and criticize structural assumptions. It claims that context and culture are subject to prejudices and misinterpretations since they affect the study of underlying systems (Powell, 1997).

Post-structuralism is unthinkable without structuralism. That maintains the strongly anti-humanist outlook of structuralism, and supports structuralism closely in its assumption that language is the key to our understanding of ourselves and the world. Nevertheless, it continues its anti-humanism and language focus, post-structuralism at the same time literal assumptions and methods derived from those assumptions (Berten, 2005).

Post-structuralists continue the structuralisms' obsession with language. poststructuralists argue that it is important to research both the object itself and the information structures which created the object in order to understand an object(Ibid). Derrida rejects all philosophical traditions, with their hierarchies and dichotomies that have survived to this day, the cornerstone upon which all truth, logos- meaning language was laid. Derrida says, words are never permanent and fixed in time, for the meaning we seek in words is a result of variation, the meaning is always polluted(Ibid). Derrida argues that the same is true for words; every single word in the language system contains traces of other words, theoretically of all other words. The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a proper existence that would refer only to itself. Each concept is fundamentally and legally embedded in a chain or structure within which it relates to the other, to other concepts (Guven, 2018).

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 "Strange Meeting"

"Strange Meeting" (1919) is a poem of war deals with the atrocity of the first world war. The poem was written in a time when anger and hatred were at their peak, when millions of young people were killed in the war on an

unprecedented scale with pictures of both stone and titanic battles, a feeling of difficult, grinding history is presented. The poem is a conversation between two enemy soldiers. These two soldiers meet in an imagined Hell, after the first one killed the second in a combat. This touching dialogue is an expression of the most insightful themes of modern war poetry which is the sympathy inside war.

The title of the poem suggests that the meeting is not an ordinary one, and the two terms *strange* and *meeting* add a further strangeness over the coming conflict. The dialogue between the two soldiers is set in a dream-like world that is really, Hell. The speech comes, mostly, from the second soldier's lips, killed by the first in action.

The form of poem is heroic couplet. The poet sets the scene saying that it only seemed that the first soldiers came straight from the battle and reached the tunnel that took him to the forefront of the cruel war in a strange landscape.

Owen's choice of words varies depending on the subject matter in that the words in the poem move through four stages represented by separate stances. Each stage deals with different aspects of the strange meeting. The first soldier's descent into hell is followed by a description of hell. He then, meets his strange friend and hears his truth in a form of monologue. Then, due to the reality of hell downs, words have an epic expression. The somber tone used to describe the sleepers, the dead soldiers in the tunnel reflects a supernatural sensation created by Hell dead smile and sullen hall.

Owen establishes a dream-like atmosphere at the very beginning of the poem: it **seemed** and **fled**. His use of adjectives creates a sense of place within which he sets the meeting scene. The tunnel is profound and dull, carved from rock. **Granites** is a rock hard and dull:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped

Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped

Through granites which titanic wars had groined. (C.P.p.35)

The opening two lines add a sense of suspense about the due to come encounter. The speaker in the poem states that everything seemed to have come directly from the skirmish and reached the tunnel that helped bring him into a strange scenery. Besides, the stillness of the language lulls the reader. The action works through a string of human gestures: **sprang up** and **stared**, showed recognition. The man's eyes are piteous, not pitiful, but rather looking for sympathy:

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

With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,

Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.

And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall-,

By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. (C.P.p.35)

In "Strange Meeting" Para rhyme scheme plays a big role in creating an instant influence to the listeners or readers It means a change of the vowel within the same consonant sequence. Lower pitched vowel following a higher one as rhyme; and this was described as a way of emphasizing the consistency of the nightmarish or

disillusionment of the experience that Owen writes about (Lewis, 1977). It has double effects on the reader. It highlights the gravity of what is being said without the intrusion of perfect rhymes which can sometimes trivialize the verse by their predictability. They sound wrong because they cause an irregularity of true rhyme such as the words **grown** and **groaned** in lines three and four. The first is an unusual, unexpected word but it possesses an onomatopoeic quality. It sounds like **groaned** very much. Owen achieves a similar effect in lines nine and ten with the neutral **hall** anticipating the sinister **hell**. **Moan** and **mourn** ending lines fourteen and fifteen not only have a similar auditory consistency but also suit one another. The **moan** is the mourning-sound. The irregularity of sounds helps create a sense of uneasiness. It indicates time running, suggests an immediacy, sense of being and reflects a fleeting beauty. Furthermore, they suggest an exceptional situation, the battlefield with all its personification. It is based on the notion of a fully-presented voice, an original expression protected from understanding itself (Evans, 1991). These spoken words are representations of mental experience of the two soldiers because they create an immediate relationship with the mind (Derrida, 1976):

Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred (C.P.p.35)

Own tries to rouse the mental experience bringing a sad and knowing look in the speaker's eyes about the true purpose of his poetry. The flesh's sufferings are juxtaposed with the strange friend's desire to pour out his mind to ease those pains. Thus, the reader now in a direct contact with the two characters in the poem, the two soldiers with the absence of the poet. This adds a sense of drama to the poem, the words come live. Evidently, the realistic text is based on the direct combat experience. The speaker's initiating dialogue is intended to allay fear and create a link free of animosity and sorrow by the opening remarks of the speaker. The use of the term *friend* instantly flags up the concept that this is an equals gathering; no enemy now exists/ "Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn" /. The answer is direct-at first, / "None," said   dead, but then there is recognition of the many futures lost, the situation's hopelessness. Through this formulation, the focus on personal experience is the defining element of the poem:

Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn".
"None," said that other, "save the undone years, (C.P.p.35)

The language changes to be abstract and philosophical, rather than descriptive. Owen uses abstract nouns that carry profound meanings such as **hope**, **beauty**, **pity, discontent**, **courage**, **mystery**, **wisdom**, **mastery.** Such terms are interwoven with phrases that bear the speaker's feelings like **hopelessness** and **weeping**, thereby producing a complex layer of meaning:

The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here. (C.P.p.35)

Owen creates a monolog, where the words of the other soldier take over the poem: The monolog the German soldier is saying is a sermon or Monosyllabic language. The language again undergoes change in the final section of the narrative:

I am the enemy you killed, my friend (C.P.p.35)

Its emotional impact is strong. Compared to the complexity of the previous words, they are straightforward and almost monosyllabic. The verbs **knew**, **frowned**, **jabbed** and **killed**, move the poem to its close with the familiar war vocabulary that many of Owen's other poems recognize. In addition, in line thirty, the mood changes again. The tone is positive; the speaker tells what he'd done to cleanse the world. Even the brutality of killing in line forty-two does not break that mood and the final invitation to sleep leaves us and the protagonists at peace.

The opening remarks by the speaker are intended to allay anxiety and create a connection free of hostility and sorrow. This soldier, a German soldier, also had a life full of hope, just as the speaker had. Essentially, these two are the same, young men hunting after the wildest beauty, the essence of life which cares not for routine things and feels deeply, even in grief, much more so than in Hell.

Thought is symbolized by words spoken which are symbolized by written words in return. Speech, can be seen as innocence, while it is from that innocence that writing fell. Writing is undermining the absolute originality of oral verbalization. Writing sounds to push itself, even abusing and manipulating the natural condition of the word (Derrida, 1976). Obviously, the piteous recognition of the weird friend is a key to the poem, piteous recognition being what Owen seeks to provoke and reject in the public, experience or traumatic memory. Words seem to be one with the listener's feelings. Significance is present to the listener as well as to the speaker. What can be clearly noticed is that expression produces presence but also true significance. This is a recurring nightmarish view of the world, a built landscape in which Owen puts a figure in movement from the previous Earth's wheels run oiled with blood. Considerably, it's not a confirmation of the violence committed against but by a person or a richly satirical tale of two nations diplomacy. It is an indication of the dissociation that appropriates the foreign field as the true home, imparting an impulse, brotherhood and violence overmastering (Kendall, 2007).

Courage was mine, and I had mystery;

Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery: (C.P.p.35)

The dreamer is the near reason why people are going to be satisfied with what we have forgotten: namely, what is unspoken due to the death of the poet. The form of "Strange Meeting" allows the ridiculing of the poet to be the subject of reconciliation. The dream vision ends with a wakefulness back into reality, evidently, with a move back on the journey, the vision's epistemic content. In this way, the poem is unfinished (Leitch, 1988):

Was my life also; I went hunting wild

After the wildest beauty in the world,

Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair, (C.P.p.35)

All the feeling is now useless, it has died from laughter to tears. And with that, the truth that still has to be told. This is the pity reality, composed of sadness and compassion, expressed when others suffer as they did in the battle in untold amounts:

But mocks the steady running of the hour,

And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.

For by my glee might many men have laughed, (C.P.p.35)

Future generations may learn about peace, or join in the insanity of destruction that we have begun. They are going to be more aggressive, stubborn, and make any progress difficult to do. I believed I was courageous and wise, going into the unknown, still a master of my own destiny, but I'm left behind by history now. How susceptible the world is going to be:

And of my weeping something had been left,

Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,

The pity of war, the pity war distilled (C.P.p.35)

The war machine's wheels grind to a stop in the spilled blood: I will clean, purify, and cure from the profound well with water. The dead soldier says with the sheer intellectual fact that he will wipe the blood blocked wheels. This sentence comes from the Bible, and is discovered in the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and the Apostles Acts. The soldier, basically, gives his life as a sacrifice to mankind, hoping they will see the war reality. But on the wounds or foul business of war, he doesn't want to waste it. War also results in psychological disease, blood and gore are not all about it. That disastrous thing is that the second soldier shows the sad news of his assassination to the first, but he reciprocates and calls him a friend. Even as death happened, there is recognition of the shared speech, which the second soldier attempted to avoid in vain:

"I would have poured my spirit without stint

But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.

Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were (C.P.p.p.35,6).

The final change is from that the main monologue reflects, meditative tone to the nearly soft, understated sound of denouement. This final section brings with it the simplicity of fulfillment a change of tone with nothing high-flown but plain, mostly monosyllabic language. Paradoxically, illumination in the tunnel's darkness is given again. The frown of the first soldier as the second soldier bayonets is an expression of doubt, perhaps self-loathing, a hesitation to kill. Having been reconciled, having learned that pity, distilled by the terrible pain of war, is the only way forward for humanity, the final line has the second soldier suggesting they both sleep now:

I am the enemy you killed, my friend.

I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned

Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.

I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.

Let us sleep now". . . . (C.P.p.36)

Own wanted to return to the front line, by all accounts, to explain his work, despite being faced with post-traumatic stress disorder. He hated the gentle, emotional poetry which overshadowed the war. The weird friend's pitiful recognition is a key to the poem, pitiful recognition being what Owen tries to incite and reject in the public, experience or traumatic memory.

4.2 "Insensibility"

"Insensibility"(1917) is one of the most judgmental poems of Owen's. In this poem, Owen launches his vitriol full-blown at the people who are to blame for this war, the people he himself claims are the cause for this war, this cruel, unremitting fight that left thousands dead on either side, and the poets who never fought throughout battle and the ministers who sent them to die were honored in the most oblique ways. But the generals, most notably General Haigh, who came up with increasingly hare-brained schemes to cross into German territory, most of whom left more people dead, remained well away from the front line. While making it patently clear to the reader how disappointed he is with the way soldiers are handled, Owen spares no words (https://poemanalysis.com/wilfred-owen/insensibility).

Owen's selection of words draws heavily on the vocabulary of the military and the language of war with many nouns identified by negative associations such as the, **front line withers, troops, fade**, **shell-fire, teases the men**, whilst armies are decimated and battle. Evidently, in a poem that is supposedly about emotionlessness, Owen does not refer to emotions in that figurative way but he either negates them or uses them within ironic context or when he enforces the meaning of feeling by putting the words at the beginning of the line of verse. Furthermore, the poem is of irregular line length and differ in lines number (Campbell, 1999; Cash, 2010).

In the first stanza, Owen says men are happier at battle if they lose their emotion and compassion. He writes of alleys paved with their brothers. Owen says something similar in stanza Owen with echoes of Shakespeare's Henry V claims that those happy are the men who are oblivious to the dangers they face on France battlefields. Not only do these cold-blooded men go unknowingly to their deaths, but they can also come upon the bodies of their fallen brothers without pausing to count the human cost (Cash, 2010):

Happy are men who yet before they are killed

Can let their veins run cold.

Whom no compassion fleers

Or makes their feet

Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers. (C.P.p.37)

Owen, on the other hand, is acutely sensitive about the cost, and even pauses to make a self-conscious criticism of his tearful fooling with this poetic subject. He is conscious that, whilst he plays with fancy images, flowers and fancy rhymes, his soldiers are dying. His metonym for fallen front-line soldiers **filling gaps** is bitterly ironic at the expense of Haig's attitude toward the under-commanded youths. The epithet sums up the attitude of fire-generals towards such **losses** that is, they are commodities that can be replaced by no one bother (Cash, 2010).

Owen's strategy becomes clearer. It is to identify the various categories of men who benefit from one kind of' insensitivity or another. He is concerned with men who cease feeling to the point where they even cease to calculate their own survival odds. In the second stanza the soldiers get sluggish and stop feeling:

And some cease feeling

Even themselves or for themselves.

Dullness best solves

The tease and doubt of shelling, (C.P.p.37)

The horrific experience of front-line service leaves them numb Having half rhymed with **best solves**, Owen para-rhymes **shelling** with **shilling** but he uses the word **arithmetic**, one of the most uncompromising nouns to ever be in a rhyme position:

And Chance's strange arithmetic

Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling. (C.P.p.37)

Then Owen uses /cannot more ache/, a polysyllabic line-end that just responds to an echo. Such related recurrences are, deftly help to unify a single meditation on the theme of insensitivity. Owen's frustration is with the lack of concern of his own men about their dying comrades; his rhymes convey this mindset with a fitting casualness to the victims. It is better for soldiers to lose their imaginations because their wounds would ache less if their souls do not have such a weight:

Happy are these who lose imagination:

They have enough to carry with ammunition.

Their spirit drags no pack.

Their old wounds1 save with cold cannota more ache.

Having seen all things red,

Their eyes are rid (C.P.p.37)

Finally, Owen changes settings. He writes that, in their ignorance, soldiers at home are happier because they have not yet encountered the darkness of battle:

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion

How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,

And many sighs are drained. (C.P.p.38)

Owen switches settings once again as he goes back to the battlefield and writes of soldiers who are dead and dying in the land of no man, and their deaths are all the more painful because they have no meaning:

We wise, who with a thought besmirch

Blood over all our soul,

How should we see our task

But through his blunt and lashless eyes?

Alive, he is not vital overmuch;

Dying, not mortal overmuch; (C.P.p.38)

In the last stanza, Owen, relentlessly, reveals dullards who are not stunned by a cannon. He points out their cowardice by saying, they made themselves resistant by default. In other words, though choosing to stay safe at home, they send their countrymen out to **leave these shores** and face danger and death (Selden,1985; Appignanesi, 1992):

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,

That they should be as stones.

Wretched are they, and mean

With paucity that never was simplicity. (C.P.p.38)

In other words, there are so many dead bodies that they fill end to end in the alleyways. There is no continuity between either the length of the stanza or the length of the line; nor does each line of a rhyme or half rhyme with another line of that stanza. This owes its ambiguity both to the statements syntactic structure and to the para-rhymed lines that support them:

The front line withers.

But they are troops who fade, not flowers,

For poets' tearful fooling:

Men, gaps for filling,

Losses, who might have fought

Longer, but no one bothers. (C.P.p.38)

Owen, on the other hand, is acutely sensitive about the expense, and even pauses to make a self-conscious critique of his **tearful fooling** with this poetic subject. He is aware that his **people** are dying while playing with **flowers** and fancy rhymes.

V. CONCLUSION

In the light of the preceding discussion, the present study has come up with that the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, accurately, reflects the pain of war, and the rage of those forced to fight for glory and nationalism. Owen wants to convey, literally, the harsh and horrific images of the great War. He wrote war poems that have sharp and tough words because he sees poetry of war as both traumatic memory and testimony. Moreover, his use of language is a literal more than figurative one. In this situation, the strong emotional effects are made by bringing the poems close with the familiar vocabularies of war which many other poems of Owen recognize. Take the case of "Strange Meeting", every word is integrated fundamentally and legally into a chain or framework within which it relates to another word generating concepts. Lower pitched vowel following a higher one as a rhyme; and this has been identified as a way to emphasize the continuity of the nightmarish or disillusionment of Owen's experience. Furthermore, these words are related to each other by simple and almost monosyllabic words that suggest a sense of immediacy such as the verbs **jabbed** and **killed**.

In "Insensibility" Owen's collection of words draws heavily on the military vocabulary and the language of war, with many nouns characterized by such negative associations as the, front line **withers**, **troops**, **fade**, **shell-fire**. Again, the feeling of the awful front-line service experience is conveyed by using half rhymed with best solutions, Owen para-rhymes **shelling** with **shilling** but using the word **arithmetic**, one of the most intransigent nouns ever to be in a rhyme position. Indeed, thought and idea are symbolized by spoken words which are in return symbolized by

written words where the poet gives full force to emotions. For instance, **stay-at-home**, **dullards**, **couldn't-care-less**

as **Wretched** and **evil,** the former gaining special power by their place at the beginning of the line.

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