

# The Ideological Manifestations in War Poetry: A Critical Stylistic Perspective

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**Abstract**—Ideologies can be traced back and extracted through formal aspect of language where the authors' choices reflect the world view they construct in order to influence their receptors. This study aims at extracting ideologies of war in war poetry relying upon the model of critical stylistics proposed by Leslie Jeffries (2010). The model presents ten textual-conceptual tools of analysis; one of which, '*negating*', has been adopted as a tool of analysis in this paper to extract the hidden ideologies. The study came to the conclusion that the textual conceptual tool of analysis, *negating*, as a formal textual aspect guides into manifesting the hidden ideologies of the text producer about war and this is achieved through creating a virtual positive world in receptor's mind to be juxtaposed with the actual negated world in order to build expectations.

**Index Terms**—ideology, negation, critical stylistics, war poetry, soldier poets

## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern war poetry has not received enough attention by critical studies and thus there are few studies have been undertaken in this respect; the major attention of critics had been targeted to poetry during the First World War. This work concerns itself with war poetry of the modern wars i.e. post-world war II, such as those took place in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The data consists of a number of randomly selected poems written by soldier poets, expressing their attitudes towards war. Their words and lines reflect a more reliable portrayal of the battlefield than those poets who rely on their imagination with no direct war experience. The study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent can formal aspects of language reflect text ideologies?
2. How can *negating* as a textual conceptual tool help in extracting hidden ideologies?
3. What are the linguistic clues to negation which lead into ideological manifestations?
4. What are the ideologies extracted from the data by means of the textual conceptual analytical tool *negating*?

It is hypothesized that the tool of analysis, *negating*, with its variety of linguistic forms guides the text reader into comprehending the hidden ideologies of war implanted by the text producer.

## II. IDEOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

The birth of ideology started with the objective of mental engineering that will enlighten mind and society altogether and thereby, liberating human from mystifications and social taboos. The science of ideology inception with the age of reason, having the faith that revolution against false gods springs from inner consciousness. Louis Althusser observes that ideologies never reflect upon themselves. That's to say they never explicitly state that they are ideological; rather they are hidden beyond the text and affect minds implicitly. There is a pleasant analogy proposed by Eagleton where the concept of ideology is assembled to a screen or blockage which isolates us from the world. The focus is on the reality and appearance distinction where there is a reality out there which is represented in a distorting, obscuring way (to ourselves and others) (Eagleton, 1994).

For Louis Althusser, the Marxist philosopher, ideology opposes science and this is ironic since the concept was introduced as a novel science. Other thinkers such as Marx and Engels of The German Ideology perceive ideology to be: ideas free from their material basis. This is also ironic since it was part of social materialist issue. Moreover, ideology is seen as an inversion of the relationship between reality and consciousness; the latter, to Marx, is associated with social practice; whereas for Hegel, ideas are seen to be autonomous of such practices, as well as being the reason behind social existence. Therefore, Marx suggests that the change in people's minds leads to the change in their life conditions, and the only way human consciousness can be altered is through the change in the material conditions creating that consciousness.

Rejecting idealism and rationalism, The German Ideology holds a rather practical view of ideology through altering man's awareness of oppression by means of creating illusions and mystifications. Ideas, then, are linked with real life;

however, this link takes the illusive form of non-relation. Therefore, to count an idea ideological is to say that it achieves a specific sort of deceptive function in social life rather than just calling that idea deceptive or false (ibid).

In its modern sense, ideology gained senses much more than just certain sociology of ideas to refers to the way ideas are associated with real material condition by means of disguising them, or replacing them with other terms, resolving their struggles, changing them into something natural, inevitable, and universal. Thus ideas gain political force instead of being as solely reflections of their world. Later Marxists elaborated that ideas are weapons in the battle field. When an ideological discourse is said to be comprehended it means that it might be decoded in particular ways, nevertheless, deceive the reality by its silence, gaps, and internal contradictions. Ideology, through this view, is a form of thought with the ability of adaptation according to the power imposition. It can also disguise the conflicts from which it is originated from and this is done either by denial of their existence or by lessening the conflicts' significance (ibid).

As is issued by Eagleton (1994), in order to operate successfully, ideology needs to work both theoretically and practically with the objective of linking these two levels. It needs to work on systems of thought and on everyday life practices alike. It needs to extend from scholarly treaties to a normal shout in the street. Explorations in ideology require the examining a set of complex linkages that mediate among the most and least articulate levels. A good instance in this respect would be the religion. Religions consist of a hierarchy of discourses; some are theoretical, some are prescriptive and ethical, and others are practical such as preaching. The church, as an institution certifies that all the levels of such discourses are in harmony with one another. This creates a smooth continuum extending from theoretical into practical or behavioral levels.

Ideology is one of the most elusive concepts within the field of social sciences which has not been rested upon an adequate definition so far. This is due to the nature of ideology with all the numerous compatible significations that it carries (Cassels, 1996). Originally, ideology meant the scientific study of man's ideas; later it came to refer to the systems of ideas themselves (Eagleton, 1991) and literally refers to "the study or knowledge of ideas" (ibid, p. 1); this view on ideology reflects the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment where there was a tendency to chart human mind through which body motions can be mapped. During that era, i.e. 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, Ideology focused upon ideas as social phenomena aiming at exposing the system rules of a particular social thought rather than solely mapping certain abstract ideas like consciousness. Therefore, it extends between nowadays' psychology and sociology of knowledge (ibid.).

Theodor Adorno perceives ideology to be essentially a sort of identity thinking, which removes otherness and differences at the mental level; whereas Martin Seliger, an American sociologist, regards ideology as a group of beliefs which are action-oriented with quite irrelevant truth or falsehood. Other thinkers such as Jirgen Habermas, Nicos Poulantzas and Alvin Gouldner, observe ideology to be totally modern, semi-scientific, secular phenomenon. Their perception of ideology emerged in opposition with the early mythical, metaphysical view on ideology. By contrast, Karl Mennheim observes ideology to be essentially old forms of thoughts which does not follow the demands of the modern age (Eagleton, 1994).

Ideology as proposed by (van Dijk, 2013, p. 175) can be defined as "basic shared systems of social cognitions of groups" which have control over the community's attitudes towards particular topics such as abortion, immigration, divorce, etc. and it also has control over the mental modes of the members of community. The conception of 'self' and 'otherness' are the polarized ideological representations, along with their categories 'reference groups, goals, actions, identity, etc.' dominate all strata of ideological discourse, namely topics, meanings, interactions, lexicon, etc. It is crucial to stress that ideologies are acquired, publicized, and reproduced through text and talk.

Controversial opinions about ideology yield the following views:

- I. It should be noted that ideology cannot be synonymous with 'culture'. Not every natural issue is ideological; being born, eating, communicating with one another, laughing, dying, etc. are all natural to human beings which suggest various cultural forms. Rather, ideology denotes the state in which cultural practices and political power are interwoven.
- II. With regard to the issue of what is counted as ideological, there is no value or belief that is free from ideology in the appropriate conditions. It relies upon 'who' is saying 'what' to 'whom' and what are the 'intentions' and the resulting 'effects'. Ideology, therefore, is related to discourse rather than language only (Eagleton, 1994).
- III. In a rather less general meaning, ideology is perceived as a set of ideas and beliefs symbolizing the state of a particular socially significant class. The truth or falsity of these ideas is disregarded. In this sense, ideology is close to the idea of world-view, with the latter being more concerned with basic matters such as peace in the universe, the sense of death, etc.

This sense views ideology as a type of collective symbolic self-expression not seen associated with conflict or relations. Promoting or legitimating the desires of certain social classes in favor of the counter desires. This definition parallels the definition of ideology as an action-oriented discourse with non-rational desires and interests are superior to cognition and thought.

- IV. The dominant ideologies participate in unifying society in ways pleasant to those in power through which ideas not only are imposed, but also guaranteed to be accepted by the dominated groups as well.
- V. Ideology refers to ideas and beliefs which aim at legitimating the interests of the dominant group by means of dissimulation and distortion. The opinions (IV) and (V) signify that not the totality of the ideas of the dominant

group needs to be articulated to be ideological. Ideologies might not undergo promotions to be explicitly perceived. The opinion (V) holds that so far there is no formal name has yet been assigned for the politically oppositional discourse which seeks to legitimate the ideas of the dominated groups.

- VI. The last opinion issues upon the definition which counts ideology as: false, deceptive beliefs arising from the material structure of the society as a whole rather than from the interests of the ruling class. This opinion extends the territory of the signification of ideology to cover the totality of the society base, in an attempt to bring about a more comprehensive portrayal of the concept.

Other scholarly opinions are provided by Tabbert (2015) who points to Wodak & Meyer, M. (2009) as they define ideology in a sense of relativism to be shared collectively: “coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values”. Hall (1996) adopts a rather cognitive perspective to perceive ideology as:

... the mental frameworks - the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works (p. 26).

From a critical angle, Jeffries (2010, p. 5) views ideologies to be “significations/constructions of reality [...] which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices”. This idea draws upon the concept of hegemony which views ideology to be at service of power (Fairclough 1995). As is proposed by Fowler (1991) language is a highly constructive mediator and it is not neutral, and this understanding about language leads us to the idea that no single text is free from ideology since it is, as Jeffries and Walker (2012) hold, part of the text and via textual analysis can be identified. Adopting rather social terms, van Dijk (1998) perceives ideology to be constructed, adopted, and adapted by social actors as members of a group in a particular (discursive) social practice. Hence, it operates at two levels:

1. macro-level (i.e. social groups, group relations, institutions)
2. micro-level (i.e. social practices)
3. van Dijk calls for an integration of social and cognitive approach to ideology i.e. collective and individual social actors, rejecting the materialist sense that solely springs from socio-economic context.
4. Likewise, definitions for ideology can be seen to be ranging from Habermas’s ‘systematically distorted communication’ to post-structuralism’s ‘semiotic closure’; from Paul de Man’s ‘confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality’; to Pierre Macherey’s ideology as a discourse marked by crucial elisions and absences. Ideology is seen as a genetic matter by Lukacs as well as Lucien Goldmann, whose truth can be positioned in the historical situation or class from which it is originated from; others perceive the concept from a functional perspective with the question of the impacts that particular utterances have. A quick view on the history of the concept of ideology can map opposite perceptions from different thinkers. The early Marx and Engels regard it as ‘seeing reality as it is’; whereas Lukacs counts it as ‘consciousness of totality’ and while Althusser perceives it as science, Adorno sees it as ‘a recognition of difference’. Eagleton issues that the concept can refer to thoughts that are socially conditioned or socially interested; on the other hand, it might refer to false ideas legitimizing an unjust political power. The former view is too vague while the latter is too narrow.

This work investigates the ideology of war as a source of negative or probably positive representations. Ideology is perceived as a body of ideas representing a specific social group or class, in this context the group of poet soldiers.

### III. THE GENRE OF WAR POETRY

War poetry (1914-1918), as a subgenre of war culture, is regarded to be highly popular with large audience compared to any other subject. English literature courses as well as history and social studies in schools and higher education are influenced by war poetry. It aims at conveying the truth about war with the predominant pacific attitude. Wilfred Owen, one of the pioneer figures of war poetry, set forth the poet’s obligation to warn the coming generations of the war’s devastating consequences. Siegfried Sassoon, another prominent figure, rebelled against the administration of war. The significance of war poetry lies not only in its being a crucial means of spreading poetry, but also showing where war poetry is situated within a wider culture of war. It occupies a position within a range of competing forms, some of which stand against the anti-war aim of the poetry. As Sassoon and Owen gained more popularity in the 1960s, the political view in education changed too. Later, after the Falklands War (1982) the political context for war poetry\_ reading and interpreting\_ has shifted as well. The influence and significance of the war poetry lies in its subject matter as well as its documentary importance rather than its relation with literary culture (Featherstone, 1995).

Various poets, with no direct experience, wrote about wars. They were known as soldier-poets who were the first to depict the effect of war not only on physic, but also on psyche. During the ancient period, in the Middle Ages, war poetry used to depict mythological fighters to portray pictures of bravery and heroism. It aimed at taking part in supporting civilizations by means of depicting a stereotype of warriors willing to sacrifice everything for their country. By the change of warfare over time, those ancient heroic poems lost their effect. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the technological progress and the invention of gunpowder, the war conduct had shifted dramatically. The shift in the nature of war caused a prominent change in the poetic products. The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed even more advancement of technology of warfare.

During the First World War, along with every able-bodied man in the country, soldier-poets were also expected to join the army. There are a number of prominent English figures taking part in that war and depicting real pictures of war: Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Edward Thomas, Isaac Rosenberg, Ivor Gurney, David Jones, and Rupert Brooke. The majority of them couldn't survive the war. Their works are counted as a reminder of the real face of warfare for those who are fighters. The horrific experiences those soldier-poets had during the First World War had been something far behind the political dominance of war directors; rather they were forms of everyday events they found to reflect into their poetic works. The significance of their works lied in the power of their voice to the public discourse to educate the public about warfare. They depicted what was experienced by all soldiers (Reisman, 2012).

### War Poetry: A Critical View

The internal struggle of war poetry usually goes unobserved. In the formation of poems one can realize the binary opposites it carries: destruction versus formation, chaos versus order, pain versus pleasure, and mostly life versus death. Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) supposed that war poetry is positive in a manner that praising suicide in a poem would be taken in the honor and dignity of life. War poem, therefore, would be in struggle against itself; no matter how negative its lines could be, it brightens a dark subject-matter.

John Lyon as a critic perceives war poetry and the conflict which it exhibits to be fatal, disagreeing with creating a poem that makes formal sense out of the violence and destruction of war and thereby distorting the truth. To him the truth is the weapon that the war-poets hold in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bevis, 2007). Others such as Edward Thomas (Thomas, 1981) suggests that the class of war poetry vanishes so rapidly than any other class of poetry and all the surviving works that, as he claims, had been accomplished under the domain of the public patriotic urge would fill no more than a thin volume. The only achievement war poets do is to convert death, violence, destruction, etc. into aesthetic pleasant art. With this essay, Thomas achieved a crucial contribution in this respect which is tearing apart the equation between 'public patriotic motives' and war poetry. This idea led into generating more significant war poets than any other wars before. By this, Thomas challenged the traditional war poets who dedicated their works to what the public desires to hear or read. Thus, only the powerful poets are able to resist the public opinion of the twentieth century. This idea was advocated by Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) who holds that approaching war requires a more abstract, a colder way, with more individual feelings and less million feelings shared by everyone. W.H. Auden (1907-1973) shares a similar idea proposing that the serious poetry is always at odds with the majority's conscious ideas.

The truth conveyed by poet warriors which encompassed futility and false triumph feelings (in Owen's terms), arouse the feelings of horror. Soldier-poets seem not to regret the horrific experiences they had as they alter death, violence, and brutality into art. War poetry makes poetry happen, when poetry makes nothing happen (Noakes, 2006).

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The data in this study comprises of a number of randomly selected modern war poems written by poet soldiers whose works are gathered by John Jeffcock (2011) in his book *Heroes: 100 Poems from the New Generation of War Poets*. The pieces of work are written as direct involvements experienced by soldier poets during the contemporary wars i.e. Gulf War (1991), Iraq war (2003), and Afghanistan (2001).

Within the frame of critical stylistics, Leslie Jeffries (2010) put forth a model of analysis in an attempt to fill the gaps noted in critical discourse models of analyses. Jeffries (2010) is concerned with setting a range of tools helping in showing the way texts tend to persuade readers to adapt their ideological perspectives to match that of the text producer's. Therefore, the model aims at:

- i. Providing not only a comprehensive set of tools but also reasons behind them being a set.
- ii. Guiding the advanced English language student towards the study of power in written and spoken texts.
- iii. Explaining the cognitive processes that lead into impacting the readers by means of the ideological structure of text.

Jeffries's model (ibid) perceives stylistics to be focusing on the choices made by the text producers. The text producers are bound to the pressure of making the exact choices suitable for expressing their intention. Those choices, whether consciously or not, are always ideologically loaded.

The aim of this approach, other than reconciling the best of critical linguistics and stylistics together, is to investigate under the surface of language to extract the stylistic choices that form the meaning of text. The function of tools is to tell 'what the text is doing'. Therefore, Jeffries (ibid) argues that the tools provide answer(s) to this question in present participle:

1. Naming and Describing
2. Representing Actions/Events/States
3. Exemplifying and Enumerating
4. Prioritizing
5. Negating
6. Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of Others
7. Equating and Contrasting
8. Implying and Assuming
9. Hypothesizing

## 10. Representing Time, Space and Society

## V. THE TEXTUAL-CONCEPTUAL TOOL 'NEGATION'

The ideological implication of negation is to create a virtual non-existing world to be juxtaposed with reality. This would enable the text producer to have receptors imagine an absent world to be real virtually by relating it to reality. Constructing this hypothetical world in the receptors' mind would lead them into interpreting this virtual world which in fact contradicts the opposite image they store already. In other words, negation in the text would create an opposite image in receptors' minds.

The negative mental image proposition has the effect of creating expectations about the world, be it real or virtual, with the reader having the free will to accept or refuse the proposed expectations (Jeffries, 2014).

Juxtaposing a pair of negative and positive mental images brought to the receptor leads the receptor into a better understanding of the options available to interpret the situation. Ideologically, the text producer can lead the receptor into imagining a positive version of the negative text.

As a typically grammatical phenomenon, negation can be represented in a number of ways as found in Jeffries (2010):

1. The addition of negative particle "not" to the first element of the verb phrase as in: will not, do not, is not, were not, etc.
2. pronouns such as *nobody*, *no one*, *nothing*, *nowhere*, etc.
3. nouns signifying absence or lack such as *absence*, *lack*, *scarcity*, *dearth*; adjectives such as *absent*, *scarce*; verbs such as *lack*, *fail*, *refuse*, *omit*, etc.
4. morphological affixation as in *incomplete*, *uncomfortable*, *humorless*, *carefree*, *abnormal*, *asocial*, *anti-depressant*, etc. for more details see also (Al-Timimi, 2018; Coffey, 2013).

The negation textual clues, thus, can be classified into syntactic, lexical, and morphological. The following extracts are cited from Jeffcock (2011). Documenting poems is according to the page number (p.), either stanza number (S.) or line number (L.).

**Instances for syntactic negating**

1. *Sleep will **not** come no matter how hard you try **not** to recall* (ibid; p. 28; S. 1)
2. *Ashen face and pallid, if I **don't** act fast he will bleed out* (ibid; p. 31; L.17)
3. *I'm just glad I can go home to my bed*

***Not** like of my mates who ended up dead* (P. 43; L.16)

The above listed instances of negation draw in receptor's mind a negative version of a positive virtual reality and thus a conceptualization of the positive version of meaning intended is summoned up. The ideological implications of negation lie in its power to draw in reader's mind expectations of what a real world should be. In (1) there is a portrayal of the hard times soldiers have during war where the violent war episodes causing sleeplessness and this can have critical consequences later on. Syntactically the poet added the negative particle 'not' to the verbs 'will' and 'try' while ideologically the text producer created a virtual positive world in which the receptors expect that soldiers can sleep and can forget about the past events. This positive fictional world leads the reader into concluding that soldiers actually suffer from difficult psychological pressure because of war. Therefore, war is counted as a source of distress and psychological stress.

In (2) the poet provides a negative situation in which a medic is not acting fast enough and this would lead into losing the casualty. This would create in receptor's mind expectations of a medic who have to act as fast as possible in order save lives and this can be considered as a source of stress and anxiety. The ideological implications can be similar to that of (1) in which war is seen as a source of stress and anxiety.

In (3) death and life are brought into the expectations of readers. The negative situation is that the soldier's mates are dead and cannot go back home. The positive juxtaposed situation is an episode in which soldiers are alive returning home. The latter's virtual mental image is expected in reader's mind which is not found in real world. War is portrayed as a source of death and loss where youth and life are stolen.

**Instances for lexical negating**

1. *The CO tells us we have **lost** another of the men*  
***Killed** in action by a bomb* (p. 46; L. 2-3)
2. *Is it worth it, this human cost, young blood split and innocence **lost**?* (p. 56; L. 27)
3. *The medic is trying his best*  
*To **stop** the fast-flowing blood* (P. 84; S. 5)

The instances extracted reflect a negative image which creates positive juxtaposition of a fictional world where opposite situation is the case. Negation is represented through words carrying negative meaning such as *lost*, *Killed*, *stop*. These words which appear in forms of verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs aid the text producer in creating a virtual positive world in the receptor's mind in order to grow expectations of what real world should or shouldn't be. In (1) the verb *lost* signifying the absence of something already existed and in this context it signifies the death of a soldier in war. The negative situation brings in mind a positive virtual situation where young soldiers are alive and the latter mental image raises expectations of having youth alive; not killed in the battlefields. This leads into perceiving war as a source of death and loss and this idea is repeated in (2). In (3) there is a portrayal of a situation in which a medic soldier

is trying to keep a casualty alive. The negative verb *stop* creates a positive mental image of a fast-flowing blood which definitely would lead to death. This negative-positive juxtaposition invites the receptor into expecting a supposed world where no bleeding and death is taking place. Ideologically war is portrayed negatively as a source of death.

#### Instances for morphological negating

1. Agreeing to *disagree*, we depart (P. 53; S.4)
2. A constant air of toxic fear, the *unseen* threat ever near, (P. 55; L. 4)
3. and I brush him aside like an empty suit hanging *lifeless* in the air. (P. 72; L.25)

This type of negation relies upon morphological affixation. This can be achieved through the addition of negative prefixes and suffixes to the base. The creation of fictional world in this type is not different from that of the previous formal triggers of negation. Through the addition of negative prefix or suffix the text producer presents the reader with a negative situation and thereby the receptor constructs a positive fictional world opposite to that presented originally. In (1) the prefix *dis* in *disagree* is the source of negation. The situation is about the war profiteers who run the war to achieve personal benefits. The disagreement among the war profiteers means the continuation of war and destruction. In (4) the text producer through negation presupposes that there is a close threat, be it seen or unseen, embracing soldiers and keeping them in fear and distress. Ideologically, this implies that war is a source of horror, distress, and threat.

Instance (6) exemplifies negation through the addition of suffix *less* meaning 'without'. In (6) the degeneration of humanity and human cost has been portrayed through the choice of the negated element *lifeless empty suit* as a description attributed to a dead soldier. This view is reflected from a soldier killing his foe. The juxtaposed virtual positive world constructed unconsciously by the receptors would grow expectations of the way real world ought to be or not and this consequently reflects ideological implications about war as a source of human degeneration, loss, death, destruction, and oppression.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, negation as a textual conceptual tool of analysis relies upon a number of textual triggers in order to extract the hidden ideologies underneath the text. The manifestation of negation can be classified into syntactic, lexical, and morphological.

Through negation the text producer guides the reader to create a juxtaposition of two opposite worlds: one is real and negative; the other is unreal and positive. This juxtaposition helps in growing expectations of what a real world should (not) be.

Through the instances selected, a number of ideologies of war have been stressed upon namely: Human devaluation as well as futility of war; war as a source of loss, death, and destruction. These ideologies are brought to the surface depending on the formal aspects of language as well as the context.

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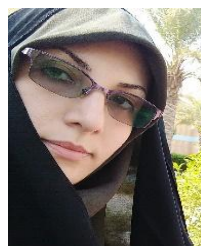
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