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## **History Served: A Critical Study of English and Kurdish Docupoems**

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### **Abstract**

Poetry as a literary genre has been the first and the most influential human method for conveying what people wanted to since the birth of humanity. Therefore, it was almost the sole way for entertainment, information, and documentation as well.

As a result, it is of little surprise to hear and see such an expression as documentary poetry. Topics about it started to be seen in journals such as *Chain* in the middle of the 1990s; yet this kind of poetry could be traced back, in the English literature, to the first English poem that survived i.e. *Beowulf*.

The study is an attempt to discuss a number of English and Kurdish poems that can be labeled under this nomenclature in order to reveal whether or not world poetry share this aspect along with its usefulness for humanity at large. It tries as well, to revive focus upon the historical events documented by poets and poems and illustrate the range of the humane responsibilities the poets felt and consequently made them immortalize the human experiences through those poems.

The study also analyzes the strategies followed by the poets in writing their poems through the different modes of documentation. It came out with a number of conclusions like: Kurdish poetry did not come short of its likes in the other languages and cultures especially the English language and poetry. And it closes with a list of the sources used.

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## 1. Introduction: Poetry and Documentary

It is difficult to get the news from poems,  
Yet men die miserably every day,  
for lack , of what is found there.  
(William Carlos Williams)

Despite this declaration by a landmark of the American poetry, it seems not so familiar to combine these two, seemingly, contradictory words into one title since they do not seem to go along. Yet, a rapid view at the history of any poetry, let alone the English one, shows that poetry can well be a documentary. Moreover, this genre or trend-though with a new nomenclature-took a circular pathway; thus bringing to mind Coleridge's idea about poetry that should "assume to our understandings a circular motion- the snake with its Tail in its Mouth" (qtd in Harrington: 1). In the old British society since the Anglo-Saxons and even earlier, the poets played the roles of the historians of their tribes and "the keeper of the traditions which hold the *cynn* (kin) together, just as the king (*cyn-ing*) is the keeper of the treasure which is the *cynn's* only possession and defense. . . . In a primitive society the poet is historian and priest and his song has ritual significance." (Alexander, 1966 : 11-12). A long list of poems can be made to illustrate the fact mentioned in the quote above starting from the earliest English poems until the present. The first English poem that survived, i.e. *Beowulf* is a clear example in case. On the surface, it tells the story of a strong English dragon-slayer, but it has more than that to tell:

A fellow of the king's  
Whose head was a storehouse of the storied  
verse,  
Whose tongue gave gold to the language  
Of the treasured repertory, wrought a new  
lay,

Made in the measure.

The man struck up,  
Found the phrase, framed rightly

The deed of Beowulf drove the tale,  
Rang word-changes. He chose to speak  
First of Sigemund, sang th most part  
Of what he had heard of that hero's  
exploits.  
(qtd in Alexander, 1979: 12)

As the passage indicates then, the poet narrates part of the history of his people and their achievements. It also shows that such poems are not limited to the history and story of the one hero or superman about whom they are recited and then written down; rather, they tell the story of a large segment of the heroic and leading people along with their fingerprints in the history of their nations. So, an eco-poem can invite the reader to its inner life and also the life outside it which is the real one.

Looking at such poems, necessarily, brings into mind the concept of epic and dramatic poetry that were a common vogue in the previous ages but abandoned by the modernists. Epic poetry as Philip Metres writes:\

emerged from the oral tradition of poetic storytelling, in which the sweeping narrative of a nation or people would be told. The early epics were amalgamations of poetry, politics, and history, and at their best, they offered both heroism and reflection. They didn't merely transmit history or heroic values; they offered a mirror on the culture, inviting their listeners to pose questions that the poems themselves could not answer (3).

This tradition is on the way towards renewal thanks to this newly named "docupoetry".

For this reason, some definitions of this sub-genre, as I would like to call, are necessary. Here is how Metres himself defines the term: [Documentary] poetry arises from the idea that poetry is not a museum-object to be observed from afar, but a dynamic medium that informs and is informed by the history of the moment (qtd in Johnson). The words 'informs' and 'history' are critical in the definition since

they allude to the fact that poetry, especially in the modern age, goes close to facts, information, and reality. Meanwhile, it refers to the idea of writing poetry objectively which has become a trend in the modern and postmodern poetry. This implies what can be called the 'opposite' of the lyric poetry; poetry coming up from the innermost of the 'bard'.

The case, however, does not end here. Some critics oppose this 'genre' or 'trend' as Johnson calls it in her abridged article "Documentary Poetry", through different and contradictory concepts and understanding. Poet Nada Gordon (b.1964), for instance, rejects it saying that it is "grasping for mimesis and reportage at the expense of verbal imagination," (qtd in Harrington: 4). This trend of renunciation was accompanied, in the 1940s and 1950s, by the appearance of the New Criticism and academic formalism in poetry that reject truths outside the poem and stress only the ones inside it.

Yet, some writers, critics, and poets of name stand face -to-face to Gordon's and other critics' understandings about this poetry. Critic and poet Mark Nowak (b. 1964) believes that "documentary poetics needs to participate not only in the social field of contemporary Poetry but—as has been its historical trajectory—in the larger social movements of the day" (www.poetryfoundation.org).

In fact, the documentary poetry, nowadays, enjoys a better reception all over the world, not necessarily under that strict nomenclature. Like the English poetry, the Kurdish poetry for instance, encompasses that genre or trend, as some critics like to call. The classical and the modern poetry alike are embedded with such poetry. This fact should not be considered surprising for two major reasons: (1) Kurdish poetry does not lack the properties expected from any other poetry, an (2) the social and political environment of the people represented in that poetry was and still is a great point that gave and still gives an accelerating push towards that genre. In her critical essay about documentary poetry, Jill Magi paves

the way, unknowingly and unwarily, to understanding the causes behind documentary poetry for such poets: "The documentary poem is meant to 'testify to the often unheard voices of people struggling to survive in the face of unspeakable violence'" (5). It is this 'unheard voices' that count here and give birth to such poetry in different parts on our planet.

## 2. Docu-witnesses

Among the most noticed practitioners of this poetry in the English poetry at large, comes the African American poets and writers who reflected atrocities and maltreatment they witnessed as they were practiced against their people inside the United States or abroad. The once poet laureate of America, Rita Dove (b. 1952) is just one example in case. Her 72 line poem "Parsley" is documentary par excellence. The poem which she read at the White House, tells the story of a shocking atrocity as Therese Steffen writes:

reports an  
incident at the  
Haitian-  
Dominican  
border, which in  
the 1930s was  
de facto  
traversable for  
Dominicans but  
closed to  
Haitians. De  
jure, the case  
was even more  
complicated.  
Not clearly  
delimited since  
1844, the border  
was redefined in  
1929 when  
thousands of  
Haitians already  
lived abroad. In  
1937[2], to stop  
the influx of

immigrants, the  
unilateral  
border, though  
officially still  
"open," was  
brutally  
enforced.  
(www.english.ill  
inois.edu).

The Dominican dictator, whom Dove calls El General in the poem, thinks of a way to get rid of the large number of Haitians who lived and worked in the cane cutting there. The poem seems from the very beginning to follow the observational mode in conveying the intended message. Dove keeps herself away, letting the actual victims of the event tell of their misery and the process carried out on them:

There is a parrot imitating spring  
the palace, its feathers parsley green.

Out of the swamp the cane appears  
to haunt us, and we cut it down.  
(Dove: 110)

The first annoying thing to the workers that is documented, here, is the nature of the work, i.e. working in the cane fields. The poet cleverly summarizes the suffering of the workers in the word 'haunting' and illustrates the speakers of the poem through the pronoun 'us'; thus alienating herself as an observer of the atrocity that the poem tells. The poem, then, proceeds towards the horrific and catastrophic event which is its core per se:

El General

searches for a word

.....

. We cannot speak an R-

.....

El  
General has found his word: perejil.

Who  
says it, lives.

(Ibid)

The general is looking for an excuse to dismiss thousands of Haitian workers from the sugarcane fields. Still worse, he is planning to annihilate those people and the other Haitian people living in his country. Here the symbolic significance of Dove's title becomes clear. The dictator, Raphael Trujillo (1930- 1961), at last, found the suitable word for his purpose. He ordered the workers in his plantation to "pronounce the shibboleth perejil, Spanish for 'parsley'. Creole speakers of French, he certainly knew, would inevitably fail the test. Standing at bayonet point, those who could not roll an "R" in perejil were condemned as Haitians and sentenced to death" (Stephen).

As a result, as historical facts tell it, 20000 Haitian poor innocent workers were ordered to death simply because ' We cannot speak an R-'! All these events were told in the first part of the poem which is entitled 'The Cane Fields'. The second part under the title 'The Palace', reflects upon the general's palace as contrasted to the simple and poor invaded sugarcane fields.

Though an African American herself and the victims of the poem were people of color; yet she did not show herself as part of the victims of the barbaric deed nor did she even denounce it, leaving such reflections for the readers and especially the people of color in her country and in the world at large to evaluate, and surely, to dismiss and attack such inhuman proceedings. As for her real purpose in the poem, she stresses: "when I started Museum, I was in Europe, and I had a way of looking back on America and distancing myself from my experience...I found historical events fascinating for looking underneath—not for what we always see or what's always said about a historical event, but for the things that can't be related in a dry, historical sense"

([www.ritadoveatwandl.blogspot.com/2012](http://www.ritadoveatwandl.blogspot.com/2012))

Another poet, a woman again, Muriel Rukeyser (1913- 1930) tried her hand, earlier, at disclosing what other sources of providing information failed to show and discover. She wrote a collection of poems entitled *The Book of the Dead*. It is, as one critic writes:

based on the poet's personal investigation of the survivors, the site, and the documents relating to an event which occurred in a valley in West Virginia in the early thirties. Two thousand men were digging a three-and-a-quarter-mile tunnel under a mountain from Gauley's Junction to Hawk's Nest in Fayette County so that a river could be diverted as part of a hydroelectric power project. When it was discovered that the rock through which they bored, had a high content of valuable silica, the contracting company had the men drill the rock dry, to get more silica out faster. As *Time* magazine put it, many of the workers "died like ants in a flour bin" of silicosis, which is incurable and leads in effect to strangulation (Kertesz: 98).

This 'incident' that happened in 1929 and claimed the lives of nearly 2000 workers, should have shocked and horrified the young woman poet who, later, collected further information about it from different sources including interviews with survivors and court proceedings. The event encompasses a number of contradictory situations that can usually be seen and felt under any capitalist system. Here, the workers who produce a great source of energy, fall victims to it instead of getting any benefit from it. Writer and critic Walter Kalaidjian (b.1952) puts Rukeyser's collection in the heart of docupoetry regarding it as " a modern tour de force in its experimental fusion of poetry with nonliterary languages drawn from journalism, Congressional hearings, biography, personal interviews, and other documentary forms" (162).

The title poem takes the reader in a rapid review about history of the country and the influence of the European immigrants upon de-shaping its landscape. In the second half of the poem, she describes the workers who died during the digging of the tunnel:

these carrying light for safety on their  
foreheads  
descended deeper for richer faults of ore,  
drilling their death.  
These touching radium and the luminous  
poison,  
carried their death on the lips and with  
their warning  
glow in their graves.  
(LL. 94-9).

It is capitalism to blame for this catastrophe, taking into account Rukeyser's leftist background and interest. The workers dig in such a filthy deadly situation and then die only to make the companies and owners richer. Sarcasm is obvious on the surface.

The poet extends her description of the event and attack on the capitalists through twenty poems that she collected under this title. In "George Robinson: Blues", the speaker, Robinson, is one of the black drillers who seems like the mouthpiece of the dead workers. In his ironic testimony, the brutality of the event and the hypocrisy of the authorities come to the surface:

I've put them  
DOWN from the tunnel camps  
to the graveyard on the hill,  
tin-cans all about—it fixed them!—  
TUNNELITIS  
hold themselves up



at the side of a tree,  
I can go right now  
to that cemetery.

([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)).

It is the most believable testimony since the speaker is one of the few survivors; yet the authorities did not pay any serious attention to it. Further, a true and reliable account as it is, it stands as a stark contrast to what the reporter says- in the testimony- about Gauley Bridge: Gauley Bridge is a good town for Negroes, / they let us stand around, they let us / stand around on the sidewalks if we're black or brown (LL. 1-3).

The reporter's testimony itself carries an ironical tone. It is even a double irony since the reporter-speaker in the poem seems to be an African American or a man of color. The verbal irony is clear from the last line of the quote above and it proves the reality of the misery those people suffer from.

Robinson concludes his testimony in the poem with the greatest range of sympathy and sarcasm at the same time: As dark as I am, when I came out at morning after the tunnel at night, / with a white man, nobody could have told which man was white. / The dust had covered us both, and the dust was white (LL. 32-4).

Again evaluating and then denouncing the atrocity is not shown clearly and openly though one of the speakers in the poem is an actual victim; rather it is left for the reader to understand the situation and make meaning from it..

From a quick glance at the Kurdish poetry, classical and modern alike, it becomes clear that this newly named sub-genre (or whatsoever other critics like to call) can be traced back to the very beginning and great poets used it to serve their purposes. May be their necessity for it was and still is greater than the that of poets like Dove and Rukeyser who are under

study here. Yes; the Kurds who are a nation of more than fifty millions and divided- after the World War I- among Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria; suffered and still do and in most cases the world is ignorant about their miseries. So, the Kurdish poets tried to do part of what history had and has to.

Sherko Bekas (1940- 2013) is one of those poets. Five months before the end of Iraq-Iran war in August 1988; Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq attacked the Kurdish city of Halabja (north- eastern Iraq) with chemical weapons, excusing itself that the Kurdish peshmerga forces supported Iran in the war. As a result, within some few minutes more than 5000 aged men, women, and children fell dead. The international community and the world at large did not react or even acknowledge that atrocity. Bekas was one of the poets who tried his hand at the heavy duty. In a 346 lines elegy entitled "Poison" he tries to reflect upon the huge human catastrophe that is compared- nowadays- to that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan during the First World War. As he is a member of the victimized people and community, the poem is based on a poetic mode in which the poet's emotions and bitter feeling is mingled with the sorrow of the great loss. In the very beginning, he calls for the owl to leave him for a while (an owl in the Kurdish tradition is the symbol and symptom of misfortune and bad luck):

O! landing owl  
On my skull and soot, fly  
Fly, at least for a moment, leave  
This blackened body.  
.....  
Unlucky month.  
Unlucky month.  
Unlucky month.  
(Bekas: 530)\*

(\* These lines and the others to follow are translated from Kurdish by the researcher himself).

He is referring to March because his people faced many huge misfortunes in that month, including the subject of this poem that happened in March, 16, 1988). Though the poet not following strictly the example of Muriel Rukeyser by collecting all the poems he wrote about this event in one volume or collection; yet he tried to divide his description of and reaction to the horrifying event among a number of poems. In "First Sound, Last Sound", he rushes into more accurate details:

One minute, half a minute, some seconds  
before eleven,  
The sky, like Mawlawi's\* soul, was clear,  
Like Ahmed Mukhtar's\*\*horse  
In Sharazoor's\*\*\* meadow.

.....  
One minute, half a minute, some  
seconds before eleven,

A family there was, father, mother, and kids.

(Ibid: 689)

(\* \*\* Two famous classic poets from Halabja)

(\*\*\* A fertile land with beautiful natural scenery to the west of the city).

The first line just holds the breath off; why exactly this specific time? Why counting minutes and seconds? What is the role of the family with small kids here? It seems exactly as a rising action and therefore, the readers should look for and expect a climax to relieve the tension created in them; and the poet cleverly follows the technique of story-telling and proves one of the influential climaxes:

Became eleven

One thunder, two, three,  
A smoke like the heart of "Auja's"\* son,  
The wind died,  
The sky died,  
Spring died,  
Father, mother, and the kids,  
At eleven

.....  
Altered to three stone statues  
That embraced each other!

(Ibid: 690)

(\* A reference to the ex -Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain who was born in a village called Auja)

The poet is so frustrated at the barbarism of the event that he seems in a whirl and does not know how to voice the acrimonious feeling of his innermost. He thinks, therefore to remind the great powers of the world about the deadly day and event through a letter-like poem:

In the name of Halabja and five  
thousand "moon"s,

In the name of Mawlawi  
and five thousand flowers,

In the name of Goran\* and  
five thousand doves,

To the genius scientists in  
Pushkin's country, Jack London's country,

Byron's country, Jon Dark's  
country, Bismarck's country,

Garibaldi's country, Von  
Koch, ...'s country, .....s country,

Thanks to the present you  
collectively sent in the morning of

16-3-1988 through Baghdad to flowers,  
doves, children, and poetry of Kurdistan.

(Ibid.

Vol. 3: 547)

(\* A famous romantic Kurdish poet)

The bitter and sarcastic tone tells a lot about two major aspects: First: The poet's feeling as a result of the destruction of more than five thousands of his people and a beautiful part of his country that suffered for years after that and still does; and secondly, the irresponsibility of the great powers of the world towards millions of civilians in this part of the world. (Later investigations showed that at least 84 German companies provided the ex-Iraqi regime with chemical weapons that were used against the Kurdish civilians in Halabja).

This was not the first massacre that the Kurds faced in their history, nor was the last. Less than one month after bombardment of Halabja with chemical weapons; Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad decided to launch another barbaric attack against the rebellion peshmergas and their families and villages in the areas under their control in the northern part of Iraq (Now a semi-independent area ruled by the Kurdish federal region "Kurdistan Regional Government"). This military campaign which was launched through eight stages in different parts of the mountainous region, claimed the lives of more than (182 000) persons, mostly old people and children. The regime gave the name "Anfal" to the campaign (It is the name of one of the verses in the Holy Qur'an) to give the impression that the Kurds are anti-Muslims and therefore annihilating them is a lawful and righteous duty. Through this campaign, the civilians were taken as prisoners of war and removed to the deserts and empty areas in southern Iraq. Thousands of them were buried alive and thousands more were put in prisons there.

For this heart-breaking catastrophic event, a number of Kurdish poets wrote elegies to immortalize the memory of the tens of thousands of people who became

victims along with thousands more who survived and suffered the aftermath. Saleh Halaj (b. 1954) is one of those poets who stands as a vivid picture for the range and extent of the ever-living burn that is still torturing thousands of Kurds not only in Kurdistan; rather, all over the world. He is unique in this respect because, as a peshmerga, he witnessed-live- the barbarism of the Iraqi regime's personnel during the military campaign. Even worse, his family in full (a wife and seven children), were killed by a jet attack at the village where they were living.

The first piece of a poem that he gave mouth to, was in 1991 when the Kurds rose against the regime and they dismissed the Iraqi army and authorities from the region. "Separation" is the first free outcry of the poet at the loss of his wife and children; that is why, the caption under the title reads: "This poem was written for my beloved wife and my seven children". The poem starts with apostrophe and the poet addresses his deceased wife directly:

Like the early blossoming flower of the mountain,

You used to lull the zeal of adolescent heart.

.....  
.....

But now, my honey,

I look around

I don't see you! You are not here!

Why are you vexed? Who offended?

(Halaj: 20)

The loss is great, so he remembers bitterly every moment he enjoyed in her presence. She used to be the source of every pleasure he felt; like flowers of spring to the nightingale. (The poet recited this poem for the researcher; and when he finished this part; he stopped, hesitated, shivered, and his face turned pale as if it was the moment



when he received the news of the annihilation of his family).

In the second part of the elegy, the poet bewails for his kids and again calls them directly:

O! Lost apples of my eyes,  
Every night

I am a wanderer in the far deserts,

.....

Between you and myself,

I am just a doubt & will-o'-the-wisp,

.....

When will you come?

Come back, come back,

Lighten the last seconds of my breath,

Come back! Come back!

(Ibid: 24)

The first person speaker of the poem; unlike many other docupoems, is the poet himself. He is actually the poet, father, husband, victim, and the voice of the bewailing elegiac. He is almost sure of the permanency of his loss; therefore, his call is no more than a despairing lament. This can be deduced from the exclamatory mark after his last two cries.

Like Rukeyser and Bekas, the poet- it seems- felt it necessary to pen other outcries to the horrible human catastrophe that – among thousands of victims- claimed the lives of his wife and children. The second poem, written in 1994, he called "Funeralist" with a caption that reads: "Part 2 of Separation". The speaker, here, is one of the victims not the poet himself:

Effas\* stopped in line,  
Children and adolescents  
Unopened buds, Girls,

Old and young, like a herd, were pushed in,  
Hurry up, go

They say the Sultan\*\* in the desert,

.....

Got furious, and his black hungry dog\*\*\*  
barks.

(Ibid: 27)

\*A Soviet made military truck used by Saddam Hussein's regime to transport thousands of Kurdish civilians from the areas where they were taken as prisoners of war to the deserts in southern Iraq where they were imprisoned in the ill-famed castle and jail "Nugra Salman" , killed, or buried alive in huge ditches.

\*\* The sultan is a reference to the chief of the castle who (survivors tell) was a real barbarian in his treatment of the prisoners.

\*\*\*The few survivors from "Nugra Salman" told the story of the black dog. When any prisoner (especially children) starved and died; the authorities of the prison used to throw the body away where the dog was waiting. All the survivors stressed that the dog got fat because it was "over-fed" with "meat"!

The speaker, here, is either one of the survivors or the poet himself imagining the situa

### 3. The Range of Imagination

tion. "The poet stressed that the speaker is himself and his imagination" (Murad). The above lines move the reader (imaginatively) to a time and moment that can horrify anybody who got a little of humanity in heart. Loading young boys and girls like animals is an attention- catching moment; even worse, putting dead bodies of human beings to a dog to eat is unbelievably shocking and disgusting.

Documentary poetry, as mentioned earlier, staggered at some rejections in different stages and times. Some critics even do not regard it poetry at all. Most rejections- it seems- hinge upon the close relation and

resemblance tween poetry and other means that simply provide information like journalism and history, to name just the most obvious examples. In this respect, George Szirtes' remark is relevant. He writes that "the truths the poem deals with are not evidentiary truths. ... They do not lead back to the real life outside the poem: their truths refer to the real life inside the poem" (qtd in Harrington: 3). This and other comments like it should have fallen under the influence of the New Critical assumptions, but it is never difficult to let them down since it is impossible to divorce poetry from biography, history, and personal life outside it.

The most interesting point, here, may relate to the idea of the duality of poetry and imagination; the one point that leads back to Coleridge's idea about poetry and to lyricism at large. But the question in relation to docupoetry would be: Does it inhibit imagination altogether?

Rita Dove's "Parsley" can adequately answer this ever-raised interrogation. First and foremost, the poet herself declines the assumption in an interview in 1985 saying:

The only thing in that poem which is a product of research is the actual fact that Trujillo made this happen and that the Haitians worked in the cane fields. And then the fact that when someone cannot roll an "r," it usually comes out as an "l"; hence, you get "Katalina" instead of "Katarina." But the rest of it – what goes through Trujillo's mind as he tries to find a way to kill someone – is my own invention. (Rubin & Kitchen).

The poem starts not with a usual story of a historical text; rather with a complicated symbolic idea: "There is a parrot imitating spring / In the palace". The two lines are embedded with imagination and symbols. Why a parrot among other birds? Why does it imitate spring? Why the parrot is in the palace? Was there in reality a parrot in the

palace of the dictator? More questions can be raised!

The parrot- as a granted matter- stands for repetition of anything said or done. So, in that palace, anything that the dictator says or does should be approved and repeated. On the other hand, spring is the symbol of rebirth and regeneration, and the parrot imitates this season; thus hinting at the fact that despite barbarism and destruction, rebirth and renewal will surely be ahead.

These are just some of the ideas deduced from the two lines that are –undoubtedly- the product of Dove's imagination rather than particulars associated with the event.

The titles of the two parts of the poem, i.e. "The Cane Field" and "The Palace" stand as another proof that docupoetry actually leads back to facts outside itself in an artistic and poetic way. The poem is divided into two contradictory parts in titles and contents as well. In the first part, the reader is taken in tour de jure into the daily life and hardships that the cane cutters face and live in along with the fearful climax that every reader stumbles at surprisingly. In the second part, the title leads the imagination of the reader towards what he/she may have expected or at least suspected, the luxurious life in the dictator's palace where: " his mother collapsed in the kitchen / while baking skull-shaped candies" (LL 37-8). The poet even rids the reader of the disgusting tension that is caused by the horrific idea of the dictator in the first part through a beautifully- set anti-climax: " the Haitians sing without Rs / as they swing the greater machetes: / Katalina, they sing, *katalina*" (LL.54-6).

Although Rukeyser delved deeper in the body of 'documentary poetry' and its documentary aspect, yet historical facts and events are not the only things there. In the first line of "The Book of the Dead" for instance, the reader encounters poetic rather historic ideas: "These roads take you into your country / Seasons and maps coming where this road comes". The addressee 'you' of the first line could be the workers

who fell victim to the event story of the poem; but it could also refer to every American at large because the poet put the subject of the line in plural; instead of 'road', it starts with 'these lines'. But it makes little difference, and whether a road or roads, the poet changes the city of the event, its road, and consequently the bridge into symbols; they symbolize America in general, not themselves alone.

In "The Road", another poem of the collection; she stresses the symbolic significance over the concrete meanings and interestingly enough, she starts in the same way: " These are roads to take when you think of your country". In the final lines of the poem as well, she conveys her meaning through imagery:

Here is your road, tying

you to its meanings: gorge, boulder, precipice.

Telescoped down, the hard and stone-green river cutting fast and direct into the town.

([www.murielrukeyser.emuenglish.org](http://www.murielrukeyser.emuenglish.org))

The road, here, is not a simple word but an object that influences and is influenced by. The inter-relationship between the road and the 'you' of the poem creates the image that the poet wants to use to send her meaning. The road could also mean the way of life that every poor person like the victims of the event should expect and wait for; a way that leads necessary- at least according to the poet's belief- to a result and conclusion that the readers come across in these poems.

The rate of imagery, picturesque concepts, and imagination in the Kurdish docupoems do not lack adequacy compared to Dove's and Rukeyser's poems here; and in fact, compared to any English docupoems. In "poison" for instance, the poet, like Dove and Rukeyser, starts not with telling the story or particulars of the event; rather, he

gives freedom to his imagination to prepare for the coming horror: "O! Landing owl / On my skull and soot, fly". The image is attracting. The owl, the ominous bird, lands on the speaker's skull and soot who is dead or killed and his/her body thrown away in the open land to become food for the bird. A closer reading for the line shows that it contains metonymy and symbols. The bird, here, symbolizes every misfortune that the people of the speaker (necessarily the poet himself) faced in the past and through this campaign, while the skull and soot, are no more than symbols for the remainder of his people after the long series of atrocities launched against it throughout history.

In another elegiac poem, the same poet tries to put the reader into the picture of the event through a long series of symbols and images. The poem "Waiting for an Earthquake" is embedded with a figurative language instead of focusing on historical facts and findings:

Now I see Halabja is like a round

Pregnant fog standing in the air,

I see its lap filled with pomegranate flowers,

Reach the autumn room of my psyche,

.....

Which cloud poisoned you so

That your white body turned blue

Beside a green dream.

(Bekas, Vol. 5: 690-1)

The extract is poetically interesting and it is on behalf of the views of such critics as Mark Nowak. It stands, however, as a contrast to what some critics assume about this kind of poetry, like Nada Gordon, who's perspective in this respect is clarified earlier in this paper. To compare a city to a pregnant woman is not only a metaphor; rather a creative and extended one. The line: "I see its lap filled with pomegranate flowers" is no more than an extension of

the metaphor that he started in the first two lines. The fog is pregnant, but not with a child as any logical conception should expect; rather with "pomegranate flowers" that stand for the chemical bombs thrown over the city. The bombs are red like the colour of the flowers since they cause blood and death and so, they are used cleverly to suit the situation. The contradictory images of 'pomegranate flowers' and 'autumn room' is another interesting poetical genius. The innermost of the speaker in the poem turned into 'autumn' which symbolizes the end of flowers and falling down of tree leaves due to the miserable results of the destructions that his country and people were objected to; and it shares this point with the "pomegranate flowers" that, necessarily bring about blood and destruction.

The last three lines of the extract, again, disclose the range of the purity of the poet's imagination. Cloud is personified and turned into a malicious agent; that is why the speaker addresses the victim (s) of the event through a rhetorical question and asks about the identity of the symbolized cloud that poisoned him/her/ them, in a clear reference to the chemical attack on the civilians in Halabja in 1988.

In another thrilling poem, "Samandra Halabja", the poet revives his bitter memory of the heart-breaking event. He starts the poem with a classical allusion in order to draw further attention to the subject of the poem on one hand and to be able to evacuate the restrained and squeezed feeling of his innermost. (In Greek mythology, Samandra is a mythical creature thought to be able to resist and live in fire). For the speaker in this poem, Halabja is a kind of Samandra and the disgusting fire of the enemy failed to kill it completely:

"Samandra Halabja"

The morning when suddenly Halabja

Vomited, and swooned,

Its heart ceased!

With me as well

In the kingdom of words,

A city of poetry,

A mountainous series of stories,

A forest of essays,

Hundreds of song cataracts,

.....

All together and

In a moment

Lost heart.

(Bekas, Vol. 8: 404)

The poem, as any postmodern poem, encompasses stark contradictions. The challenging title, for instance, stands contradictory to the last line of the extract. But, realizing that the poem was written in 2008 (20 years after the event), gives plausibility to the paradoxical concepts in it. The city received a great range of attention and service both at home and internationally. As a result, it revived its previous status and survived the destruction like the mythical samandra.

Back at the day of the event, the personified city 'vomited' and 'swooned'. The diction serves the purpose of the poet verily because a large number of the civilians survived fell sick, vomited, swooned, injured, etc., but they survived the attack. The poet, then, tries to show how he as a poet and writer was affected by the critical human situation and what happened to his literary output. The strange and unfamiliar metaphorical images like these could not come from any historian, journalist, or court-hearings; rather, they need pure imaginative mind and feeling to be born.

In a fully emotional poem, Halaj, like his peers, pours lots of imagination onto the pages that moves every reader violently. "A Child's Verse" was composed, as the poet's note to it shows, in an occasion some years after the attack and event:

April fourteen  
Yes, it was April fourteen,  
.....  
Hungry animals of the desert,  
Some of them were black.  
I was in my mother's womb then,  
I did not know anything,  
Nor see anything  
Except for my mother's shriek.  
(Halaj: 146)

The poet's note to this poem, as he told the writer, is as follows: "In April, 14, 2011, corpses of 187 of Anfal victims were brought home from the mass graves of southern Iraq. They included a child's corpse which was still unborn when the ex-Iraqi regime authorities took the people prisoners including the child's mother. While shooting the mother in a mass killing process; a bullet pierced the child's head"!!!! (Murad).

Thrilling as it is, an unborn killed child is the speaker in the poem. This is on the surface; yet in reality, the poet's imagination is the cradle-birth of the full poem and its ideas. Any reader of literary or poetic texts who comes across this poem, is reminded of Thomas Hardy's (1840- 1928) anti-war poem "To an Unborn Pauper Child", where the poet is in an imaginary conversation with an unborn child.

With such examples at hand, one can easily reject other critics' denunciation of this kind of poetry since the majority of their justifications are based upon one central

point; namely that this poetry is simply a reproduction of documents and therefore it is not the language of the poets themselves. The poets and poems with documentary touch, even as just a nomenclature; provide convincing replies to such accusations and the few English and Kurdish examples above could be definitely enough for every opposer of 'documentary poetry'.

### Conclusions

The few pages of discussion above about the controversial 'documentary poetry' brought the writer to some conclusions that may or may not convince some critics who fiercely oppose it as poetry and some call it "creative non-poetry". Yet, the discussions and the conclusions follow logical paths and procedures; therefore, they lead the readers somewhere.

One of the first findings of the study is that the nomenclature is accurate and meaningful since the poems- whether those discussed here or any other documentary poem at large- do actually document things and events of human significance. Some of such events were covered and published by the media as pieces of news when they happened; but the impact of those publications were surely time-bound and the majority of the events were gradually forgotten. With poetry, however, they stay live and the memory of its victims remains living because poetry remains an ever living and influential medium in the minds of the people.

Secondly, the majority of the subjects of docupoems are results of political stances and measures; therefore, their subjects are mainly victims; dead, injured, dismissed, or annihilated. Again, because of political alternations, they are not given enough heed in media or history. As a result, poetry comes to the rescue.

The third finding revolves around the controversy about the nature of this kind of writing and letting it down as non-poetry



and non-literary. The study shows that the imaginative force of the poets in these poems play greater roles than the real story of the events themselves; and it is this point that draws more attention to contents of the stories than any other method of publication.

Fourthly, the Kurdish poetry was and still active in this respect and the Kurdish poets, classics and moderns, played great roles in keeping a large number of miseries alive.

The last conclusion is that while some of the English docupoems documented harsh and miserable events at home and some others abroad; its Kurdish companion focused mainly upon the local subject matters because of two main reasons: Firstly, the Kurds suffered from numerous unnoticed catastrophes throughout history, and , Secondly, none of the horrible deeds against this people drew the attention of other poets or men of letters.

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