

The Genre of Documentary Poetry in Some Selected Samples of Contemporary Poetry: A Critical Approach

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Abstract—one of the literary innovations is the new genre of documentary poetry or docupoetry. Documentary poetry has no unified definition, but one defining line is that it combines artistic talent along with factual material from the real world or the documents of real witnesses. It is a method of writing that mixes texts for make ethnographic research. However, documentary refers to the poetry of witness through which verses make existing documentation created from manifold viewpoints, witnesses' interpretations, and dialogues. It is a case study of people, events, and places; the poet can test a social and human case, through his artistic talent of writing. However, a poet is expected to transfer not only the witnesses' perspectives but his own as well. These tendencies are colorized in an attempt to portray a new version of the truth. It is an attempt to raise the voice of the marginalized or the oppressed or the often neglected against the voice of their suppressors; it portrays a rather distinct version of the national story or identity. In conclusion, it highlights the meaning of documentary poetry, its development, and its characteristics. It also attempts to give a brief critical analysis of some selected poems by some selected prominent documentary poets.

Index Terms—documentary poetry, documentation, lost voices, national identity

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern age is characterized by being productive in different fields among which are the literary movements and literary genres. Much in the same way, the literary genre of poetry is, in itself, abundant with different sub-genres that arise according to different phases with their different motivations that are reflected in the poets' literary creations of this or that phase. One of the modern sub-genres of poetry is documentary poetry or docupoetry. At the onset, documentary poetry is a kind of poetry that includes basic material such as political, terrorism, and poetry-related events. This gives an idea about the main goal behind docupoetry, which is to relate human voices or human experiences through the medium of poetry. However, these human experiences are not merely expressed through the poet's perspective or his emotional status. It is rather conveyed through real documented voices or experiences within a poetic frame.

Consequently, a recent poem such as "Someone Blew up America" by Amiri Baraka is counted as an example of documentary poetry where the poet records the event of September 11 through the real voices of the victims, which are somehow different from the event version as tackled in the mass media. Documenting an event is not similar to "having it mechanically recorded and unilaterally reflected in human consciousness, even the simplest documentary is the result of several people who recorded it" (Taihei & Baskett, 2010, p. 52). This idea means, in consequence, that every documentary work is in itself a reflection of the individuals who documented it. This refers to the fact that the idea of the documentary "presupposes an independent, subjective existence" (Taihei & Baskett, 2010, p. 52). Hence, the subjective existence of those who document a piece of work always inhabits the work to express their genuine experiences through their genuine voices. As a sub-genre or new line of poetry, documentary poetry has as is the case with any movement witnessed different phases that mark its beginning, characteristics, and development. The following sections shed some light on these different stages while analyzing some selected samples of such a contemporary sub-genre of poetry.

II. DOCUMENTARY POETRY: A BRIEF HISTORY

Every human movement whether in the field of art or science or politics is necessitated by the demands of the era in which it appeared. Human beings have diverse needs and feelings that may not be made apparent for one or another reason. Those in power may suppress those who are marginalized and consequently the voice of those marginalized either is suppressed or vanish. However, from one generation to another, people had different ways to record their own stories, which can be transmitted to others thus revealing one lost dimension of the truth. This could be achieved through the idea of spoken storytelling that remained to the explanation when writing and knowledge developed to be available to the rich, educated people (Milligan, 2019, p. 39). One example of the blurred version of truth can be traced to the early settlements in European colonies where the colonizers in the Americas, for example, wrote their own stories,

which were different from that of the colonized.

This is because the winner produces past events and the fact in this expression is that the Colonizer's interpretations are reflected as reality while the Colonized got their past accounts terminated or deleted (Milligan, 2019, p. 39). Nowadays, many voices can also be lost behind the truth version presented by mass media for example. Nevertheless, through the creative genre of documentary poetry, poets can preserve the voices of those who are marginalized or suppressed as documentary poetry is getting more common among modern poets (Milligan, p. 39).

Therefore, what necessitated the emergence of documentary poetry is the need to preserve the lost voices; to present their true version to others. By combining documentary voices with the poets' talents in writing, poets create a place to question, and correct misrepresentation, and efforts to provide a voice back to the societies whose past has been overlooked (Milligan, 2019, p. 39). In doing so, poets are calling on readers to re-examine what is declared about history or truth so that they may interact with the hidden version of that history or truth. Documentary poetry is thus a chance according to Philip Metres as cited in Milligan (2015) to intensify the voices of individuals and actions that mass media has inclined to overlook or misrepresent (p. 42).

However, in modern times, the early traces of formal documentary poetry can be traced to the mid-90s poetry journal CHAIN which according to Magi (2015) wrote documentary poetry. Simultaneously, a course called "Documentary and Poetry" was taught at Buffalo University alongside the peer-reviewed discussions of literary studies journals of the late 90s (p. 248).

Concurrently, there were many discussions on the works of Muriel Rukeyser classifying her contribution as clear evidence of documentary poetry (Magi, 2015, p. 248). These discussions and published articles at that time were some of the first examples of documentary poetry adopted in a similar breath (Magi, p. 248). Since that time poets writing under this genre call themselves documentary poets and since 2011, written literary work extending from the Poetry Foundation website, Cold front magazine, and Jacket have issued articles dedicated to the theme; the 2007 Wesleyan compilation American poets in the 21st Century (Magi, 2015, p. 249). However, Magi (2015) states that the two terms documentary poetry and poetics are now used interchangeably without justification, as they seem to be accepted terms (p. 249).

Although much work has been directed towards analyzing the genre of documentary poetry in America, this does not rule out the fact that the same genre emerged in other countries of the world. One instance can be seen in Canada whose poets produced long ago, what was termed as long poems. This tradition of Canadian poetry was primarily regarded as "narrative poetry [which was concerned for the most part] with telling a tale (McDougall, 1995, p. ii). Nevertheless, in 1969 Dorothy as cited in McDougall's 1995 published an essay entitled the Documentary Poem, which is a Canadian Genre, stating that many of these long poems are not necessarily story-telling narratives. However, documentary-long poems are founded upon factual cultural details, embodying the poet's attempt to articulate a communal vision of the historical and/or contemporaneous events, ideas, and forces that influence the life and times of a particular community (p. ii).

Another example can be traced to Wales documented filmmaker John Ormond. The written genre in Wales also emerged in response to the communal needs of this country or, as in the words of Smith (2014), the documentary practice within the setting of a propagation institution has been one of the dominant mediators in the political and cultural growth of this little society (p. ii). However, the work of John Ormond is also influenced by another movement out of Wales, which is the Griersonian British Documentary Movement, which is another instance of how documentary poetry had its roots in different parts of the world (Smith, 2014, p. ii). Apart from this brief historical introduction to documentary poetry, the following section will shed light on its definition, and components along with a brief critical analysis of some selected documentary poems.

III. DOCUMENTARY POETRY: DEFINITION, TYPES, AND FEATURES

The contemporary era can be defined as the era of discoveries in science and the period of modernization in literary work. Poets, authors, and performers of the contemporary era attempted to break original grounds, and this culminated in the appearance of modern actions and varieties in literary work among which written poetry is a specimen. As has been referred to earlier, this genre of poetry is termed and defined according to its source materials and content. Thus, according to Joseph Harrington (as cited in Hufnagle, 2015) documentary poetry includes extracts from or procreations of documents or declarations not created by the poet and transmits historical stories, whether macro or micro, human or usual (p. 3). This combination of sources has the effect of producing a viewpoint, answer, and analysis that neither individual expressive poetry nor academic historical description could afford (Hufnagle, p. 3). This means that documentary poetry can only achieve its intended effect through combining the document with the artistic talent of the poet. In other words, the intended effect cannot be achieved by employing the document only or through verse only.

Clarifying the main purpose of documentary poetry, with its dependence on documents and real voices of the suppressed, Parks (2014) states that written poetry as a group of social events shows a modernist approach regarding artistic interferences *as* answers to social catastrophes (p. vii). However, during the thirties, documentary poetry verified and analyzed the social schemas related to the notion of documentation.

Nevertheless, current opponents have stated that documentary poetry exemplifies ethnic, gender, class, environmental, and social dissimilarities self-consciously by trying to consider the occurrence of the documentarian in

the act she forms (Parks, p. vii). Thus, this new documentary genre gave rise to both the cultural role of poets as documentarians wandering, informally involved scholars who attempted to support their medium with the creative forces converting contemporary mass values as they collected facts regarding American social life and a modern approach regarding “reality” “itself” (Parks, 2014, p. 1). The growth of the documentary poetry genre made a change in poets’ connections from old-style affiliation to a politics of class in which radicalized scholars treated themselves as operating in line with the radical proletariat. This is performed to transport the crowds from the evils of capitalist modernism gone awry to a propensity to classify with a politics of ethos related to the official culture of the Popular Front and the New Deal and the informal schemas simultaneous with it (Parks, 2014, p. 4). This affiliation shift can be observed in poets’ works, which shifted from a focus on “proletarian fiction” to a “proliferation of new documentary forms” (Parks, 2014, p. 5).

Introducing documentary poetry as a new genre, Magi (2015) points out that to say that the written poem is voted to affirm the frequently ignored voices of societies stressed to continue in the face of revolting violence is somewhat a deceptive description. The reason is that according to Magi (2015) this definition neglects two points. The first point is that “fictional systems can also do [the] work referred to in this definition. The second point is that this statement neglects “the range of documentary approaches that authors utilize” (Magi, 2015, p. 250). Elaborating on this idea of ‘documentary approaches, Magi clarifies that in documentary films, the opinions of the influential may be intentionally presented to expose repressed past facts (2015, p. 250). Thus, to compensate for the lost meanings in this previous definition of documentary poetry, Magi states that it would be precise to state, “*how* the ferocity and opinions of the individuals are selected, outlined, and epitomized is important in documentary preparation (2015, p. 250).

Accordingly, Magi states that efforts at describing documentary poetry contempt multifaceted points in modern art about meaning, neutrality, illustration, and what the purpose of art is and must be (p. 250). In addition, according to Bill Nichols as cited in Magi (2015), there are four styles of the documentary: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive (p. 250). In Magi’s viewpoint, the consideration of these modes focuses on their specific moral difficulties and this assessment would support poets consider the problems of a work’s method and arrangement, purpose, and possible special effects on its spectators and even its documentary themes themselves (p. 251).

Worthy of note is that the idea of documenting is not only confined to the genre of poetry. Much on the same line, the creative production of films involves documentation. Documentary films also combine documentation of real events and voices that are artistically produced. Similar to poetry, “documentary films are not a manuscript of mere peripheral sphere actions via the medium of film. Rather, they should be a report of and a manifestation of social knowledge. They are continuous records of social thought, a manifestation of only those belongings that the mind can distinguish, which is why they are a truthful report of social interiority (Taihei & Baskett, pp. 54-5). The fact that filmmaking also involves documenting gives an explanation why Bill Nichols, among others, assigns four modes of documentary that apply to both poetry and filmmaking. Regardless of the debate on how to define documentary poetry, the following section will shed some light on the different features of this genre.

IV. FEATURES OF DOCUMENTARY POETRY

The modern era which witnessed the emergence of documentary poetry – in America and other countries in the world forced -- with its modern technologies of documenting -- poets to reshape their forms of writing to respond to the era, which witnessed -- especially in America -- a crisis on the cultural, economic and political levels. Consequently, the British filmmaker Paul Rotha described documentary (1935; as cited in Parks, 2014) as representing modern information and occurrence conveyed about human relations, proposing public associations of making within which its truths consider meaning (p. 11).

One feature of documentary poetry is that it is characterized by depending on the idea of a long specialized monograph, which has some long detailed interpretations of relegated themes from manufacturing laborers to confined prisoners to the sufferers of hegemonic ferocity and massacre (Leong, p. ii). Accordingly, the role of documentary poets goes beyond being mere production of creative literary works where the poet only depends on the luxurious language. Within the genre of documentary poetry, where poets depend on real documentary voices, poets develop to be not just makers of aesthetically-pleasing language but also initiators of theoretical interferences; they convert to be archaeologists, historians, sociologists, documents managers, ethicists, and supporters (Leong, p. ii).

Therefore, according to Leong (2013), this new role of documentary poets contradicts what is traditionally known about poetry in that it is isolated and inward as the study of contemporary poets pushes poetry outside its disciplinary limits to question the policies of reminiscence and past data in an era of digital imitation (p. iii). This last idea of documentary poetry role supports what Taihei and Baskett (2010) call ‘cognitive activity. In their viewpoint, the idea of documenting only exists in a work of art to reflect the “human cognitive activity” since it is difficult that a human being to document something for the sake of documenting.

Taihei and Baskett (2010) point out that “even children who write character after character do not do so for transcription, but rather to learn characters” (p. 53). It is this idea of ‘learning’, which comes to the core of documentary poetry. In other words, according to Taihei and Baskett, the task of documenting is meant to “reflect on the past, plan for the future, and attempt to understand the meaning and purpose of our lives” (p. 53). Hence, documenting has a humane function, which is to sympathize with and at the same time glorify human experiences so that others would

make benefit from such experiences. Bearing in mind this idea of sympathizing with others, through documenting, is another feature of such poetry genre as it facilitates for human beings to co-exist with each other; in this way, “all documentation, even the simplest, is conducted as a conscious human activity and as such must constitute a form of expressing human consciousness” (Taihei & Baskett, 2010, p. 53).

However, documenting a human experience denotes, as has been mentioned earlier, that it reflects a subjective cognition, which means that such kind of documentation expresses individuality. Individuality work with other voices and experiences to create a humane co-existence. Therefore, the act of documenting, according to this last line of thought, reveals that to “document is not the passively mechanical practice of simply collecting data, but rather to develop as an expression of artistic and scientific cognizance” (Taihei & Baskett, 2010, p. 54). Consequently, documentary poems – such as *Someone Blew up America* among many others – are an “obvious expression of a subjective cognizance and the result of that expression moves people emotionally” (Taihei & Baskett, p. 54). Thus, as documentary poetry expresses a subject and is at the same time a document of subjective knowledge, then it becomes both a scientific and artistic cognition. With such a concept in mind, documentary poetry, is then, conceived as expressing “how much or how little the documentarian [or poet] knows of his circumstances” (Taihei & Baskett, p. 54). Tracing early documentary poetry history and the way it developed over time, Lobo (2011) states that the early versions of documentary poetry appeared in America with the modernist poets in the era between the Depression and World War II. However, Lobo (2011) adds another dimension to the characteristics of poetry stating that documentary poets are in essence an interdisciplinary occurrence, using and acclimatizing changes from filmmaking to form a diversity of basic resources (p. iii).

Thus, according to Lobo (2011), American documentary poets have a wide range of resources for their artistic creation. These resources range from constitutional mails, lawful accounts, administrative hearings, chronological and radical texts, and eyewitness explanations, while concurrently testing with poetic practice and preparation (p. iii). The complexity of documentary poetry resources shows that this genre is not only limited to the expression of individual human experiences whereby others get to sympathize with them but is at the same time open enough, in itself, for the society as it engages as a genre with the politics and culture of society.

Building on this perspective of engaging with the politics and culture of society, Lobo (2011) points out that documentary poetry has threefold importance. This is because it marks the history and growth of American legendary radicalism, noticeable documentary art besides filmmaking, and related photographic arts; in conclusion, documentary poetry operates as an important indicator of social alteration, representing how poetic performances expressed and answered several political actions over past times (pp. iii, IV).

Therefore, the role of documentary poetry extends the idea of mere documentation or, in other words, of simply presenting a factual document. Emphasizing this role, Muriel Rukeyser (1938) stressed the idea that poetry can expand the text (Reil, 2018, p. xi). Highlighting the idea, Rukeyser in her book ‘*The Life of Poetry*’ goes on to say, our verses will have been unsuccessful if they do not introduce our audience outside the poems (Reil, p. iii).

This is reflected in the words of Resnikoff (cited in Parks, 2014) who states that, through documentary poetry, the American nation history for a century and a half can be written not from individual stances as in diaries, or from unusual angle such as newspapers, but from each view as many opinions as were provided by the witnesses themselves (p. 13). The words of Resnikoff give an elaboration to Rukeyser’s statement that poetry may cover the document. The document can be extended through the many voices and hence different realities that are endorsed within the documentary poetry. Although Rukeyser did not specify the type of reality she calls for, her words reverberate with Kazin’s new commencement of reality (Parks, 2014, p. 14). It is this novel conception of reality that integrates the whole society with its diverse voices and experiences into one whole or under one unified, but multifaceted culture. Hence, documentary poetry can be conceived not as a secondary method of manifestation to the period’s documentary types, but as the conclusion of its combined determination to collect a massive granary of truths, an enormous supply of documents posturing to experiential truth and social authority (Parks, 2014, p. 15). The notion of an extension within documentary poetry is then capable of both illuminating the facts of a given culture as well as analyzing the conceptual incentives of such occurrences.

This last idea leads to the discussion of the role of poetry in modernity. During the period, poetry continued in a position of fluctuation as there was an ongoing debate about the status of poetry as a social movement. These discussions about poetry’s social contribution reflected other ongoing debates about the position of the author along with the idea of culture itself. Addressing modernism’s social politics, Sara Blair as cited in Parks (2014) refers to the violent challenges over the cultural significance of modernism accepted not only as a commitment to specific actions but as a group of continuing events (p. 16). However, while addressing this debate, Blair raises some questions concerning culture itself ‘what is culture? what makes it? whose possessions it is? How it classifies or notifies racial bodies?’ Yet, before giving answers to these questions, Blair points out that the defining line behind the answers to these questions is that the idea of culture especially under modernism is indeed a deeply political issue” (Parks, p. 16). Blair notes that the uniting characters of many modernisms reaching across the political range and located on both sides of the color line as she endorses that fictional research receptive to modernist principles served as a public act in and through which social value was created (Parks, 2014, p. 16).

However, Pierre Bourdieu (cited in Parks, 2014) provides through his literary ground sociology a convenient

framework for clarifying such debates. Bourdieu points out that the cultural production area is considered as a place of fights in which what is under question is the supremacy to enforce the leading description of the author and thus to demarcate the populace of those permitted to participate in the struggle to describe the author (p. 16). According to Bourdieu, because of the struggle over the writer's contribution to society leads authors to align with the subaltern groups. Bourdieu gives evidence of this tendency to align with the lower oppressed classes as when it happened throughout the depression when authors expected the layer of representatives for a proletarianized underclass contained in urban ghettos or undersized countryside territories (Parks, 2014, p. 17). However, Parks states that despite these imaginary alliances the fact that remains is that in the thirties modernism developed not as much a system of consistent official or artistic agendas, but instead a ground for opposed deliberations about social significances in which the writer's contribution in modern social and political life stayed exposed to amendment and reorientation.

However, apart from the debate about the social and cultural role of the writer under modernism, Parks extends the discussion on how documentary poets can contribute to constructing identities. In his work *Ghostlier Demarcations* (1997), Michael Davidson (as cited in Parks, 2014) provides the example of Rukeyser and Resnikoff as an important model that specifies the role of the poet. In Davidson's viewpoint, poets can contribute to the structure of national identity through the documentary character or their work feature, with its propensity to the forefront the materiality of the text in the building of national belonging narratives (Parks, 2014, p. 21). Davidson explains that the model of Rukeyser and Resnikoff is exemplary in that both of them rely on folklore genres, documentaries, verbal history, analysis, legal evidence, and marketing (Parks, p. 22). In his opinion, this reliance on these genres, which are derived from the public domain, sends modernism's weight on aesthetic language materiality to public speech materiality (Parks, 2014, p. 22).

Worthy of note is that the materials embraced by documentary poetry witnessed a shift, which marked a shift in tendencies and intentions of writing documentary poems. Writings of James Joyce - as *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* - are regarded as modernist writings. However, the materials embraced in such works are different from that used after the depression and distinguish a change in the types of materials used and in the determinations to which they were placed viz., building a general democratic communal culture (Parks, p. 22). This shift was because of the change of alliances poets have taken and which marked their new social and political role. This shift showed how poets have changed the conceptions of their role in society. Commenting on this shift, Michael Szalay as cited in (Parks, 2014) states that in this shift fundamental authors often connected what they understood to be a modernist asset in form with an asset in the random setting of laissez-faire economics (pp. 22, 3). The resultant highlighting composition's position as a practice of labor-valued 'processes over 'product'. Therefore, Szalay points out that affiliation with the working group contemplated further in giving a radical author a technique of understanding his or her work, not as a measurable value to be vented in a vulnerable market, but as a constant process of labor (Parks, p. 23).

However, the significance related to modernity's capitalist economy showed an effort on the part of performers, authors, and other knowledge workers to envision their labor as establishing a direct interference in the class-based relationships of construction (Parks, 2014, p. 23). The effect was the development of the figure of the author as-technician" as an example of the change in the intellectuals' social contribution, which situated them within a technocratic cultural development (Parks, 2014, p. 23). This new formation according to Jeff Allred as cited in Parks (2014) preserved the separation of cerebral and physical labor, visualizing writing as a dedicated system of work whose consultants were charged with constructing an intellectual substructure for the public benefit, one that would develop an irrational culture that prepared (or disorganized) life within capitalism (Parks, 2014, p. 23).

Johnathan Kahana another critic (cited in Parks, 2014) goes on the same line as Allred tracing the shift in the writers' social role during the thirties. In Kahana's viewpoint, there is a trace of conversion of fictional vocation, from writer to spectator causing a production that he defines as "intelligence work" as a method to assimilate the professional and cultural position of writing as a profession amid conditions that appeared to reduce the notion of the artist as lonely middle-class intellectual archaic (Parks, 2014, p. 24). Thus, the idea of documenting culturally significant information led artists' techniques, in their exploration for socially expressive practice, to develop more politicized. Consequently, the writer developed to be considered a class-minded intellectual who operated to send types resultant from the mass media from the business benefits they attended (Parks, 2014, p. 26).

With this discussion about the writer's role, and hence poetry, in society, the following section will briefly investigate poets' contribution to the genre of documentary poetry.

V. POETS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO DOCUMENTARY POETRY

As a reflection of the role of documentary poetry as extending the document, Rukeyser's "the Book of the Dead" develops to be a collection of twenty poems marking the deadliest industrial accident in United States history. According to Riel (2018), with this huge and prominent collection, Rukeyser was "pioneering a new poetic approach to documentary materials, extending the possibilities of cousin experiments ventured in High Modernist poetry and other art forms" (Riel, 2018, p. xi). What made Rukeyser's work a prominent one within the genre of documentary poetry is that it is an exemplary work that shows the depth and diversity of materials that can be utilized while producing a documentary poem? Riel (2018) clarifies that Rukeyser's work combines diverse material and tackles a range of topics from death to resurrection, and political activation. The elegance of documentary poetry is that it turns documentary

materials into live cases resurrected by the work of the documentary poet. For readers to “experience documentary materials as sites of communion, as mediums that contain the resonances and voices of the dead, it requires not only a reshaping and recontextualizing of documents, but a priming of imagination that poetry makes possible” (Riel, 2018, pp. xi, xii). In other words, poetry can bring the dead back from the document into the emotional consciousness of readers. Hence, documentary poetry is “an attempt to rescue a ... story from the sterility of objective fact and stand readers in the trenches of individual feeling and witness” (Riel, p. xii). It is the unique role of documentary poetry to create a field of allusions to suggest a story about “who we are or might be, where we came from and are headed. These allusions are both connective tissues to the traditions and production of the past and the actual present. Allusions establish gravity in the invented world of the poem and implicate the reader in the act of creation, inviting them to read, think, and act further” (Riel, 2018, p. xiv).

Worthy of note is that documentary poets were not away from understanding the drawback resulting from the shift of the writer’s role in society. Consequently, Rukeyser in her “The Book of The Dead” seeks to “remedy a fundamental deficiency in the nature of bureaucratic and professional production: that while documents are composed to approach truth, they often veer from the truth of human dimension, from the atmospherics of individual pleasure and suffering” (Riel, 2018, p. xii). These ‘atmospherics’ are the ones that poetry can preserve from the document which in contrast can “equip poetry with a narrative spine, grounding the work in shared realities beyond the poet’s solipsistic, inner world” (Riel, 2018, p. xii). Thus, Rukeyser suggests that by joining the poetic talent with the documentary, there can be a democratic remedy of the national tragedy. This means that poetry can raise the “dead from the purgatory of the document, from narrative or statistical objecthood, into the emotional consciousness of readers, which can arm a democratic body with deeper understandings, connections, senses of pathos and anger, and a more durable will to act against injustice” (Riel, 2018, p. xii).

Hence, “the Book of the Dead” -- according to Riely 2018 -- is an attempt to set free a national story from the infertility of objective fact to align readers in the line of individual feeling in front of the structural forces that divide them. Therefore, it is easy to discern multiple allusions to T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” which were introduced by Rukeyser as a “counter vision to Eliot’s pessimism; “the offer of...death is one sign of impoverishment in the artist” (The Life of Poetry 53), she writes. His speakers wish to be buried in an extinction of “forgetful snow” (The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition 5), Rukeyser wishes to affirm and disinter the dead’s voices into a fruitful exchange with the living: the dead voices include a pounding music; they have certainly experienced the life of our society” (The Life of Poetry 92) (Riel, 2018, p. 24). What Rukeyser was convinced of is the role of poetry in building shared determination beyond the poem itself along with sustained activism. In her opinion, the poet must encourage “self-actualizing creativity in the reader: both authors and spectators produce, and both do labor on themselves in producing (the Life of Poetry, 50) (Riely, 2018, p. 26). Part of the creative work a poet might attempt is to invest readers with a “sense of their radical potential and entitlement” (Riely, 2018, p. 26).

According to Riely (2018), although in “the Book of the Dead” and much of Rukeyser’s early works, the speakers have a kind of “prophetic voice, the point is not to “dictate a vision to the divinely blind flock”, but to help readers “learn their powers of sight” (p. 26). This idea of involving readers is apparent in Rukeyser’s poems in her “the Book of the Dead” where she makes use of the pronouns “this and these” multiple times and hence imposing in the readers “the same radical abilities of apprehension as the speaker” (Riely, 2018, p. 26). This has the effect of transferring or exchanging of energy between the speaker and the reader. In poetry, in Rukeyser’s words, “the altercation is one of the dynamism. Social dynamism is transmitted, and from the poem, it spreads to the reader. Social dynamism is awareness, which is the ability to create change in prevailing situations (Riely, 2018, p. 27).

Thus, as part of documentary poetry, “the Book of the Dead” is a kind of argument not merely for a new “form of poetry that responds to passive fragments of information, but a new form of information reception, one that compels *a total response*” (Riely, 2018, p. 35). Elaborating on the role of the poem, Rukeyser states that “a poem requests you to sense more than that: it requests you to react and better than that: a poem offers an entire response (Riely, 2018, p. 35). In this way, the poem is, in fact, emotional, intellectual, and a democratic imperative. Thus, to borrow Rukeyser’s words, “poetry can extend the document”. This is because the document has demonstrated an “inadequacy in compelling public responses proportional to the hostilities waged against the same public” (Riely, 2018, p. 35). However, Riely points out that this kind of insufficiency can be traced to the level of the “form rather than the content” (p. 35). The document can deliver a person’s deeds or diagnose their motivations, but it cannot convene the “psychological atmospherics that was these deeds’ cause and effect—for this, the lyric is called for” (Riely, p. 36). The document can report an event, but it cannot be the event itself. Hence, Rukeyser says: “the realization of a poem is an event of belief and experience. This event takes place in a time-sequence involving the reverberation of images and sounds” (the Life of Poetry, 49)” (Riely, 2018, p. 36). Rukeyser then adds that “and art-work is one through which the realization of the artist is competent to provide its feelings to anyone ready to accept them (the Life of Poetry 50)” (Riely, 2018, p. 36).

It is through this interaction between poetry and the document that there is a possibility for the conversion of feeling into political action. Without the interaction of poetry, the document keeps the victim apart from the reader; the document separates feeling, thought, and action. Nevertheless, “poetry can extend the document” as it, adds, a “psychological dimension – it adds *life* -- to what is always a limited, incomplete, and dead vehicle of communication”

(Riely, 2018, p. 37). Another influential figure within the genre of documentary poetry is Charles Resnikoff who contributed to the field. In contrast to other documentary poets, Resnikoff discards the notion of a cohesive national story grounded on an agreement. Rather, he inscribes through the voices of numerous spectators as they perform in a legal demonstration (Parks, p. 83). Hence, in doing so, according to Davidson as cited in Parks (2014), Resnikoff focuses on the official legal construction within which a domestic history is composed (Riely, 2018, p. 83).

In his important documentary poem "Testimony", Resnikoff accepts a tendency of rhetorical objectivity that describes the poem as a text from the chronological lawful forms from which its writer concludes (Parks, 2014, p. 83). Incorporated into a fictional agenda, this legal register develops to be all the more distant from its focus intensifying the meaning that there is, in reality, nothing outstanding about these acts and that the fears they signify were normal and normative components of everyday life in the past of the republic (Parks, 2014, pp. 83-4). This raises an inference that past ferocity cannot be healed or obscured in the present as Resnikoff comments saying: "the same thing is taking place today that was taking place in 1885" (Parks, 2014, p. 84). Although Resnikoff did not clarify or specify what he means by "the same thing", it implies his sense of unhealed past violence, which is transferred to the present. It also suggests a sense of lamenting which can be perceived from the early title of the poem, which appeared in 1932 as "My Country 'Tis of Thee". Accordingly, Parks comments on the first lines of "Testimony" saying that "a superficial look at the first few pages of the text offers some effective specimens of its credentials of historical grotesqueries: about half a mile above Dun's they experienced Williams sitting on the side of the river, complaining and shouting. Thomas Lacy was operating in his area when he overheard the gunfire, but he gave no attention to it. Later, his neighbor, Pledger, called to him to find a man lying on the street and making excessive noise. They thought he was drunk until they lifted him and saw two shots in his back and blood on his clothes. Williams crept into the water freed a canoe that was there and went in. The boat floated down the river until it was stranded on a sandbank along the other side, where no one existed, and Williams crept and died (Parks, 2014, p. 84).

The examples of ferocity as offered in these and other lines of the poem fix the tendency of the poem and prepare the reader's prospects. The first act shows how instead of serving the wounded "Williams", a spectator requests his neighbor to "approach and see" the sight of "a man lying near the street making an excessive sound". In instances presented by the poem's lines, the chapters the text contributions are clipped of any contextualizing prompt beyond the normal names of the contributors themselves. They seem unambiguously empty of remarks on the part of the text's description voice. What the text forefronts instead are the remarkable features of such acts, their propensity to decrease the ferocity they portray to a pure spectacle as remote grief provides a way to public experience (Parks, 2014, p. 86).

During the Depression, there was a centrality of "the pained body". This presence of the body, especially the one in pain or wound, signifies "truth and realness which seem to defy contextualization" (Parks, 2014, p. 86).

Making use of this fact, Resnikoff introduces the scenes of bodily pain to inaugurate "a type of written documentary" in which according to Resnikoff the truths have sociological, psychological, and maybe even poetical functions (Parks, p. 86). What Resnikoff does through the scenes documented in his poem is that he enables "the facts" to speak for themselves. Thus, *Testimony's* keeping the truths speak repeats "William Stott's now-canonical description of documentary as a method that challenges remark; it enforces its significance. It opposes us, the spectators, with an experiential indication of such an environment as to reduce difference unbearable and clarification superfluous (Parks, 2014, p. 87).

However, Scott's documentary poetry is contrary to that of Resnikoff as he insists that the main aim of documentary poetry stays magnificent to its spectator's emotions: "By 'emotion,'" Stott inscribes, one does not reflect a weird thrill, a frisson at the repulsive (Parks, 2014, p. 87). This shows how "*Testimony*" leaves from the "redemptive pedagogy" connected to the genre of documentary poetry through which documentation of history's sufferers gives itself to optimistic policies (Parks, 2014, p. 87). Thus, Park's explanations saying that in *Testimony*, the appearance of the excruciated social practice stays an intricate constituent, as separately witnessed occurrences of physical and emotional pain do not succeed to give to any story that would offer them national-historical importance (p. 87).

Accounting for the connection between ferocity and spectatorship, Michael Warner (as cited in Parks, 2014) observes tragedy's atypical aptitude to impart corporeality to a "mass subject" inattentive from its corporal practice: the tragedy spectators see its body to an unusual extent, he says. Its exterior is all understanding: there has been an awful chance (p. 88). For Warner, the inattentive body of the collective subject shoulders material practice through the mass viewing of tragedy, a performance that creates "transitivism," a wish to wound: "the transitive desire of observing/damaging makes accessible our translation into the incorporeal promotional of the mass theme. By hurting a mass body rather than a truly massive body, somewhere we make ourselves a noncorporeal mass spectator (Parks, 2014, p. 89). Hence, this use of spectacles of bodily injury as seen by the "mass subject" reflects the persistence of the constitutive contribution of ferocity in starting and upholding a public domain (Parks, p. 89). This also accounts for the horror scenes Resnikoff presents in "testimony" and other texts. These scenes also serve to organize the hierarchized public space in which forms developed to be noticeable by their irregular involvements of class, gender, race, and culture within America as a developing contemporary realm (Parks, 2014, p. 89).

Moreover, these scenes of violence and bodily degradation go along with the American ferocity that arose in the thirties as a counterbalance to the false positivity of authorized answers to the Great Depression (Parks, 2014, p. 89). Consequently, according to Parks, *Testimony*, then, supports itself with the era's documentary example through its show

of incongruous bodies, which accept a tropological purpose evocative of a change of the social body (p. 90).

To sum up, the experience reflected in "*Testimony*", it becomes clear that *Testimony* belongs well to the historical context from which the material of the poem is collected. This material gives evidence and is indicative of forced labor, culture, gender, and class ferocity. It is also reflective of the economic abuse at that time and the Civil War along with its consequences, all of which became essential subjects in describing instants of national distinctiveness (Parks, 2014, p. 91). Furthermore, the motif of industrial labor as a menace to the body connects Reznikoff's texts with the main documentary developments of the era as well as progressive era comments coeval with Reznikoff's work extracts (Parks, p. 101).

Apart from the early poets who set the model for documentary poetry, other contemporary poets go on the same line of creating their poems depending on factual material that they derive from real voices. They aim to present the truth according to the victims' perspectives. Among these poets is the contemporary poet Amiri Baraka with his famous poem someone blustered America, which belongs to the genre of documentary poetry. The verse records the event of September 11 hitting the Trade Centre in the USA. Baraka's intention, through his documentary poem, is to introduce the event from a perspective that is different from that of the mass media.

As a Black man, Baraka set a mission for himself to struggle against ethnic racism, to keep the African American culture, and to disclose the fact about American politics in his various documents. In his "Somebody Blew up America", Baraka tries to expose the U.S. Government by accusing him or her of being part of the attack. This concept comes from his attitude, as a Black man, that there is real discrimination and violence practiced against minorities among which is the Black or African-American minority. Hence, the poem "calls into question what the United States government knew in advance about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001" (Ervin, www.hu.mtu.edu). Much like the way, Resnikoff presents his scenes of body pain to reflect past yet constant agonies; Baraka's poem contextualizes the September 11 event within America's larger history of atrocities committed against different minorities. Baraka himself wrote as restated in Ervin that the poem's underlying theme reflects this: Stresses how Black Americans have suffered from national violence since being abducted into US chattel slavery, e.g., by Slave Owners, US & State Laws, Klan, Skin Heads, Domestic Nazis, Lynching, denial of rights, national oppression, racism, character assassination, historically, and at this very minute throughout the U.S" (Baraka, I Will Not) (Ervin, 2001).

Right from the start of the verse, the poet applies spoken sarcasm to blame "American terrorists" for the delinquency; the same radicals who burdened the "niggers" and "blew up nigger churches", applying the word "nigger" because it is an aggressive, abusive and scornful duration for a black person. They say it is some extremist, brutal Arabs in Afghanistan. It had not been our American extremists. It had been the Klan, the Skinheads, or the them that setbacks nigger Churches, or restore us to Death Row. It had not been Trent Lott or David Duke or Giuliani or Schundler, Helms retiring (ll. 1-13). The verse starts with "They say..." which indirectly proposes that they (the Bush Administration) lie. In these lines, applying dialectal language, Baraka retells readers of the harassment black people had experienced by American extremists in the past and he stated some of them by names. By "Klan", for example, he refers to Ku Klux Klan, which was a white supremacist group led in the South after the Civil War (1860-1865) that applied ferocity and homicide against the blacks.

What Baraka refers to as a colonial-like position of African Americans in terms of their associations with white chauvinists. Baraka connected the contemporary extremist actions in America to rivalry, domination, and colonization (Mehrvand, 2016, p. 24). Baraka also agrees with Rukeyser in her assertion that poetry spreads the document. Connecting the incident from the witnesses' viewpoint while contextualizing the incident within a greater historical frame is one way that displays how documentary poets use poetry to assist a social, human, and national goal. Hence, Leon (2013; as cited in Mehrvand, 2016) connected the American situation of Baraka's 9/11 poem to the colonial and neo-colonial one, affirming, "Representative of Baraka's so-called 'Third world Marxist phase, 'Somebody blew up America' tries to contextualize the entertainments of terror within larger histories of slavery and colonial and neo-colonial discrimination (p. 24). In Leon's perspective, "Baraka demonstrates a Derridean 'archive fever,' that is, a burning search for historical causes, culprits and explanations, they also expose the limitations of the archive's explanatory and institutive powers (p. xvi). He contended that Baraka's "somebody blew up America" was an "analysis of archival positivism (p. 24). As another demonstration of the notion of documentary poetry, Baraka comprises sights of the hip-hop values in his poem. This presence is important because it supports the audience determine diverse facts behind the 9/11 attacks (Mehrvand, 2016, p. 25). Part of the significance of hip-hop values is its truth-teller operation (Mehrvand, p. 25). Therefore, in this poem, Baraka is competent to restore past imprecisions intended to disparage America's national violence against African Americans in the last few centuries (Mehrvand, 2016, p. 25).

In conclusion, this paper aimed at investigating the genre of documentary poetry by deliberating its definition, development, and characteristics. The paper also discussed briefly some selected poets along with some of their poems to investigate how documentary poets utilize the idea of documenting to serve their aims while showing their attitudes towards the social role of the writer and how writers can contextualize their and others' experiences within a larger frame.

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