

**تجربة الحرب وولادة جمالية الابداع
الشعري في قصيدة (هنا ايتها الرصاصه)
لبريان تورنر**

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**War Experience & the Aesthetic Birth of Poetic
Creation in Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet"**

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This is a study of Brian Turner's master poem "Here, Bullet" which gives his first volume (2005) its title. It studies this poem in light of Theodor W. Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory", 1997. It shows the authentic, realistic and truthful aspect of Arts in general and poetry in particular in expressing the atrocities of the war on terror comparing with other means of expressions (mass Media, interviews ...etc). It investigates a first-hand experience of a poet veteran who suffers the horror of war. It studies the poet's reaction towards the idea of death and how he aesthetically depicts the inability of the bullet to penetrate his soul. And by doing so such portrait appeals to the reader. The language of the poem shows the courageous soul of the speaker who invites the bullet to target his body. Doing so adds to the beauty of the poem and thus appeals to the reader.

Keywords: Bullet, Violence, Veteran, Aesthetic, War.

المخلص

هذه دراسة لقصيدة براين تورنر الرئيسية " هنا ايتها الرصاصه " والتي تعطي المجلد الأول (٢٠٠٥) عنوانها. حيث تدرس هذه القصيدة في ضوء "النظرية الجمالية" لثيودور أدورنو، ١٩٩٧. يظهر الجانب الأصيل والواقعي والصادق للفنون بشكل عام والشعر بشكل خاص في التعبير عن فظائع الحرب على الإرهاب مقارنة بوسائل التعبير الأخرى (وسائل الإعلام ، المقابلات ... إلخ). إنه يحقق في تجربة مباشرة لشاعر مخضرم يعاني من رعب الحرب. يدرس رد فعل الشاعر تجاه فكرة الموت وكيف يصور جمالياً عجز الرصاصه عن اختراق روحه. ومن خلال القيام بذلك ، فإن هذه الصورة الشخصية تروق للقارئ وتُظهر لغة القصيدة الروح الشجاعة للمتحدث الذي يدعو الرصاصه إلى استهداف جسده. إن القيام بذلك يضيف إلى جمال القصيدة وبالتالي يجذب القارئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رصاصه ، عنف ، مخضرم ، جمالية ، حرب.

Art can help us recognize dimensions of different challenges that cannot easily be understood through conventional forms of policy analyses. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 engendered a more fundamental breach in human understanding. Aesthetic insights into 9/11 attacks have the ability to identify and concentrate on this essential breach of understanding. One of the most notable features after the attacks are the artistic reactions. Numerous artists around the world dealt with both the tragic event and its implications for the future. They painted portraits, created films, they wrote poems and novels, and they composed and performed music. (Bleiker, 2009: 50)

The representation of violence in the different forms of literature belongs to a sphere of aesthetics that has long been a challenge to scholars in the fields of literary theory, psychology and sociology. The paradox that perplexes readers is how an act which is originally considered distasteful could be morally justifiable and even gratifying by many readers, audiences and observers. (Thompson, 1)

First of all what violence is and how it is represented. Robert Audi gives a comprehensive definition of violence as "the physical attack upon, or the vigorous physical abuse of, or vigorous struggle against, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous psychological abuse of, or the sharp, caustic psychological attack upon, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous, or incendiary, or malicious and vigorous, destruction or damaging of property or potential property" (cited in Thompson: 7) The means of representing violence is very crucial for its critical and aesthetic reception. Violence exists as a representation as some means of articulating the cause, or effect, or occurrence of it. This representation takes two forms; factual (through the media of reporting, journalism, documentaries, historical documents, histories, autobiographies, biographies, and so on) and fictional (descriptions and depictions of violence in poetry, novels, short stories, film, drama, television etc)The question is which one of these two representations is more realistic, more accurate than the other, and consequently more authentic and then whether such representation has an ethical and/or aesthetic validity lacking in the other. Ronald Bleiker states that Aesthetic theories are illuminating, but they become politically significant only in the context of real-life situations. (2009:48). He adds that Art can help us understand security challenges which cannot be understood through conventional forms of policy analyses. (Ibid). Bleiker raises several questions relating to the authenticity of Arts to express certain aspects of terrorism better than a straightforward factual account. (49) Death is a recurring theme in the poetry of the Eastern and the Western cultures. It is one of the persistent preoccupations of poets in almost most of the different ages. Brian Turner is an American poet and veteran who served in Iraq at the start of the 21st century. His poetry depicts his experiences as a veteran interacting with Iraqi people.

In "Here, Bullet," the war veteran, Brain Turner becomes as one unity with the bullet. This killing device becomes as agent to death exists as an invalidation of the human. For the whole congregation of war, the

bullet and the target exist in a hopeless stuffing reducing everything to the dominion of death. (Goldensohn, 2015: 24) Brian Turner, writer of *Here, Bullet*, served for seven years in the US Army despite having a college degree. H joined the service in Iraq in 2003-4. Turner conveys many lessons that he draws from the danger and boredom in the life of the war zone to those who read his poems. The first lesson that the bullet teaches, the dangerous atmosphere of the war. Secondly, the mortality of the human being, death is described as an inescapable truth in *Here, Bullet*. Turner depicted the culture, history and the language of Iraq in his poems, approaching the war as a student to teach these lessons. He also shows the strange nature of a war that began rapidly with an invasion to clear the weapons of mass destruction owned by doctorate regime into a grinding counterinsurgency. This transition was already existed when Turner and his unit came to Iraq for duty in 2003. (Jason, 2019:3-4) The contemporary American poet and war veteran Brian Turner has responded to his history, as a soldier served in Iraq, to explore various experiences encountered in a war zone and to examine the enduring emotions evoked by them. He has wrote two volumes of poetry that evoke his war experience in Iraq. The first volume is (*Here, Bullet*. 2005) and the second one is (*Phantom Noise*. 2010). In each of these two volumes you will touch the war experience and its impact on the creativity of the poet to help him establishing his own poems. Some of these poems has been written during his service in the American army, and some of them has been written after returning home. Absolutely the terror of war will cause such a reaction, but to serve as a solder in the American troops in Iraq will make things harder because of the cultural, social, and political circumstances with all the words mean. The poet sometimes borrow a proverb or verse from holy Qura'an or a speech by a popular Iraqi figure to be the opening of a certain poem in his two volumes. This gives an impression that this poet is living a state studying the Iraqi culture in order to know how to move and live the current life as a solder. For instance, in his poem "Leaves That the Wind Drives Earthward" he said "*You have to study the Iraqis to know them*". (Turner, 2005) As if he is making a shield to protect himself by knowing the Iraqi culture but the matter was so difficult for him. As a result of that, the poet tried to overcome his fear from death by attacking it through poetry in order to encourage himself and his companions. And to show the aesthetics of violence that the only way to escape it is to welcome death through speaking to the bullet which is portrayed by the poet as the only source of death in his mind. So the poetic creativity which is created by the fear from death gives the poet the start to show us his ability to flip over our understanding of things.

Theodor W. Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory" might have been able to study some of these assumptions that have the potential to capture aspects of the trauma of war which cause these aesthetic reactions. Actually, the world is divided into 'good' and 'evil', so the pretext of the US military troops to occupy Iraq, is to save the Iraqis from the doctorate regime. This truth has the unwelcome effect of representing the war as it deceived even the war veterans and among them was Brain Turner. This approach is making sense in the context of the shock after the events of 9/11, but it is making things more difficult than solving them. Actually, in the time after 9/11 terrorism remains threatening the world. The war on terror in Iraq have not brought peace but have generated new forms of violence instead. Aesthetic questions thus need to be raised with regard to 9/11. These questions by focusing the aesthetics of literature to map how the poet in this aesthetic field has engaged the war. By showing how the artistic activities do allow us to raise questions that are central for understanding the aesthetic creation caused by the war experience.

The Aesthetic questions are:-

- 1- Can literature, provide certain insight into human beings and their emotions that other sources and representations fail to capture?
- 2- Can literature's appeal to the imagination generate political and social change in a way that prose accounts cannot? (2009:54)

In his poem "Here Bullet" which is the master poem of his first poetry volume of the same title (2005), Turner selects to attack the smallest implement of modern warfare as he prepares himself for death. The poem portrays the speaker as he challenges the bullet as it hits him. It confronts the bullet which is a symbol of evil in the war. By addressing the personified object, the poem targets the weapon soldiers use as a symbol of the greater concept of violence of war.

The poem consists of sixteen lines. By addressing the bullet, the speaker explicitly dramatizes the theme of fear. But a close scrutiny of the poem shows that the speaker is challenging that bullet to end what it starts to give the sense that this bullet which is a symbol of death can do nothing but only brings an end to the body. The description of the bullet damaging the body in a variety of ways isn't enough to damage the spirit

and courage of the speaker. The poem uses clinical description of a bullet wound. It describes the individual parts of the body the bullet injures on its mission to kill the individual.

The speaker addresses the bullet saying;

If a body is what you want
then here is bone and gristle and flesh.
Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
the aorta's opened valves, the leap
thought makes at the synaptic gap.

Inviting the bullet by the speaker to do harm to him can be seen as ironic and sarcastic. Such irony and sarcasm would enhance the image of the soldier as courageous and triumphant even through death. For the bullet's aim is no more than the body without being able of penetrating the soul. On the other hand, the personification of the bullet making it the perpetrator of violence allows the poet to attack all the powers of war, politicians, generals of wars and businessmen profiting from it.

The speaker addresses the bullet, "If a body is what you want, then here is bone and gristle and flesh." He describes his body as gristle. By doing so the speaker dehumanizes his own body for the word gristle describes the body of an animal after it is slaughtered. The lines, "the clavicle-snapped wish, the aorta's opened valves, the leap thought makes at the synaptic gap." Describes the fatal path the bullet passes through the speaker's collarbone, aorta then spine and finally brain. Addressing the bullet rather the shooter gives a complex message about the immoral nature of war. Brian Turner knows the horrible experiences soldiers on both sides have during war. That is why Turner chooses to address the bullet rather than the shooter because the shooter suffers similar situations and he is not necessarily devilish or malicious. The speaker has no ill will against his enemy because he shares similar emotions.

Ignoring the enemy shooter needs volumes to be written about who is to be blamed for waging wars and committing such great guilt of killing thousands of people. The speaker challenges the bullet which is made for the sole purpose of killing him. This bullet is an object which is very simple, detached and unfeeling tool. It is literally inhumane but it is personified to represent a malicious perpetrator of violence. It hisses just like a snake, "through the air," seeking" the bone and gristle and flesh" (line 2). The path of the bullet is described as "that inexorable flight," (line 7) revealing the fact that weapons are manufactured for the sole aim of ending life as described in the first lines of the poem, "Here is gap." These lines show the personification of the desire of the bullet to kill. Every bullet is designed and destined to be launched on a target whether this target is a living thing or an animate. So the bullet is made for malicious reasons, for the "adrenaline rush" and the "insane puncture into heat and blood" (lines 6-8). The bullet becomes the ultimate antagonist.

In order to calm down the fear, the speaker elevates the personification of the bullet; now the bullet, like Man fearing the bullet, possesses an, "adrenaline rush" and learns to crave that rush as human beings who become addicted to the substance. So when the bullet is launched, it does not stop until it crashes into something solid. And as it strikes a certain body, its speed "puncture[s]" that body of "heat and blood".

The speaker does not stop his concerns and fear but he starts to challenge the bullet by mocking, "And I dare you finish what you've started." (lines 8-9) Then the speaker confirms, "because here, Bullet, / here is where I complete the word you bring/ hissing through the air." (lines 9-10), that he will have the last word, that he will not allow the bullet to take his body without offering a strong response. In other words, the challenge to the bullet becomes obvious and direct. The speaker mocks the bullet that its power will end where the soldiers will start and that his words, his final breaths are still his and not commanded by the bullet. The last line of the poem "This is where the world ends, every time" (line 16) is a gloomy reminder of the futility of war as well as a great sign to mental strength of the speaker. The soldier's world ends in a state of triumph not one of surrender and pain.

Aesthetically speaking, the acts of violence in the poem are but vestiges of the ritual of poetic creation. Earlier in the poem, the speaker quite willingly and stoically offers his body as the manifest target of the bullet. He even invites the bullet to hit him. The apostrophic utterance specifies his body as "bone and gristle and flesh" in order to highlight a sacramental ritual rather than bodily physicality. The biblical overtones are unmistakable here of Jesus's sacrifice for humanity. Thus, the very death that the bullet brings unmask life in a Biblical sense. The subsequent anatomical terminology establishes the reality of the pain of the bullet wound. The ultimate aim is to invoke the physical pain the bullet incurs as it puncture the body. But even here the physical pain is mediated by sensational pleasure via such words as wish, crave, and insane.

This turns pain into pleasure in a Freudian approximation of pain\pleasure formula. However, the wound does not invoke death as much as deviance from the wounded speaker when he challenges the bullet to “finish what you’ve started.” This challenge plays on the uncanny. Logically, the bullet starts in the shooter’s intention to kill and ends in the fulfillment of this intention. But the speaker here is ironic and defiant as if he is dead sure that he is invincible. This defiance is reasoned out quite differently: the speaker says that the wound of the bullet is “where I complete the word you bring.” Is this the Biblical word of creation or should be literally interpreted as the message of death. However the subsequent lines put this statement in a different context which is that of moan and coldness. These are typical symptoms of injury and the trauma associated with it. But they are equally symptoms of labor and birth too. The subsequent volley of military terms gives these physical reactions a different direction. Words like triggering, explosives, and rifling denote violence and war except that they describe internal conditions of the speaker: “I have inside of me.” These physical and psychic symptoms intensify as the bullet goes deeper and deeper in his flesh. The last two lines relocate the bullet spatially in his body not in a moment of inevitable death but of death as creation because where the bullet hits in his body is “where the world ends, every time.” The irony here is what ends is not the speaker who is hit with a bullet but the world itself. The capping adverbial “every time” creates a sense of iteration because death happens once but here the speaker implies that he was hit numerously and by implication dies many many times.

Conclusion

In Brian Turner's Poem, “Here, Bullet”, it is impossible to read the bullet as real bullet. Most probably, it is a metaphor of poetic inspiration at least in the shamanic sense. What Turner is doing here is a re-enacting of the romantic concept of imagination and inspiration with all its attending violence. The poet as speaker offers himself as a medium for inspiration regardless of its physical pain. The reception is conducted in a ritualized and shamanic way but attended by the biting realism of modern war. The death that the bullet is supposed to incur is reconceptualized as an act of poetic creation. Turner is essentially doing what the British poet Ted Hughes was trying to do in his famous poem “The Fox” but with qualitative difference. Hughes was working the process of inspiration in its romantic sense through the metaphor of the fox. Turner did the same with the metaphor of the bullet but not just to celebrate this very act of poetic inspiration. This metaphor and the very act of composing his poem is a means to process and come to terms with his war experience in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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