From This Dark Place to the Other: Violence and Connection in the Poetry of Brian Turner

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Abstract
Brian Turner is a poet and American soldier who served in Iraq at the start of the 21st century. His poetry is about his experiences as a soldier interacting with the Iraqi people, his time in America following the war, PTSD, and the endless violence in the war zone. As a comparatively recent entry into the genre of War Poetry, his work pays homage to the writers who preceded him, like Wilfred Owen and Bruce Weigl, while also referencing Middle Eastern poets typically outside the scope of American literature. Through Turner’s recurring themes and motifs, connections are established between people on opposite sides of the war, as the same violence that separates people paradoxically unifies them. Turner’s poems are divided into categories of violent and nonviolent poems, where violence is quantified by the level of “noise” in each poem as defined by its imagery and structure. Turner’s nonviolent poems ultimately point to the presence of peace in the poetry, where this strange unity of people affected by war produces a culture of understanding through loss and suffering, yet it acknowledges that war itself, and with it war poetry, will continue.

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On the other hand, during the same period in the 20th century, many notable practitioners of English literature left the British Isles to live abroad: James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Robert Graves, Graham Greene, Muriel Spark, and Anthony Burgess. In one case, that of Samuel Beckett, this process was carried to the extent of writing works first in French and then translating them into English. Even English literature considered purely as a product of the British Isles is extraordinarily heterogeneous, however.