

**Otherizing and Harmonizing the Self in Brian Turner's
"Night in Blue"**

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الملخص

كان قرار الولايات المتحدة بخوض الحرب مع العراق في أوائل العقد الأول من القرن الحادي والعشرين أمرًا معقدًا ومتعدد الأوجه، وكان المبرر الأساسي الذي ساقته إدارة بوش يدور حول تأكيدها على وجود علاقة قوية بين النظام العراقي والإرهاب العالمي، وخاصة فيما يتعلق بأسلحة الدمار الشامل. كان هذا التبرير بمثابة الأساس للغزو الأمريكي للعراق في مارس ٢٠٠٣. وقد شارك بين تيرنر، وهو جندي وشاعر أمريكي، في هذا الصراع الرهيب في العراق، حيث أجبره التزامه على أن يشهد أهوال الحرب وأكاذيب ادعاءاتها. لذا تبحث هذه الدراسة في عملية تغريب الذات ومواعمتها في قصيدة تيرنر "ليلة باللون الأزرق" في ضوء نظرية الاستشراق لادوارد سعيد. تقدم الدراسة وجهة نظر مؤثرة حول الآثار النفسية والعاطفية للحرب على الجندي الشاعر من خلال التركيز على الصراعات والعواطف الشخصية. كما تتحدى القصيدة الصور النمطية والميول اللإنسانية التي غالبًا ما تصاحب روايات الحرب والصراع. ومن خلال القيام بذلك، فإنها تشرك الشاعر والقارئ في عملية تغريب الذات ومواعمتها بالإضافة إلى كشف مغالطات روايات الحرب المستخدمة لغزو العراق.

Abstract

The decision by the United States to go to war with Iraq in the early 2000s was a multifaceted and intricate matter. The Bush administration's primary justification revolved around their assertion of a strong connection between the Iraqi regime and global terrorism, particularly in terms of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). This justification served as the foundation for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Brian Turner, an American soldier and poet, participated in this horrible conflict in Iraq. Turner's commitment forced him to witness the horrors of war and the falsehoods of its claims. In light of Said's *Orientalism*, this study examines the process of otherizing and harmonizing the self in Turner's "Night in Blue". "Night in Blue" offers a poignant perspective on the psychological and emotional effects of war on an individual soldier. By focusing on the soldier's personal struggles and emotions, the poem challenges the stereotypes and dehumanizing tendencies that often accompany narratives of war and conflict. In doing so, it engages the poet and the reader in the process of otherizing and harmonizing the self as well as unmasking the fallacies of war narratives used to invade Iraq.

Introduction

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused a lot of debates about the reasons and claims behind the heinous invasion. The American Administration fabricated certain narratives to justify the interference in Iraq, which led to the fall of the former regime and the destruction of the country. It masked the real reason of the invasion, which lies in the American deadly hegemonic desire to put a hand over the world's oil reserves. To keep the flow of oil to provide the power supply for their country and their armies everywhere, the United States has taken preemptive steps to ensure this oil flow. The one who seizes control over oil resources will control the global economy and capitals. (Hinnebusch, 2007)

One of the USA false claims of invading Iraq is the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction. U.S. government introduced a rationale that Iraq possessed or was actively developing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. It utilized this false claim to justify and legalize their aggression and invasion. They convinced the public opinion that Iraq stands as a threat to the United States and its allies.

Another claim was the link of the president of the Iraqi regime to Al-Qaeda and 9/11 attacks. The U.S. government accused the Iraqi regime of supporting the terrorists financially, which led to the destruction of the World Trade towers through airplanes attacks. This link was later refuted by various intelligence agencies and experts after investigations.

The failure of the various intelligence agencies to find signs of Weapons of Mass Destructions and the direct link of the former regime to terrorists' organizations caused a lot of rage around the world that the Bush administration had fabricated and exaggerated claims to justify the bloody war against Iraq.

The U.S. government and its allies created these fake claims protect its interests in the rich region. Iraq's alleged possession of WMDs, support of terrorist groups, and their claim to establish a democratic system in Iraq were the justification for invading this Iraq (Bassil 2012). However, these false claims of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and the absence of concrete evidence for the link with terrorists created an international awareness that Iraq posed no immediate threat to the USA or the international community (Cirincione, Mathews and Perkovich, 2004).

Discussion

Brian Turner's poem "Night in Blue" is a meaningful one that delves deep into the psychological and emotional effects of war on an individual soldier. Through its exploration of personal transformation, loss, and the moral complexities surrounding war, the poem serves as a meditation on the experiences of soldiers in conflict and their struggle. Utilizing free verse, Turner captures the soldier's state of mind as he reflects on his time in a war zone and the impact of his experiences on his life and relationships. The poem opens with the speaker situated at an altitude of seven thousand feet, possibly aboard an aircraft returning from deployment. The imagery of "running lights blacked out under the wings and America waiting" conjures a sense of detachment and dislocation from the homeland, signifying a disconnection between the soldier's experiences in war and his previous life. As the year of the soldier's life "disappears at midnight," the central theme of the poem emerges the challenge of reconciling the experiences of the past year with the soldier's sense of self and his worldview.

At seven thousand feet and looking back, running
lights
blacked out under the wings and America waiting,
a year of my life disappears at midnight,
the sky a deep viridian, the houselights below
small as match heads burned down to embers. (1-5)

Additionally, the concept of time plays a significant role in "Night in Blue." The poem's opening line, "At seven thousand feet and looking back," signals a temporal and spatial distance from the soldier's past experiences. As the poem progresses, the speaker reflects on past events, wondering if they are still affecting his present life. This examination of time adds another layer to the poem's exploration of otherness, as the soldier struggles with his changing sense of self and identity, further complicated by the passage of time. Turner's use of

colour in the poem is notable, as he describes the sky as a "deep viridian" and the houselights below as resembling "match heads burned down to embers." These colours evoke both the vast distance separating the speaker from the world below and a sense of darkness. This combination of detachment and darkness establishes the tone for the poem which makes him feel othered from himself.

In the poem "Night in Blue," which is set during a journey from Iraq back to the United States, the speaker poses a number of issues that are unrelated to the battle (Shaffer 11). The speaker questions the influence of his experiences on his capacity to love, asking if his time at war has made him a "better lover" This meditation underscores the soldier's struggle to find meaning amid the chaos and brutality of war. He wonders if his encounters with "hardship" and "loss" will be discernible to a lover through the intimacy of a kiss or touch, as he struggles with the emotional burden of his memories.

Has this year made me a better lover?
Will I understand something of hardship,
of loss, will a lover sense this
in my kiss or touch? What do I know (6-9)

These lines highlight the internal contemplation of a soldier who questions how his experiences in war have shaped his ability to love. This meditation reflects the struggle to find meaning amidst the chaos and brutality of war. The soldier ponders whether the hardships and losses he has endured will be perceptible to a lover through the intimacy of physical connection, specifically in the form of a kiss or touch. This inquiry showcases the emotional burden carried by the soldier and the desire to be understood and connected with on a deeper level. In relation to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, it provides a lens to analyse the dynamics of otherizing and harmonizing the self. Orientalism refers to the Western representation and construction of the

East as an exotic and inferior "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage- and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" (Said 3). In this context, the soldier might perceive his war experiences as an aspect that sets him apart from others, creating a sense of otherness within himself. He questions whether a lover could recognize and empathize with this otherness, acknowledging the impact of hardship and loss on his identity. Simultaneously, the soldier yearns for harmonization, desiring to bridge the gap between his inner self, shaped by his experiences, and the external world of love and connection. The inquiry about whether a lover can sense his encounters with hardship and loss through a kiss or touch reveals the longing for understanding, empathy, and recognition of his complex emotional journey. Overall, this meditation delves into the soldier's struggle to reconcile his personal growth, the impact of his experiences, and the yearning for connection.

The poem shifts into a duller and more reflective tone, with the speaker questioning what he has gleaned about "redemption" or "sacrifice" from his time in war. He contemplates how he can make sense of the deaths he has witnessed and whether he can justify them as "worth it." Another important aspect of the poem is its focus on the sensory experience of war. Turner describes the sights, sounds, and tactile sensations that the soldier encounters, creating a vivid experience for the reader. This emphasis on the physicality of war enables the reader to better understand the soldier's emotional state and the challenges he faces. The presence of the "other self" within the soldier is an intriguing aspect to consider in relation to the sensory imagery and the soldier's experiences. The soldier's encounters with foreign sights, sounds, and sensations during war contribute to his

sense of alienation and may emerge the divide between his pre-war self and the person he has become. The sensory imagery in the soldier's reflections likely evoke a contrast between his previous experiences of familiarity and the new, unfamiliar world he has been thrust into. This contrast can intensify the perception of an "other self" within him, as he navigates through the chaos and brutality of war. The sights, sounds, and sensations that he encounters during this time may become part of his identity, further highlighting the divergence between his past self and the transformed self that emerges from the war experience.

Moreover, the sensory imagery can also serve as a vehicle for the soldier's self-meditation. The soldier may find himself grappling with how these foreign sensory experiences have influenced his emotions, thoughts, and actions, deepening the divide between his pre-war and post-war identities. Ultimately, the presence of the "other self" within the soldier suggests a sense of internal conflict, a struggle to reconcile the past and present versions of himself. This internal struggle, combined with the sensory imagery, adds another layer of complexity to the soldier's reflections on his experiences and their potential impact on his capacity to love and connect with others.

of redemption or sacrifice, what will have
to say of the dead – that it was worth it,
that any of it made sense?

I have no words to speak of war. (10-13)

The speaker admits that he has "no words to speak of war," realizing the complexity of his experiences. The poem then shifts focus to specific scenes from the soldier's time in war: digging graves in Talafar, comforting a grieving mother in Ramadi, and carrying the body of a fallen friend. These vivid images serve to underscore the emotional losses that war has taken on the speaker and the difficulty he

faces in reconciling these memories with his sense of self. (Koivisto 86)

I never dug the graves in Talafar.
I never held the mother crying in Ramadi.
I never lifted my friend's body
when they carried him home. (14-17)

As the poem nears its conclusion, the speaker reflects on the quiet, more peaceful moments he will carry with him. In "Night in Blue," the Iraqi environment plays a crucial role in helping the speaker navigate his sense of self-other and find moments of solace amidst the chaos of war. The images of the "shadows under the leaves," the "quiet of the desert," and the "low fog of Balad" evoke a sense of peace and tranquillity within the natural surroundings. These moments of respite stand in stark contrast to the more violent and traumatic memories that the speaker carries. The Iraqi environment serves as a backdrop for the speaker's reflections and allows him to connect with his surroundings on a deeper level. The mention of the "orange groves with ice forming on the rinds of fruit" adds an element of fragility and fleetingness to these moments of peace. It highlights the transient nature of life in a war zone, where beauty and tranquillity can be easily disrupted. Through the portrayal of the Iraqi environment, Turner suggests that the speaker finds solace and a sense of belonging within the natural world. The free verse structure of the poem, with its fluid and narrative-like quality, mirrors the soldier's wandering thoughts and emotions, capturing the disjointed nature of his memories and experiences. This fragmented portrayal reflects the speaker's struggle to maintain a cohesive identity in the face of the disorienting and dehumanizing effects of war.

By depicting the Iraqi environment as a source of solace and connection and these places are no longer places of monsters and

savages. Instead, they are places of peace and love. So the Iraqi environment helped him to de-otherizing his strange feelings. The poem explores the potential for overcoming the feeling of self-other. The speaker's appreciation for the beauty and tranquillity amidst the chaos of war allows him to establish a connection with the land and the people, blurring the lines between self and other. The Iraqi environment becomes a space where the speaker can momentarily transcend the divisions and find commonality with his surroundings, offering a sense of unity and belonging in an otherwise fragmented existence. Overall, the role of the Iraqi environment in "Night in Blue" is to provide moments of respite, reflection, and connection for the speaker, enabling him to overcome his feelings of self-other and find solace amidst the turmoil of war.

I have only the shadows under the leaves
to take with me, the quiet of the desert,
the low fog of Balad, orange groves
with ice forming on the rinds of fruit. (18-21)

Turner's use of language and poetic structure in "Night in Blue" also contributes to the poem's exploration of otherness. The free verse structure allows for a fluid, narrative, mirroring the soldier's wandering thoughts and emotions that emphasizes the disjointed nature of the soldier's memories and experiences, reflecting the fragmented nature of his identity in the face of war. The poem concludes with the image of a woman crying in the speaker's ear, her voice mingling with the sounds of "moonlight and sand as a resonance of the dust of bones." This image is a powerful ending to the poem's themes, as the soldier's personal relationships, memories of war, and his struggle to find meaning are all brought together in a single, affecting moment.

I have a woman crying in my ear,
late at night when the stars go dim,

moonlight and sand as a resonance

of the dust of bones, and nothing more. (22-25)

Throughout "Night in Blue," Turner explores the concept of otherness by examining the psychological and emotional impact of war on the individual soldier. The speaker's experiences have forced him to face the limits of his understanding and empathy. In this context, Edward Said's otherness can be seen as a result of the soldier's alienation from his homeland, his mingling with different cultures and perspectives, and the emotional and moral challenges he faces in making sense of his experiences. Furthermore, the poem's vivid imagery and tone serve to humanize the experience of war, highlighting the shared humanity of those involved, regardless of which side they may be on. By focusing on the soldier's personal struggles and emotions, the poem challenges the stereotypes and dehumanizing tendencies that often accompany narratives of war and conflict. In doing so, "Night in Blue" invites readers to consider the complex, multifaceted nature of human experience and the ways in which otherness can be both a source of differences.

"Night in Blue" by Brian Turner, acts as a powerful reminder of the far-reaching consequences of war on individual soldiers, prompting readers to contemplate the internal struggles faced by those who have experienced the harsh realities of conflict. The poem's strategy serves as a reminder that soldiers are not just faceless entities on a battlefield, but rather human beings with complex emotions and experiences. The concept of otherness, as articulated by Edward Said adds a unique dimension to the understanding of the poem. In this poem, the poet embodies the idea of "the other" by initially presenting a sense of detachment and isolation. The poet, as an American soldier, reflects on their experiences in a foreign land and the emotional toll of war. They grapple with questions about the impact of their service on their

identity and relationships, wondering if the hardships and losses they've witnessed have transformed them into a better lover. The poet acknowledges their lack of direct experience with the realities of war in Iraq, as they've never dug graves, consoled grieving mothers, or borne the weight of their fallen comrades.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Turner's "Night in Blue" introduces an anti-discourse to the idea of "the other" by subtly highlighting common human experiences and emotions that bridge the gap between American soldiers and Iraqis. The mention of "orange groves", "the woman crying at night", and the imagery of "moonlight and sand" allude to shared moments of sorrow, beauty, and reflection. These elements suggest that despite cultural and geographical differences, there are universal emotions and experiences that connect people across borders. In doing so, the poet moves away from a strict sense of "the other" and succeeded in de-othering his feelings through emphasizing the common humanity that underlies both their own experiences and those of the Iraqi people they encountered during their service.

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