



## War Poetry in Mahmoud Darwish's "To Our Land" and Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting": Comparative Analysis

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### Keywords

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|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. War             | 2. Mahmoud Darwish |
| 3. Wilfred Owen    | 4. To Our Land     |
| 5. Strange Meeting | 6. identity        |
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### Abstract:

War has been a persistent phenomenon throughout human history. The effects of this phenomenon are devastating and extend well beyond the battlefield to include the loss of thousands of lives, physical harm, psychological trauma, displacement of countless numbers of people, and destruction of entire communities. The topic of war has thus become a central theme for poets, novelists and other men of letters trying to portray the horrors and dire consequences of armed conflicts, as well as the strength of the human soul. The present study is aimed at exploring the theme of war in poetry across cultures. To this end, two poems (i.e. Mahmoud Darwish's "To Our Land" and Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting") are selected to be analyzed and compared in terms of their themes and stylistic devices. The paper thus seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the poets' perceptions of war and the cultural and historical contexts that appear to have shaped them, with a special focus on certain issues such as identity loss, displacement, and reconciliation. The results indicate that both poems, despite their different backgrounds, portray a common human experience of war and its emotional impact on all sections of society

## شعر الحرب في "إلى أرضنا" لمحمود درويش و"اللقاء الغريب" لويلفريد أوين: تحليل مقارنة

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### الكلمات المفتاحية

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| 1. الحرب        | 2. محمود درويش |
| 3. ويلفريد أوين | 4. إلى أرضنا   |
| 5. لقاء غريب    | 6. الهوية      |

### الملخص:

الحرب جزء من التاريخ البشري لآلاف السنين. أثار الحرب هائلة، ليس فقط من حيث عدد الأرواح المفقودة ولكن أيضاً من خلال الصدمات الجسدية والنفسية التي تسببها، وتشريد عددًا لا يحصى من البشر على مستوى الفرد ومستوى الجماعات، وكذلك تدمير مجتمعات بأكملها. فأثار الحرب تتجاوز ساحة المعركة، حيث تؤثر على الأجيال وتترك انطباعات دائمة في ذاكرة المجتمعات. هذا جعل الحرب موضوعاً رئيسياً في الأدب والفن، من خلاله يتمكن الناس من توثيقها والتفكير فيها وانتقاد آثارها البعيدة المدى. تم تناول موضوع الحرب من قبل الشعراء والروائيين وغيرهم من الأدباء، في محاولة لنقل عواقيها المروعة وتعقيداتها وقوة الروح البشرية. تقدم هذه الورقة تحليلاً مقارنةً بين قصيدة "إلى أرضنا" للشاعر الفلسطيني محمود درويش وقصيدة "اللقاء الغريب" للشاعر الإنجليزي ويلفريد أوين. وتهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف أوجه التشابه والاختلاف الموضوعية الأسلوبية بين القصيدتين، مع التركيز على كيفية تصوير كل شاعر للحرب والهوية والتهجير والمصالحة. وعلى الرغم من خلفياتهما المختلفة، يبرز كلا الشاعرين التجربة الإنسانية المشتركة للصراع وتأثيرها العاطفي. من خلال هذا التحليل، يسعى البحث إلى تقديم فهم أعمق لوجهات نظر الشعراء والسياقات الثقافية والتاريخية التي تشكل أعمالهم.

## Introduction

Throughout history, war has significantly influenced the socio-cultural and geopolitical landscape. From ancient conflicts involving the Greek and Roman empires to the extended and devastating wars of the 20th century (e.g. the two World Wars), the nature and means of war may have transformed, but its lasting negative impacts on affected societies and cultures remain the same.

Like other serious issues concerning man, war and its horrors have provided a fertile territory for all sorts of literary forms. War poetry has been extensively studied as a literary genre celebrating such conflicts and their heavy cost on human race. Whether written during World War I or in response to more recent armed conflicts, war poetry often reveals universal truths about war and what accompanies it of suffering, loss, and hope. Cross-cultural studies of war poetry often attempt to highlight such truths through comparative analyses of selected poems taken from different cultures and/or periods.

This paper is an attempt to approach the theme of war from Eastern and Western perspectives represented, respectively, by Mahmoud Darwish's "To Our Land", which depicts the Palestinian struggle for liberation, and Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting", which is a haunting portrayal of the futility of war. The primary aim of the study is to show how poets from different eras and cultures address similar themes in unique ways. Siegfried Sassoon, for example, was not only a skilled writer but also a capable soldier, one of the few who survived the first world war and then went on to achieve notable success as a poet. He composed a poem entitled "Attack" in (1918), that powerfully captures the grim realities of war, vividly depicting the battlefield and the soldiers, and ultimately exploring their emotional struggles: "The

barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed / With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear, Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire."

Similarly, Arabic poetry boasts a rich and varied tradition that spans centuries, offering deep insights into experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities affected by war.

In their war poetry, Arab poets delve into the themes of displacement, exile, and search for a sense of belonging. These themes are particularly prominent in the works of those who have faced exile or lived through periods of political turmoil.

The Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, for instance, wrote extensively about the themes of love, loss, and political strife. His poetry depicts struggles of the Arab nations and their quest for identity amid conflict. A case in point is his poem "Balqees Barada" (2005): "The war is over, but the wounds are still bleeding / The cannons have fallen silent, but the hearts are still crying."

## Historical and Biographical Contexts

*Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008)*: Darwish stands as a central figure in Palestinian poetry, with his works dealing with the Palestinian experience of displacement, exile, and resistance. Darwish's life and work are closely connected to the Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948, a time when more than 700,000 Palestinians were uprooted from their land during the creation of Israel. His village, Al-Birwa, was obliterated, leading his family to seek refuge in Lebanon and later in Galilee. The persistent Israeli occupation, the 1967 Six-Day War, and the Palestinians' fight for freedom and self-determination have profoundly influenced Darwish's poetry in terms of the themes of displacement, resistance, and identity.

Darwish's early political activism resulted in house arrests and imprisonment. In 1973, he

became a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and played a significant role in drafting the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988, solidifying his status as a national poet. Having spent decades in exile across different cities (e.g. Beirut, Paris, and Ramallah), his poetry captures a sense of diasporic identity, intertwining personal grief with shared historical memories.

Scholars such as Muna Abu Eid (2016) have highlighted Darwish's status as a leading intellectual in the Palestinian nationalist movement, establishing the link between his artistic expression and political activism. Ahmed and Hashim (2014) regard Darwish as "the father of Arab resistance poetry" (94).

Hala Nasser (2011) further asserts that Darwish remains the most significant Arab poet of resistance to date and is recognized as a prominent literary voice for the Palestinians. His diction, while straightforward, resonates profoundly with their concerns, portraying the ongoing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis as a clash of two memories. Darwish himself stated once that "Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance" (cited in Nasser 2011: 7).

Celebrated for their emotional depth and political significance, Darwish's works have established him as a pivotal figure in Arabic literature. Edward Said (1994: 112) pointed to Darwish's role as the Palestine's unofficial national poet, stressing that his aspirations extend beyond that title. Darwish also explores such solemn themes as love and death to show the human side of his personality. Thus, instead of allowing himself or the Palestinian people to be defined solely by their political struggles, he aims to remind the world of their full humanity. Darwish is undeniably the voice of Palestine. As Bernard (2008) aptly stated, "Mahmoud did not speak for or instead of, he quite naturally was

the voice of Palestine. The voice and not, as some have it, the spokesman" (52).

*Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)*: Owen was an English poet and soldier whose experiences in World War I profoundly shaped his work, establishing him as a pivotal figure in war literature. Guided by Siegfried Sassoon, Owen's poetry challenges glorified notions of war and heroism, presenting a stark and honest portrayal of the physical and psychological toll on soldiers. His poetry is known for its striking imagery, intricate meter, and profound emotional resonance, frequently juxtaposing the idealized perception of war with its harsh truths.

Owen initially worked as a teacher before he enlisted in 1915. His time on the front lines in France from 1916 to 1918 left him traumatized, leading to his being undergone treatment from shell shock in 1917. While at Craiglockhart War Hospital, he was mentored by Siegfried Sassoon, and this in turn influenced his anti-war poetry in combining raw realism with a touch of irony. Tragically, he was killed in action on November 4, 1918, just a week before the Armistice, and his work was published posthumously by Sassoon in 1920.

In the 1931 edition of *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, Blunden included a memoir that showcased Owen's development as a poet and the significant impact of his wartime experiences on his writing. He emphasized Owen's dedication to uncovering the harsh realities of war, noting that his poems were filled with "a passionate sense of the suffering of others" and a commitment to authentically portraying the soldier's experience. Furthermore, Blunden's memoir provided insights into Owen's character, depicting him as kind and empathetic, yet resolute in his mission to convey the brutal truths of war through his poetry. The author also acknowledged Owen's technical skill, particularly his use of parhyme

and assonance, which contributed to the haunting quality of his work.

Both Darwish and Owen were profoundly influenced by their tragic experiences of armed conflicts—the former by the Palestinian Nakba, the latter by the horrors of World War I. While Darwish's poetry emphasizes the importance of identity in the face of displacement, Owen's work laments the way war erases individuality. Their unique backgrounds highlight how conflicts influence literary expressions of violence, loss, and solidarity.

### Methodology:

The present paper adopts a systematic comparative approach to exploring Darwish's "To Our Land" and Owen's "Strange Meeting". Analysis of the selected poems involves seven key steps, focusing on thematic, stylistic, and contextual dimensions. Below is a breakdown of the procedures:

#### 1. Selection of Poems

The selection of these two poems is based on their thematic relevance to war, identity, and reconciliation. Both poems offer rich texts for comparative study due to their distinct yet overlapping concerns; while Darwish's work depicts the Palestinian experience of displacement and resistance, Owen's poem delves into psychological and moral aftermath of World War I. This contrast enables a nuanced exploration of how different contexts can shape literary responses to war.

#### 2. Contextual Analysis

Knowing the historical and biographical background of each poet is crucial for an in-depth understanding of their works. Thus, Darwish's experiences as a Palestinian in exile and Owen's firsthand experiences as a soldier engaging in World War I provide the essential groundwork for grasping and correctly interpreting the selected poems.

### 3. Thematic Comparison

The study aims to identify and compare the central themes in each poem. This includes examining how each poet addresses the consequences of war, the sense of identity, and the possibility of reconciliation. The comparison looks at (a) War and Displacement: How each poem portrays the physical and emotional impact of war on individuals and societies, and (b) Identity and Reconciliation: The connection between identity and land in Darwish's work, and the theme of reconciliation in Owen's poem.

### 4. Imagery and Symbolism

There will be an analysis of the imagery and symbolism used to convey the themes and emotions expressed in each poem. This involves (a) comparing Darwish's use of natural and land imagery, which evokes a sense of belonging and loss, with Owen's depiction of death and a hellish afterlife, which underscores the futility and horror of war, and (b) discussing how symbols evoke emotional responses and reinforce the poems' central themes.

### 5. Tone and Mood

An investigation will be performed of the tone and mood of each poem and how they contribute to the overall message. This includes: (a) comparing the nostalgic and hopeful tone of Darwish's poem with the somber and reflective tone of Owen's poem; (b) exploring how the poets have managed to evoke empathy and solidarity through the exploitation of tone and mood.

### 6. Structure and Form

An analysis will be attempted of the structural elements and form of each poem. This involves: (a) comparing the free verse style of Darwish's poem with the structured form and rhyme scheme of Owen's poem; (b) discussing how the form contributes to the expression of themes and emotions.

## 7. Interpretation and Synthesis

The findings of the previous analyses will be synthesized to (a) draw meaningful conclusions about the similarities and differences between the two poems under scrutiny, and (b) highlight the unique contributions of each poet to the literature of war and identity.

By adopting this comparative-analytic approach, the present study can, hopefully, provide a comprehensive analysis and a better understanding of how Darwish and Owen address the motifs of war, identity, and reconciliation in their poetry.

### Rationale

The rationale for this comparative analysis of the two selected poems is grounded in three key objectives:

#### 1. To address a gap in literature:

While Darwish and Owen are extensively studied individually, there is limited scholarship comparing their works. This paper therefore seeks to fill this gap.

#### 2. To highlight shared humanity amid conflict:

Both poets articulate the profound psychological and emotional toll of war, transcending their specific contexts. Darwish's focus on displacement and cultural identity, and the longing for homeland is comparable to Owen's critique of war's futility and shared suffering. By analyzing how poets from vastly different cultural, historical, and political contexts explore universal themes of war, identity, and reconciliation, the paper underscores how poetry universalizes the human experience of trauma, resilience, and the quest for peace.

#### 3. To advocate for empathy and global awareness:

The study emphasizes poetry's role in fostering empathy across national and cultural divides. Darwish's lyrical celebration of Palestinian

identity and Owen's haunting depiction of soldier solidarity challenge readers to confront the human cost of conflict. This aligns with didactic goals of using literature to cultivate cross-cultural understanding and moral reflection.

By linking postcolonial resistance poetry (represented by Darwish) with Western anti-war literature (represented by Owen), the research illuminates how art transcends geopolitical boundaries to criticize oppression and advocate for reconciliation. It reaffirms poetry's power to bear witness to human suffering and inspire collective healing, making it a vital tool for both academic discourse and societal reflection.

### Limitations of the Study

While the study offers a better understanding of some valuable insights into the works of Darwish and Owen, it is not without limitations. First, the analysis of Darwish's poem relies on an English translation of it. This may not fully capture the artistic nuances of the original Arabic text, for translation often leads to a loss of certain textual and rhetorical features of the original text, particularly rhythm, rhyme, tone, and culture-specific references, which potentially limits the depth and rigor of the analysis of the poem under scrutiny. Secondly, the data of the study (i.e. only two poems) is a little bit limited, which may undermine their representativeness of war poetry as well as the inclusiveness of the findings of the present study.

### Analysis and Discussion

Darwish's "To Our Land" is a poignant poem that depicts the strong bond tying the Palestinian people to their homeland. It evokes a sense of loss and longing for the usurped land due to conflict and displacement. Through the employment of vivid imagery and lyrical diction, Darwish highlights the emotional and cultural significance of homeland, showing how



one's homeland is linked to both personal and collective identity. Despite its sorrowful and painful tone, the poem also transmits a sense of hope and resilience, reflecting the enduring spirit and aspirations of the Palestinian people for a return to and restoration of their homeland.

By contrast, Owen's "Strange Meeting" is a poem written in the form of a dialogue between two soldiers who were on the side of two different warring parties and now meet in the afterlife, contemplating the futility of war and the profound loss of humanity it entails.

## 1. Themes

### 1.1. War and Displacement

Mahmoud Darwish and Wilfred Owen are among the most celebrated war poets, with each offering a unique perspective on the horrors and futility of war. As Das (2013) argues, war poetry goes beyond its immediate historical context to tackle universal themes of suffering, loss, and hope. This is particularly true of the poems of Darwish and Owen, as they address the subsequent outcomes of war while maintaining a deeply personal and emotional resonance.

Both poems delve into the destructive effects of war. As is noted by Silkin (1984), war poets frequently use stark contrasts – like life and death, hope and despair – to emphasize the contradictions that come along with armed conflicts. Owen's poem exemplifies this idea by depicting enemies who find peace in death. Similarly, Darwish uses metaphors of fragmentation and sacredness to express the duality of resilience and displacement. Jayyusi (1991) characterizes Darwish as a poet who "merges the personal with the political," highlighting the collective trauma of displacement while celebrating cultural resilience. His poem illustrates this connection by intertwining the sanctity of the homeland with the sorrow of its division. In *Modern English War Poetry*, Kendall (2006) points out

that while Western war poetry typically centers on the individual soldier's experience, postcolonial poetry (e.g. Darwish's) often emphasizes collective struggles and identity.

In "To Our Land," Darwish gives life to the land, assigning it the role of a central character that represents the identity, history, and struggles of a people. Barbara Harlow (1987) argues that Darwish transforms war into a "resistance narrative," where land becomes a metaphor for survival.

This poem also explores the consequences of war in terms of the Palestinian quest for sovereignty. The line "We have on this earth what makes life worth living: / On this earth, the Lady of Earth" contrasts the resilience of identity with the pain of losing a territory.

Not only does the poem mourn the loss of land, but it also celebrates its sacredness: "To our land, and it is the one near the word of God / A ceiling of clouds." Clearly, the careful choice of the word "God" evokes a sense of spirituality and divinity, which in this context suggests the unique value of homeland.

In the line "To our land, and it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns, the map of absence", the phrase "The map of absence" evokes feelings of loss and longing, painting a vivid picture of a place that is fondly remembered and yearned for, yet not currently accessible.

The line "To our land, and it is a prize of war / The freedom to die from longing and burning" refers to the land as a "prize of war"; the poet highlights the significance of homeland and the struggles it has faced. The phrase "freedom to die from longing and burning" evokes a deep sense of emotional anguish and a strong desire for homeland.

In addition to the theme of war, displacement is a central idea in the poem. In the line "We travel

to a country where we see ourselves / In the mirrors of the stranger," the poet laments the Palestinian experience of exile, where identity is fragmented by forced migration. This confirms Edward Said's (1999) characterization of Darwish's work as a "poetics of displacement" where exile becomes a condition of existence.

Like Darwish, Wilfred Owen is known for his war poetry. His "Strange Meeting" examines the serious repercussions of war by pointing to its futility and the shared suffering of soldiers, regardless of their side in the conflict. The narrator, a soldier, finds himself trapped in a nightmarish afterlife where he meets his fallen enemy, who articulates the shared pain felt by soldiers on both sides: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

In this context, war is stripped of any heroic notions and is instead portrayed as a tragedy that dehumanizes individuals. The verbal exchange between the two soldiers underscores the futility of violence, revealing that even opponents can find common ground in their suffering.

Owen's imagery of "titanic wars" and "the pity of war distilled" directly address the physical and emotional toll of war.

The line "Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were" refers to the psychological and emotional scars left by war, indicating that men endure profound suffering even in the absence of physical injuries.

Elise Dalli (2016) notes that "'Strange Meeting' is a poem centered on war where, despite the war's end seeming as distant as the ability to fly, scholars widely believe that there was no real animosity between the sides – at least from the perspective of the common soldier."

Jon Stallworthy (2014) notes that Owen's work exposes war's "pity" as a universalizing force, collapsing distinctions between enemies.

Sassoon in his introduction (1921) refers to "Strange Meeting" as Owen's masterpiece, the finest elegy penned by a soldier who fought in the Great War. T.S. Eliot (2019) describes it as "one of the most moving pieces of verse inspired by the war, a technical achievement of great originality."

Owen's legacy has endured for decades, significantly influencing the modern understanding of war poetry. Woods (2015) agrees, noting that his most poignant English war poems include "Strange Meeting" and "Dulce et Decorum Est", "Anthem for Doomed Youth", "Insensibility", and "Futility" serve as poignant reflections on the tragic loss of countless young lives sacrificed to imperialism and the ideology of patriotism. Shah notes that Owen's "Strange Meeting" vividly illustrates the futility of war, the neglect of human emotions, and the countless dead bodies of young, vigorous soldiers (Shah 2013, p. 1).

Dylan Thomas (1960) remarked that "[Owen] was the greatest poet of the first Great War. Perhaps, in the future, if there are men still to read—by which I mean, if there are men at all—he may be regarded as one of the great poets of all wars. . . he is a poet of all times, all places, and all wars" (p. 118-119).

Fussell (1975) identifies Owen as a pivotal figure in transforming the perception of war from one of glory to one of disillusionment, highlighting its senseless destruction. "Strange Meeting" is often seen as one of Owen's most impactful works, encapsulating the shared suffering of soldiers and the absurdity of war.

Displacement is also evident in the soldier's psychological detachment. The "tunnel" represents a threshold where soldiers are alienated from their humanity, diminished to "swift minds" ensnared in the machinery of war.



Santanu Das (2006) emphasizes that Owen's soldiers exist in a "dislocated reality," disconnected from both their home and their sense of self (p. 149).

Both Darwish and Owen delve into the consequences of war, yet they do so from different perspectives and cultural backgrounds. Darwish focuses on themes of losing one's homeland and identity, capturing the Palestinian experience of displacement and exile, infused with a profound longing and hope for a return to what has been lost. Conversely, Owen highlights the futility and shared anguish of war, illustrating the universal horror and trauma that soldiers endure. His work emphasizes the senselessness of conflict and the pressing need for reconciliation.

Despite their differing viewpoints, both poets convey the deep emotional and psychological impact of war, showcasing its impact on individual and collective identities. Through their vivid and evocative imagery, they prompt readers to reflect on the enduring effects of conflict and the possibilities for reconciliation and healing.

## 1.2. Identity and Reconciliation

For Darwish, identity is synonymous with homeland. His roots are deeply embedded in the soil, intertwined with its pines and fields. Nothing can ever displace him.

"We have a country of words. Speak, speak / So I can put my road on the stone of a stone."

The intertwining of language and land serves to reinforce a shared Palestinian identity in the face of attempts at erasure.

Ahamed & Risana (2024) believe that "National identity in Darwish's poetry is portrayed as a complex and multifaceted construct, deeply influenced by the experiences of exile and dispossession" (353). Darwish is in a constant

quest for his identity. His experiences as a refugee and an exile have not hindered this journey; rather, they have enriched it. These circumstances have provided Darwish with a fluid sense of identity that resists being confined.

In the line "To our land, and it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns, the map of absence," the phrase "far from the adjectives of nouns" implies that the true nature of the land transcends simple words and descriptions. It emphasizes the indescribable quality of the homeland, which cannot be entirely conveyed through language.

According to Hamdi (2011), "Darwish as a poet has tried to reach deep inside the Palestinian psyche, perhaps more intensely than most writers have been able to capture the core of Palestinian identity and its closeness to the occupied land of Palestine" (32).

"To our land, and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings, holy books ... and an identity wound"

The term "identity wound" refers to profound trauma and challenges associated with one's sense of identity and belonging.

In "Mahmoud Darwish and the Quest for Identity" (2011), Tawfiq Yousef posits that Darwish's exploration of identity unfolds in two primary phases, depending on whether his poetry is written inside or outside Palestine (675-79). The connection to Palestine as a homeland has always remained with him, even after his departure. Politically, this can be linked to his unwavering belief in the Palestinians' right to return: he clings to the hope that one day, the lost land will be reclaimed and the lost identity restored. Yousef notes that this belief is mirrored in Darwish's view of the Arabic language as a unifying force for all Arabs, indicating that the identity he sought and took pride in during that time was fundamentally that

of an Arab (677-78). Darwish (2009a:148) states that "I am not embarrassed about my identity because it is still in the process of being invented."

Darwish's works have been extensively analyzed in respect of Palestinian identity, exile, and resistance. Alshaer (2011) affirms, for example, that "Indeed, Darwish contributed definitively to the construction of Palestinian identity, and the Palestinian people informed and featured prominently in Darwish's poetry."

It has been suggested that he played a crucial role in helping Palestinians shape and preserve their identities amid ongoing efforts to erase them. His poetry often expresses the deep pain and longing for a homeland, intertwined with the struggle for identity and self-determination (Ahamed & Risana, 2024, p. 352), as seen in his poem "To Our Land". Paola Garcia (as cited in Hamdi, 2014) agrees: "With poetry, [Darwish] fights to retain his humanity and his identity, resists violence and occupation, and gives a voice and a home to Palestinians".

Naomi Nye places Darwish not only among the most important Palestinian poets but also as a unique global advocate for peace and understanding. She describes him (as cited in Khan & Awan, 2019) as "the Essential Breath of the Palestinian people, the eloquent witness of exile and belonging, exquisitely tuned singer of images that invoke, link, and shine a brilliant light into the world's whole heart. What he speaks has been embraced by readers around the world – he is an utterly necessary voice, unforgettable once discovered". Mahmoud Darwish's exploration of identity transcends simple observation; "reconnect a specific identity claim with corresponding borders, linguistic or geographic" (Mena, 2009, p.115), but seeks to validate his identity and that of others, emphasizing their shared humanity,

regardless of nationality or how they are perceived—whether as victims or victimizers.

Through poetry, he strives to maintain his humanity and identity, resists violence and occupation, and provides a voice and a home for Palestinians. Meir Litvak (2009) investigated how modern Palestinian collective memory has developed and its role in shaping Palestinian national identity. He argues: "No group identity exists without memory as its core meaning; the sense of continuity over time and space is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity" (1).

Dhillon (2011) states that "Though [Darwish] is the most popular poet of Palestine, his poetry is more than poetry, it is history, mythology, and the subaltern voice. Darwish's title as the "poet of resistance" is in a sense unfortunate as it limits his scope. Darwish's work goes beyond resistance of the subaltern; he is the poet of the people" (63).

Despite its serious tone, "To Our Land" conveys a sense of hope and defiance. The repeated reference to the land as "holy" highlights its enduring significance, even in the face of occupation. Darwish's connection to the land serves as both a lament and a declaration of its unwavering role in the identity of its people: "To our land, and it is the one scattered in fragments."

The land acts as a unifying symbol, fostering resilience in those who have been uprooted. Darwish's poem subtly explores the theme of reconciliation, focusing on the hope for return and restoration. Instead of directly addressing reconciliation between opposing factions, it emphasizes the internal journey of reconciling with one's heritage and identity. The yearning for peace and a return to the homeland reflects a desire for a harmonious existence where the

wounds of displacement and loss can be mended. Reconciliation is a hopeful goal:

"We carry the negative aspects of the land within us: we feel / The land's heartbeat". The land serves as a bridge for healing, even as political resolution continues to be postponed.

Refqa Abu-Remaileh (2018) interprets Darwish's work as a "dialectic of return," highlighting how hope endures even amidst fragmentation.

In the line "To our land, and it is the one near the word of God / A ceiling of clouds," the phrase "near the word of God" evokes a sense of spiritual ties to and sacredness of the land. It suggests that the land carries a divine importance or is somehow blessed. The clouds can represent both the beauty and the fleeting nature of the bond tying the poet to his homeland.

In Owen's poem "Strange Meeting", the theme of identity is intricately woven into the narrative of two soldiers who meet in the aftermath of war. This meeting provides a profound exploration of shared humanity, challenging conventional notions of identity shaped by nationalism and conflict. John Middleton Murry (1921) recognized Owen as the foremost poet of World War I, noting that his work transcended mere depictions of war's horrors, delving into the deep grief and fear that accompanied it. Murry pointed out that Owen's identity was entirely shaped by the war, leaving no aspect of his personal experience unexamined. He mentioned Owen's claim that his focus was "not on Poetry" but on "the Pity of War," asserting that "the Poetry lies in the pity".

The setting of Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting" plays a crucial role in enhancing the theme of identity, as it influences the interaction between the two soldiers and emphasizes the complexities of their shared humanity. The

poem begins with the protagonist escaping the chaos of battle and entering a tunnel, which symbolizes a transition from the external violence of war to an internal conflict regarding identity and mortality. Within this confined space, the identities shaped by war—enemy and friend—begin to dissolve, allowing for a deeper examination of their true selves. The enemy soldier's lament—"I went hunting wild / After the wildest beauty in the world"—highlights how war erases individuality, turning soldiers into mere expendable victims. As Paul Fussell (1975) suggests, Owen depicts identity as being "dissolved" by the dehumanizing effects of war.

The darkness of the tunnel reflects the obscured and often hidden aspects of identity that emerge during moments of vulnerability and self-reflection.

Reconciliation emerges as a central theme in "Strange Meeting." The poet portrays it not just as a desire for peace but as a profound recognition of our shared humanity. The meeting in the afterlife forges a significant connection between the soldiers, who come to understand their common fate and suffering. This after-death encounter symbolizes the reconciliation that could not happen in life but is achievable in death. It underscores the necessity of looking beyond animosity to appreciate the universal human experience of those impacted by war.

The speaker's initial meeting with the lifeless enemy soldier, occurring in the afterlife, signifies a deep reconciliation and their shared suffering that transcends the brutal realities of the battlefield. Nevertheless, the poem also presents violence as a conscious choice—an action that individuals opt to engage in—rather than an innate characteristic of humanity. The two soldiers central to the poem could have easily been friends under different circumstances, as they share similar hopes and

dreams; in the words of the enemy soldier, "Whatever hope is yours, / Was my life also."

This statement highlights the deep connection between their identities, and suggests that the brutality of war obliterates personal stories and aspirations, reducing them to mere numbers in the machinery of conflict (Sarnowski, 2018).

Owen emphasizes the shared humanity of foes through the poignant address, "my friend." The use of "friend" encourages the reader to reconsider the identities shaped by war, revealing that beneath the surface of conflict lies a shared experience of suffering and loss. By depicting the two soldiers as equals after death, Owen critiques the divisions created by war and hints at the potential for reconciliation.

By stating "I would have poured my spirit without stint / But not through wounds; not on the cess of war," the deceased soldier expresses a longing to cleanse and heal the scars of war with pure, untainted truths. He wishes he could have contributed positively to the world instead of being engulfed by the "cess of war".

The phrase "with piteous recognition in fixed eyes" suggests that despite being adversaries, both soldiers share a common identity rooted in their experiences of pain and loss.

Reconciliation emerges in the enemy's plea: "Let us sleep now". This heartfelt plea for rest signifies not only a need for physical respite but also a yearning to escape the relentless cycle of violence. As observed by Dominic Hibberd (2002), this is Owen's idea of solidarity after death, where "enemies acknowledge their common humanity."

As can be noticed, both poets explore the themes of identity and reconciliation, though they do so from different perspectives. That is, Darwish focuses on the collective identity tied to the homeland, illustrating the profound connection

between land and self. His poem captures the Palestinian quest for identity through a return to their roots. But Owen examines identity through the shared experiences of soldiers, blurring the lines between enemy and ally to highlight their common humanity and suffering.

In Darwish's poem, reconciliation is portrayed as a yearning for peace and a comeback to homeland, suggesting a personal resolution with one's heritage. In Owen's poem, by contrast, reconciliation is reached between adversaries and depicted as a profound recognition of shared humanity in the afterlife. Through these themes, both poets provide a poignant exploration of how conflict shapes identity and the potential for reconciliation, each reflecting their distinct cultural and historical contexts.

## 2. Language

The diction of the two poems plays a pivotal role in conveying their central themes of conflict, loss, and the human experience. Though their stylistic devices differ due to their distinct cultural and historical contexts, both poets employ vivid imagery and deliberate word choice to elicit emotional and intellectual responses.

Darwish's language is lyrical and expressive, rich in symbolism, and reflective of his profound connection to his homeland and its history. His word choices intertwine the personal with the collective, creating a poem that feels both intimate and universal. For Darwish, language is vital in his search for a homeland and a sense of self. It serves as a means to explore identity and as a bridge linking the past with the present. Language becomes a repository of symbols, myths, traditions, and memories, allowing national identity to emerge. He writes to instill a sense of home and identity in Palestinians.

Kais (2012) examines how Darwish's language, imagery, and symbolism articulate the



emotional and psychological dimensions of exile. By situating Darwish's work within a broader literary and cultural context, the analysis underscores the interplay between individual and collective narratives of loss and hope. Given that Palestinians often lack a "linear history and place," language becomes the sole thread connecting the community (Mena 2009, p. 115). Mena adds that, for Darwish, language embodies "home and self – it exists outside of place and time, because with it, Palestinians 'carried the place...they carried the time'". Through his language, which he refers to as "his miracle, his first identity," Darwish provides Palestinians with an identity and a sense of belonging that transcends physical and temporal boundaries (Darwish 2003, p. 93). In the interview with Shehadeh (2002), Darwish highlighted the use of language as a symbol of national unity and triumph. In his own words, "The poet can contribute to the development of a nation in language. He can empower people, make people more human and better able to tolerate life. My poetry is read during times of mourning and celebration. It has also given people joy. Some of my poetry that has been turned into song gives a sense of compensation for losses and defeats."

Shaleen Kumar Singh (2023) also notes that Darwish's language is powerful and evocative, often rich with metaphors and imagery rooted in Palestinian folklore and history (19). She concludes that his poetry emphasizes the significance of language in forming identity and resisting oppression (25). In his poem "Counterpoint" dedicated to Edward Said, he revisits the idea of a home without a physical place, suggesting that one can carry their homeland within: "So carry your home country wherever you go, and be a narcissist if occasion demands" (Darwish 2009, p.88). Through his words, Darwish seeks to forge a homeland to which he can always return, as he feels he has nowhere else:

"We travel like everyone else, but we return to nothing / Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me rest my road against a stone / Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. / Let me see an end to this journey" (Darwish 2003, p.11).

Acknowledging that memories evolve and that history is often dictated by the powerful, his writing stands as a testament to the memories that oppressors wish to erase: "I want a language that I can rely on and that can support me, one that calls on me to bear witness and that I can also call upon to bear witness..." (Darwish, 2013, p.52).

Owen's language is direct and incisive, shaped by his personal encounters with the brutal realities of war. He also weaves in Biblical and mythological references to convey a broader message within the poem. The complex language structure, which includes enjambment, thoughtful word choice, vivid imagery, irony, paradoxes, ambiguities, and a half-slant rhyme scheme, all play a role in conveying the poem's central theme—the tragedy of war. In "Strange Meeting," Owen's choice of words is intentional and impactful. He uses archaic and formal terms like "encumbered," "piteous," and "apologize" to establish a timeless and serious tone throughout the poem. This careful selection of language emphasizes the gravity of the themes being explored. For instance, the line "blood had clogged their chariot-wheels" serves as a metaphor for how the brutality of war obstructs progress and inflicts suffering.

Critics widely acknowledge the poem's powerful anti-war message, conveyed through its stark portrayal of the harsh realities of conflict and its exploration of the shared humanity that exists even among enemies. The poem's language is crucial for delivering this message, as it evokes empathy and compels readers to confront the tragic outcomes of war.



In discussing "Strange Meeting," critic Elliott Gose (1961) notes that "The poem concerns the landscape of the mind; the narrator leaves consciousness for a descent that is profound in all senses of that word...Owen was at once generalizing and keeping the way open for the dual level of physical and mental which he had been at such pains to establish" (p. 417-8).

In the introduction to *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1963), C. Day Lewis wisely commended Owen's work for "the originality and force of their language, the passionate nature of the indignation and pity they express, their blending of harsh realism with a sensuousness unatrophied by the horrors from which they flowered".

Wilfred Owen uses a range of language techniques to create a powerful and thoughtful examination of the harsh truths of war and the profound human connections that persist even amid the turmoil of battle.

## 2.1. Imagery and Symbolism

Both Darwish and Owen use vivid symbolism and imagery to express the emotional and psychological aspects of war. As noted by Abrams and Harpham (2015), poetic devices like metaphor, personification, and allusion play a crucial role in engaging the reader on an emotional level.

### A. Land and Nature

In "To Our Land", Darwish uses imagery of land and nature to represent identity, heritage, and a profound sense of belonging. The land is depicted as a crucial part of one's identity, reflecting the collective memory and cultural roots of the Palestinian people. Through his vivid natural imagery, Darwish creates an emotional connection to the homeland, emphasizing its significance beyond mere physical territory, showcasing both its strength and vulnerability for example, the lines:

"To our land, and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings / Holy as a comb in a widow's hair."

The juxtaposition of fragility, "poor as a grouse's wings," and sanctity, "holy as a comb," encapsulates the delicate yet profound relationship that Palestinians share with their homeland. This imagery suggests that despite external threats to its existence, the land continues to offer spiritual and cultural sustenance. Darwish also uses natural imagery to symbolize resilience and continuity:

"To our land, and it is the one / That bore the prophets and olives."

In this line, the olive tree, a symbol of peace and stability, contrasts sharply with the region's tumultuous history. The mention of prophets adds a layer of reverence, elevating the land to a sacred status that intertwines spiritual and cultural significance. The olive tree, a recurring symbol in Darwish's work, represents endurance and rootedness:

"We have on this earth what makes life worth living: / [...] the fragrance of bread at dawn."

Singh (2023) notes that the imagery found in exile poetry often mirrors the landscape and culture of the poet's homeland, evoking both beauty and haunting emotions (p. 19-20).

"We travel to a country where we see ourselves / In the mirrors of the stranger."

The line uses the metaphor of "mirror" to portray a warped self-image created by displacement, illustrating how occupation estranges Palestinians from their true identity.

Singh further explains that Darwish used language as a tool to express his feelings of loss, displacement, and yearning for his homeland. His use of metaphors, allegories, and symbols was deliberate, and aimed at creating a powerful impact on the reader. Through these elements,

he gives voice to those silenced by exile and oppression (22-23).

"To our land, and it is the one tiny as a sesame seed, a heavenly horizon ... and a hidden chasm."

The description of the land as "tiny as a sesame seed" contrasts sharply with the idea of a "heavenly horizon," highlighting the homeland's complexity—small yet rich in significance. The "hidden chasm" symbolizes the profound, often overlooked effects of conflict and displacement.

Harlow (1987) points out how Darwish employs natural and spiritual imagery to forge a deep emotional bond between the reader and the Palestinian struggle. In Darwish's poetry, the land evolves beyond mere geography; it becomes a powerful emblem of heritage and belonging, marking his work as a crucial part of postcolonial literature. The recurring phrase "To our land" serves as a refrain and a rallying cry, underscoring the homeland's role in shaping identity and memory. He writes:

"To our land, and it is the one / Surrounded with torn hills / The ambush of a new past."

The term "torn hills" vividly illustrates the visible scars of conflict on the landscape. Meanwhile, the phrase "ambush of a new past" highlights a paradox, reflecting the persistent themes of loss and displacement in Palestinian history.

In contrast, Owen's poetic style, characterized by striking imagery and a conversational tone, brings a human element to his subjects and conveys the emotional toll of conflict. He uses dark and hellish imagery to depict the horrors of war and the afterlife, evoking a sense of desolation and despair. His use of paradoxes and somber imagery captures the futility and shared suffering inherent in war. Kendall (2006)

discusses how Owen employs paradox and irony to challenge the romanticized views of war. For instance:

"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."

The contrast between "enemy" and "friend" underscores the shared humanity of soldiers on opposing sides, while the surreal, dreamlike quality captures the bewilderment surrounding death and the afterlife. Edmund Blunden (1958) describes "Strange Meeting" as a dream, rooted in the reality of the tunneled trenches, characterized by muffled sounds and smoky dimness. It depicts rows of recruits struggling to sleep, while officers, sergeants, and corporals try to rouse them for duty (p. 128).

Owen's choice of phrases—"jabbed and killed"—is striking and visceral, reflecting the brutal physical and emotional truths of war.

The soldier's "wild, wild eyes" symbolize shared humanity and the universal trauma of war.

"It seemed that out of battle I escaped Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped Through granites which titanic wars had groined."

Here, Owen illustrates his escape from battle into a "profound dull tunnel." This tunnel, carved through granite by "titanic wars," implies a long history of conflict. The imagery evokes a sense of ancient and monumental violence that has shaped the land itself.

Santanu Das (2006) notes that Owen's use of "tactile imagery" (e.g., "swift minds") to convey the sensory overload of war, collapsing distinctions between victim and perpetrator (p. 163).

The use of land and nature imagery in both poets' works effectively conveys their themes and emotional landscapes: Darwish employs the

imagery of land and nature to symbolize identity, heritage, and a profound emotional bond to his homeland, evoking feelings of nostalgia, loss, and hope; Owen, by contrast, uses dark, hellish imagery to depict the horrors of war and the psychological trauma endured by soldiers, emphasizing desolation, suffering, and the futility of conflict. Through their distinct approaches to land and nature imagery, Darwish and Owen create powerful representations of their themes, highlighting the emotional and psychological impacts of war, as well as the enduring significance of identity and belonging.

### B. Death and Afterlife

Owen's "Strange Meeting" employs haunting imagery to convey the devastating effects of war. The poem begins in a subterranean tunnel, a symbolic **hellscape** of war:

"It seemed that out of battle I escaped / Down some profound dull tunnel."

The "profound dull tunnel" represents both the brutal realities of conflict and the deep psychological wounds left by trauma. The fallen soldier's mournful cry that "the truth untold" was "half the seed of war" highlights the disconnect between those who instigate wars and those who suffer the consequences. By situating the narrative in the afterlife, Owen transcends the immediate violence and reflects on its implications, using symbolism to critique the endless cycle of war.

"Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred /  
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and  
stared / With piteous recognition in fixed eyes /  
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless."

The "encumbered sleepers" symbolize deceased soldiers who are so absorbed in their thoughts or in death that they cannot move. One awakens, his eyes filled with sorrow as he recognizes the speaker, raising his hands in anguish as if to

offer a blessing. This creates a poignant, almost spiritual moment.

"And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, — By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell."

Owen identifies the hall they occupy through the dead man's smile. The "sullen hall" and "dead smile" emphasize the bleak, hellish atmosphere, suggesting they are in an afterlife, possibly a form of purgatory or hell.

In "To Our Land," Darwish does not explicitly refer to death or the afterlife. Instead, the poem focuses on identity, belonging, and a profound connection to one's homeland. However, the feelings of yearning and loss conveyed in the poem can be seen as a metaphorical death of cultural and national identity due to displacement. By steering clear of direct references to death and the afterlife, Darwish maintains a tone of hope and resilience, underscoring the enduring spirit and aspirations for return among the Palestinian people.

The two poems illustrate how symbolism transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, allowing readers to connect with their themes in a universally resonant manner. The depiction of death and the afterlife in these poems underscores the poets' distinct viewpoints on the consequences of war.

While he doesn't explicitly discuss death or the afterlife, Darwish's poem symbolizes a metaphorical death of identity and the cultural impacts of displacement. The focus is on hope, resilience, and the longing to return.

Conversely, Owen's poem offers a bleak and haunting portrayal of the afterlife, using it as a backdrop to explore themes of shared humanity, reconciliation, and the absurdity of war. The dark and hellish imagery highlights the profound psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by conflict. Through these contrasting

perspectives, Darwish and Owen offer deep insights into the ramifications of war, both for the living and in their views on existence beyond death.

## 2.2. Tone and Mood

Both poems express profound emotions shaped by the themes of conflict and displacement. However, their tones differ significantly, highlighting the distinct experiences and purposes of each poet.

### A. Nostalgic and Hopeful vs. Somber and Reflective

Darwish's tone is both nostalgic and hopeful, reflecting on the past with a sense of longing while also conveying optimism for the future. This duality enhances the emotional depth of the poem and expresses the poet's profound connection to his homeland, Palestine, capturing a blend of pride and sorrow for a land marked by conflict. He writes:

"To our land, and it is the one / surrounded with torn hills / the ambush of a new past."

Here, the tone carries a bitter-sweet quality. The "torn hills" symbolize the scars left by occupation and conflict, while the phrase "the ambush of a new past" suggests the unending cycles of history and grief. Yet, the repeated phrase "to our land" throughout the poem reflects a deep commitment and a lasting sense of belonging.

Naomi Nye and Christensen (2008) state that "Darwish, beloved as the beacon-voice of Palestinians scattered around the globe, had an uncanny ability to create unforgettable, richly descriptive poems, songs of homesick longing, which resonate with displaced people everywhere."

The poem's hopeful defiance shines through in such lines as "To our land, and it is the one / That bore the prophets and olives." This tone of

reverence elevates the land to a sacred space, rich in cultural and historical significance, underscoring its importance even in times of turmoil.

"And our land, in its bloodied night, is a jewel that glimmers for the far upon the far and illuminates what's outside it."

The phrase "bloodied night" implies a continuation of violence and conflict. Yet, the land is portrayed as a "jewel that glimmers," representing hope and beauty.

In contrast, Owen's "Strange Meeting" conveys a tone of somber resignation and haunting despair. Written during World War I, the poem depicts a surreal encounter between a soldier and the ghost of an enemy he has killed, exploring the futility and shared suffering of war.

Owen writes:

"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."

The tone here is sorrowful, as the ghost reflects on the senselessness of violence and the collective grief it brings about. The contradictory phrase "my friend" underscores the shared humanity between enemies, highlighting the tragedy of war. The despair tightens in some lines, such as "The pity of war, the pity war distilled."

Owen conveys a tone that is both reflective and accusatory, lamenting the devastation wrought by war and humanity's failure to learn from its past errors. The poem's somber and contemplative tone, paired with its vivid and haunting imagery, draws readers into the emotional and mental suffering experienced by these soldiers. In short, both poets utilize their distinct tones to convey the emotional and psychological impacts of war, albeit from

different perspectives. Darwish's tone fosters a profound connection to the homeland and a sense of resilience, while Owen's presents a stark portrayal of the horrors and futility of conflict.

### B. Empathy and Solidarity

Darwish's "To Our Land" powerfully evokes empathy and a sense of loss and longing felt by the Palestinian people due to displacement and exile. Through vivid and heartfelt imagery and the recurrent reference to "our land" and natural elements such as soil and trees create a deep emotional bond, the poem invites readers to engage with the emotional turmoil of losing a homeland and the pain of separation. Darwish's reflections on personal and collective identity and heritage resonate deeply, fostering a strong sense of solidarity, understanding and compassion among readers.

Owen's "Strange Meeting" cultivates empathy by depicting the shared suffering and psychological trauma endured by soldiers on opposing sides of the conflict. Gose (1961) defines empathy as "learning pity through involvement with suffering." He further states, "This one emotion could keep alive the spark of humanity and hope, which would suffice to bring regeneration to the individual, and to mankind when the slaughter finally ceased" (p. 419). By illustrating the encounter between the speaker and a deceased enemy soldier in the afterlife, Owen humanizes the enemy and encourages readers to empathize with their common struggles.

Darwish's poem promotes a sense of solidarity by highlighting the shared cultural and historical identity of the Palestinian people. His emphasis on the connection to the land and the collective experience of displacement fosters unity and a shared purpose. The poem's hopeful tone, combined with a deep yearning for return and restoration, inspires readers to connect with and

support the Palestinian quest for identity and belonging.

Singh (2023) states that "Through his poetry, Darwish aimed to create a sense of solidarity among the oppressed and to raise awareness about the plight of the Palestinian people. His use of language was not just a medium of expression, but it was also a means of resistance against the forces of oppression and tyranny" (p.21).

Owen's poem emphasizes the common suffering experienced by soldiers on both sides of a conflict. The act of the enemy soldier forgiving the speaker in death and their mutual assurance of being able to rest now suggests that solidarity could be a healing force against the horrors of war. He argues that violence often leads to further violence, creating a seemingly endless cycle. This perspective highlights a rejection of the possibility of solidarity and reconciliation among those in conflict. The poem's final lines poignantly illustrate this betrayal when the enemy soldier reveals that the speaker is the one who has taken his life. The enemy soldier states, "I am the enemy you killed, my friend." This statement is paradoxical, prompting the question of how soldiers can be seen as both enemies and friends. Yet, the enemy soldier's message is clear: their animosity exists solely because their nations are at war. Once that conflict is stripped away, they return to being friends, just as before the fighting started. It implies that friendship, rather than violence and animosity, should be the essential connection among people.

Both Darwish and Owen evoke empathy and solidarity through their distinct styles: Darwish reflects on personal and collective identity and heritage, allowing readers to empathize with the Palestinian experience of loss and yearning. By highlighting shared cultural and historical connections, he cultivates a sense of solidarity



among those who resonate with his experiences. Owen, on the other hand, depicts the shared suffering and psychological trauma of soldiers, humanizing the enemy and emphasizing the futility of conflict. By acknowledging our shared humanity and the necessity for reconciliation, he urges readers to transcend divisions. Through their powerful and evocative language, both poets effectively immerse readers in the emotional landscapes of their experiences, fostering a profound sense of empathy and solidarity.

The mood in "Strange Meeting" is haunting and melancholic, triggering feelings of empathy for the soldiers' suffering and the futility of war. The dark, hellish imagery and the depiction of the afterlife create a chilling and oppressive atmosphere. This mood underscores the tragic consequences of conflict, evoking compassion for the soldiers trapped in a relentless cycle of violence and death.

Somber phrases like "encumbered sleepers" and "undone years" reflect the heavy toll of war on soldiers' lives.

Melancholic descriptions of the afterlife setting, such as "blood and wrath" and "chill gloom," create a sense of desolation and despair.

In "To Our Land," the mood is reflective and poignant, stirring a deep emotional response from the reader. The imagery and language express profound sadness for what has been lost, while also hinting at a lingering hope for the future. Overall, the mood conveys strength and determination, emphasizing the emotional and cultural significance of the homeland.

## 2.3. Structure and Form

### Free Verse vs. Structured Form

"To Our Land" is crafted in free verse, a hallmark of Darwish's poetic style. This form allows for a fluid and expressive conveyance of

emotion, unbound by the constraints of traditional meter. The lack of a fixed rhyme scheme or meter mirrors the chaotic and unrestricted nature of the Palestinian experience. Through free verse, Darwish aligns his poetic structure with his themes, conveying a sense of freedom, resistance, and a profound connection to a homeland that goes beyond conventional boundaries.

Although free verse does not adhere to a metrical pattern, Darwish creates a rhythm by using repeated phrases like "To our land." This repetition acts as an anchor, giving the poem a musical quality. The work beautifully captures the rhythm of spoken Arabic, blending lyrical elements with prose, which enhances its relatability and emotional resonance.

In contrast, "Strange Meeting" employs a structured form, featuring consistent rhyme and meter. The poem is composed of four stanzas of varying lengths, with the longest being the third, which contains the dead soldier's monologue. This speech serves as the poem's thematic heart, delivering its most poignant critiques of war, making its length particularly fitting. Visually, the final stanza, which reveals the poem's crucial twist, is notably shorter than the preceding one. This suggests that the revelation of the speaker having killed the soldier is almost an afterthought compared to the soldier's speech. The "truth" about the dead soldier's identity is overshadowed by the "truth" of the war's horrors. The brevity of the final stanza underscores how little the cause one fights for truly matters in the context of war. Ultimately, everyone endures losses.

The poem showcases a strong use of end-stopping, which makes instances of enjambment feel like interruptions that disrupt the overall flow. This technique also creates a sense of deliberate pacing. Critics like Edmund Bluson and John Middleton Murry highlight that the use

of assonant endings or pararhyme “a slant or partial rhyme with words having similar consonants before and after adds to the melancholic and subterranean tone of the poem” (Persoon & Watson, 2013).

Most lines function independently, fostering a sense of control and intention. Instead of rushing through with overlapping lines, the poem unfolds slowly and methodically, providing a striking contrast to the violent themes it explores.

The poem's heavy reliance on end-stopping illustrates its struggle with its own structure. To understand this, it's important to note that “Strange Meeting” is written in heroic couplets, a form defined by rhyming lines of iambic pentameter. Typically, poems in this format display a consistent pattern of enjambment and end-stopping: the first line of each couplet is usually enjambed, while the second line is end-stopped. This creates a sense of incompleteness in the first rhyme, while the second rhyme brings a sentence or grammatical unit to a close.

However, in “Strange Meeting,” this pattern is often subverted. Each line frequently stands as its sentence, as seen in lines 11-12:

“With a thousand fears that vision’s face was  
grained; / Yet no blood reached there from the  
upper ground.”

While the lines show a certain rhyme (specifically, they are pararhymes), they act as distinct, separate units: complete sentences that end with a full stop. Rather than linking two ideas as a typical rhyme, this structure emphasizes the division between the two lines: even though he has escaped the battle, the enemy soldier’s face remains “grained,” suggesting he has not healed. The strong sense of separation created by the end-stopped lines reinforces the poem’s message: that violence isolates and divides individuals who could

otherwise be friends. The poem’s imperfect rhymes seem to play with the form, almost illustrating what heroic couplets might sound like after enduring the chaos of a real battle.

Darwish employs free verse to create a fluid and expressive style, enhancing the personal and lyrical qualities of his poetry. This adaptable structure allows for a deep and emotional exploration of themes, symbolizing the fragmentation and disruption that come with displacement. Conversely, Owen uses a structured form with consistent rhyme and meter, establishing a sense of order and rhythm. His use of pararhyme adds to a haunting and unsettling atmosphere, reinforcing themes of war, death, and reconciliation. Through their distinct structures and forms, both poets effectively convey their themes and emotions, using the specific characteristics of their styles to amplify the impact of their work.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Reader Response**

Bishop (1990) views poetry as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,” indicating that poetry can reflect the reader’s own experiences, offer insights into the lives of others, or transport them to new perspectives. The works of Darwish and Owen fulfill these roles by providing profound insights into suffering and resilience. Winter (2010) examines how poetry can promote empathy and global awareness, especially in educational settings. The universal themes in the two poems under scrutiny make these poems valuable for discussing issues like war, identity, and reconciliation. They encourage readers to reflect on the shared humanity that binds us, despite our cultural and historical differences.

### **Conclusion**

The comparative analysis of the two poems under scrutiny highlights the distinct contributions made by Mahmoud Darwish and

Wilfred Owen to the discourse on war and identity. Despite their different cultural and historical contexts, both poets offer profound reflections on the emotional and psychological impacts of conflict. Their diverse styles and perspectives shed light on the themes of war, identity, and reconciliation, enriching our understanding of the human experience through poetry.

Darwish's "To Our Land" conveys a deep sense of loss and longing for the Palestinian homeland while celebrating its enduring strength, tying the search for identity to the sacredness of the homeland. As noted by Singh (2023), Darwish's poetry captures the struggles and hardships faced by the Palestinian people. His evocative words urge us to confront injustices and inequalities rampant in our world. The legacy of Darwish lives on through his poetry, which continues to inspire and educate audiences worldwide. His work liberates readers from the confines of personal experience, enabling them to engage with "visions of universal truths in the depths of the mind" (Yeats 1901, p.1). While Darwish "did as much as anyone to forge a Palestinian national consciousness," his poetry and prose primarily speak to humanity, "highlighting universal human values through the mirror of the Palestinian experience" (Sazzad 2015, p.194).

In contrast, Owen's "Strange Meeting" explores the futility of war through a poignant dialogue that emphasizes the shared suffering of enemies, advocating for reconciliation and an end to violence. The poem captures the horror and compassion of war without relying on the historical backdrop of World War I or Owen's personal experiences and intentions. According to Wimsatt (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1949), "Strange Meeting," with its complex syntactic structure, interwoven meanings, tensions, complexities, and irony, offers "the most precise emotive report on custom." The poem stands out

as a crucial piece in our understanding of twentieth-century culture, highlighting the despair, fear, and grief that come along with human conflict. By delving into these perspectives, readers can gain a deeper appreciation for the complex and multifaceted nature of war.

Both poets emphasize the emotional and psychological impact of conflict, underlining the need for empathy, unity, and healing. Their works serve as powerful reminders of the human cost of war and the enduring significance of identity and belonging in the face of displacement and trauma. Collectively, these poems illuminate the shared human suffering caused by conflict, transcending cultural and historical boundaries. They remind us of poetry's potential to bear witness to painful experiences and to envision a more compassionate and peaceful future.

Darwish and Owen both employ symbolism to go beyond mere descriptions of conflict. Darwish's imagery of land and mirrors emphasizes identity in the face of erasure, while Owen's depictions of hellish landscapes and paradoxes reveal the dehumanizing absurdity of war. The contrasting symbols they use – life-affirming versus death – mirror their historical contexts: Darwish's fight against colonial displacement and Owen's disillusionment with industrialized warfare.

The significance of such insights lies in their potential to enhance our understanding of how poets from different backgrounds and times tackle similar themes. Through their evocative and heartfelt language, Darwish and Owen prompt us to reflect on the universal human experience of war and the ongoing quest for identity and peace.

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