

Drama of paintings as represented in current Iraqi students' art

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Abstract

This research paper is based on a theoretical study conducted by me during my doctoral programme. It answered the question: How would students at the Translation Department in the University of Basrah depict important events in their life through drawings? This question was based upon Ruth Leitch's (2008; 2006) and Shaun McNiff's (2007) creative methodology! Seven drawings (with a summary note on each one written by the student) were collected from first stage students in which he students depicted their timelines. The data revealed such feelings as sadness, betrayal and the difficulty to make the right choice between what the emotional rational decisions. Hope and resilience were also revealed. As this research paper is qualitative in design, its findings cannot be generalized beyond its context. Future researchers could involve students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th stages in the Translation Department; further studies could also include students from other settings in Basra (or other provinces) where English is taught - such as the English department at the College of Arts or College of Education. The study concluded with the recommendation that this creative methodology be included in the curriculum of college of Arts as well as college of educations not just in Iraq, but in the whole area of Middle East.

Keywords: creative methodology, drama, paintings, drawings, and impromptu.

Introduction

This study is an application of a theoretical study conducted by me on my doctoral programme (Hamood, 2021). Prior to discussing the importance of drawings, it is significant to define the term *drama*. The word drama "*draō*" is of Latin origin meaning "to do", or "to act". Or it is the common word for "theatre". It is also derived from a Greek word meaning "to see" or "to view" (Abd Al-Wahab, 2007). It is the "[re]presentation of story or an idea through dialogue and

action" (<https://www.scribd.com/document/109252359/Literature-Notes-on-Drama>). Like prose fiction, drama employs both characters, plot and develop certain themes in its reality representation; just like poetry, it adopts various language resources including verse (Arp & Johnson, 2006, p. 1027). For Gustav Freytag, the German novelist and playwright, drama is the exposure of feelings/ emotions for themselves, but to lead at the end to a dramatic action (Al-Juboori, 2013).

Derived from the Greek *theaomai*, meaning “to see,” (<https://www.britannica.com/art/theatre-art>), theatre is regarded as the father of arts through which the art types including cinema and photography and music do intermingle to form a final picture of the dramatic work (artistic work). This is after there has been a need to a variety in thoughts to bring the attention of the receiver intellectually and emotionally to the artistic work. With advancement in all walks of life - including art and literature - literary criticism, along with other artistic trends, have broken away from traditional thinking, moving towards post modernism. Example of this modernity is poetry which is no more belonging to the ancient rhyme and rhythm! Theatre also has abandoned the old theories favoring absurdity and illogic in thought. The same is true for painting where the painter has started showing the dramatic desire through the skillful distribution of masses, spaces and colors in order to create a drawing imitating the current familiar trends. The painting took many dramatic forms through which the current re-newer painter was able to create different images inside the art-work that made the painting of dramatic nature!

Visual methods have been first been used in research in anthropology (Guillemin, 2004). Example of which is Bateson and Mead study (1942), where photographs were used to describe Balinese life! Photographs were also used in sociology! Becker’s (1974) discussion of the visual methodologies and his analyses were a notable example! Ziller’s (1990) studies of auto- photography was another successful example as he examined personal meaning making through the utilization of peoples’ photographs of themselves and of the different events occurring in their lives. Then this methodology developed into what today is called Art based Research!

Arts-based research refers to “the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of art, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience” by the researcher and their research participants (McNiff, 2007, p. 29). In this current study, impromptu drawings are used as a form of arts-based research. Impromptu drawings refer to drawings that are “inspired by a suggested theme although no specific subject matter is specified” (Leitch, 2008, p. 46). These drawings are used in this study because, as Furth (2002) argues, they allow the researcher to “see how the inner situation can be projected onto the outer world and how the outer world affects the inner world” (Furth, 2002, p. 24). So such drawings can trigger the participants to speak (i.e. provide oral narratives) about the difficulty they faced and they joy they experienced. In additions, the drawings are used for two reasons:

They help participants to engage holistically, creatively and practically in in an activity that connects with the imagination;

They can provide an opportunity to represent experience, a tangible process and product, within which stories are inherent or out of which stories are (re)created (Leitch, 2008, p. 39).

It is crucial to note here that although the impromptu drawings have been used with children and young people, in such studies as Kendrick and McKay (2002), Leitch (2008), Leitch and Mitchell (2007), the ideas in these studies could be usefully applied to adults (Leitch, 2013).

In addition to the drawings impromptu, this study will adopt narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is defined as an inquiry “out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). Tom Barone’s (2007) account of narrative construction also stresses the fact that narrative inquiry is based on stories, when he described it as “an approach to social research in which data are configured into any of a variety of diachronic, or storied, format (Barone, 2007, p. 454).

Drawing on Ruth Leitch’s (2008; 2006) and Shaun McNiff’s (2007) creative methodology, the researchers are very much interested in how the learners express their own life experiences through drawings. Thus the research asks one main question: *how do English and Translation Dept. students represent paintings dramatically through their drawings.*

Literature Review

Dramatic Elements

Dramatic elements are regarded as the foundation for the dramatic work. Through these elements the dramatic work – be it a play or a painting – comes into existence. They are the character, plot, idea, synography, and the general psychological atmosphere (AlJuboori, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Furth (2002) holds, referring to the power of drawings, that the use of drawings, dreams, fantasies, active imagination, or combination of these forms of symbolic communication, broadens self-understanding. We learn to recognize our weaknesses, fears and negative traits, as well as our accomplishments through the analytic interpretation of these expressions. Such expressions can help us realize who we are (Furth, 2002, p. 15). Leitch and Mitchell (2007) also put a heavy emphasis on the fact that drawings help provide us with unique insights that can never be supplied by any other research tools. They elaborate further on the significance of drawings as an influential research instrument and state that such research tools can invoke the richness and expressiveness of the participants’ experiences, which could include such aspects as “visual, emotional, visceral, and sensory as well as rational” (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007, p. 54).

Leitch, (2006) and Furth (2002, 1988) argue that both the conscious (the given theme) and unconscious (represented in the process of drawing the picture) can be interconnected. This is substantiated through the pictures that the participants (also myself as a co-participant) would draw. Although the drawings are driven by a suggested theme

(thus different from spontaneous pictures), they would still have access to (and reveal) the unconscious self of the participants. This approach makes such a method of collecting data unique and substantially different from interviews and questionnaires which have been traditionally used, despite their usefulness in the educational, sociological and psychological fields cannot be underestimated.

It is worth noting in this context that narrative inquiry has mainly been adopted in such fields as nursing (Schwind, 2003; Chan, 2002), multiculturalism (Conle, 2004; Phillion, 2002), Ethnic studies (Chan, 2003), Cross-cultural studies (He, 2003) and other fields. Narratives (stories), however, would be employed in this study along with drawings so as to uncover the the depth and breadth of the participants' timeline. I would make use of narratives, just like Chan (2003), due to my conviction that narratives draw us closer to the peoples' experience! I would utilize stories, Like Benner (2000), because I strongly believe that they can make the "intangible" aspects of the participants' experience tangible!

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) specify three commonplaces in narrative enquiry: temporality, sociality and place. By temporality they mean that the events investigated are in temporal transition (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). According to them, sociality is connected with personal and social conditions. Personal conditions refer to the desires, feelings, hopes, moral dispositions and aesthetic reactions of the inquirer and their participants. Social conditions point to the context surrounding the participants' stories. They also include another dimension to sociality commonplace by linking it to the relationship between the inquirer and the research participants. The place means the specific location(s) in which the events and the inquiry happen. These three commonplaces are relevant to this study though I apply creative methodology where images and narratives are intermingled. For example, the time changes as the participants would be asked to portray their timeline – in this case time would change in the drawing! In their description – fleshed out I the few words (or lines) they note on the painting - the participants need also to consider the social context that surrounds them (their specific social conditions and relations) along with the place. It can be noticed from the aforementioned discussion that each of the two modes

of inquiry (impromptu drawings and narratives) has its own merits. However, the blending of them would yield more insights (better understanding) of the phenomenon under research (Leitch, 2008; Leitch and Mitchell, 2007).

Methodology

This study was based upon Ruth Leitch's (2013; 2008; 2006), Leitch & Mitchell (2007) and Shaun McNiff's (2007) creative methodology. According to this approach, the participants are asked to draw a painting/ a drawing each that reflect their timeline. In addition to the drawing, the participant needs to write a few words/ or lines on the painting describing its content. As a new and supportive tool, the researcher has asked an assistance from a close friend Dr. Saeed Mustafa who is a literature and criticism specialist. Dr. Saeed was asked to expand on the participants' narratives by adding fine details – such as the description of the lines and their implications – without deviating from the portrayal of the participants' narrative.

Nineteen participants have voluntarily participated in this research. They are from the Department of Translation, College of Arts, University of Basrah. They are males and females and from different age groups (their age ranges between 18 to 60). They also belong to different socio-economic backgrounds – some of them are from rich, high class families and some belonging to middle and lower classes in Basra.

We formed a group on the Telegram where all the instructions were explained to them. Drawings were also received via this medium. Despite that nineteen paintings have been collected, the analysis involved only seven. The research was conducted through five months' time – from March to September 2021. The participants are all belonging to the Department of Translation, College of Arts, where the researcher teaches. Five of them are females and one male. They are aged between 18-40.

Analysis

The received data were qualitative in nature. Thus, they were analyzed thematically according to the following creative process (on Box 1, adapted from Leitch and Mitchell, 2007, p. 58).

Outlined below are the basic protocol and directions used to guide and facilitate participants during the research process:

- Following on from our previous discussion, thank you all for agreeing to work with me further in this study! As you are aware, today's task involving drawing pictures!
- This is not an art class! It is just another way of getting at and helping us to understand our experiences of difficulties and joys with English!
- You cannot make a mistake or get this wrong!
- The task is to draw a picture in which you portray important incident(s) in your life. It is called "My Timeline" Do not think too deeply about the act of drawing! Just draw the first thing that comes to your mind!
- Be imaginative! Do not feel constrained! You might see your difficulties and joys as anything! How would they look? How do they feel? Allow yourself to be creative!
- For the sake of simplicity, take an A4 sheet of paper and choose a few colored pens to complete two drawings!
- Due to the pandemic, please send your drawing on the group formed on the telegram.
- Have as many attempts as you like at the drawings until you are satisfied with the drawing! If you are unsure about anything, please ask!
- When you have finished, choose a fictitious or a made-up name (for anonymity) and write it on the back of your completed drawing!
- When you have finished, your pictures will be collected and kept safe!
- Remember, you will have the chance to talk to me about your drawings online or in a meeting that will be arranged later!

Findings

Below is the description of the drawings:

Asmaa

The volunteer artist set out, through her psychological mindset, to express their overwhelming feelings from a starting point leading to the action! The painter used a line – which is no more than a group lines and of round adjacent dots (sometimes slanted and extended – gave the art-work a value through its dramatic representation, depicting the reality of the human being who leads a hard life!

The novice artist also placed two art masses in the middle of the painting in a semi-circular form – which in fact two faces for one personality, surrounded by the duality of hope and despair, which is a clear indication of the miserable state of the self who tries to challenge. So, this art mass has extended to fill in the whole space in the painting to portray the psycho- sociological state! After that, the artist moved through the connotation of colors to an idea – not far away from the artist's space of thought swinging, again, between hope and despair. Added to that the ordeal of living freely through the two colors (i.e. the blue and red), forming through this antipode a dramatic color mass. The red expressing danger, anger, rejection, while the blue denoting

nobleness. But the green refers to truthfulness, good and abundance, while the yellow showing how illness, envy, and grudge dominating the society!

It is further noticed the space of the painting was teeming with color circles that convey the general mood for the art. The plot is recognized in the unity of the topic and action! Below is painting (1).

Painting (1) Hope!

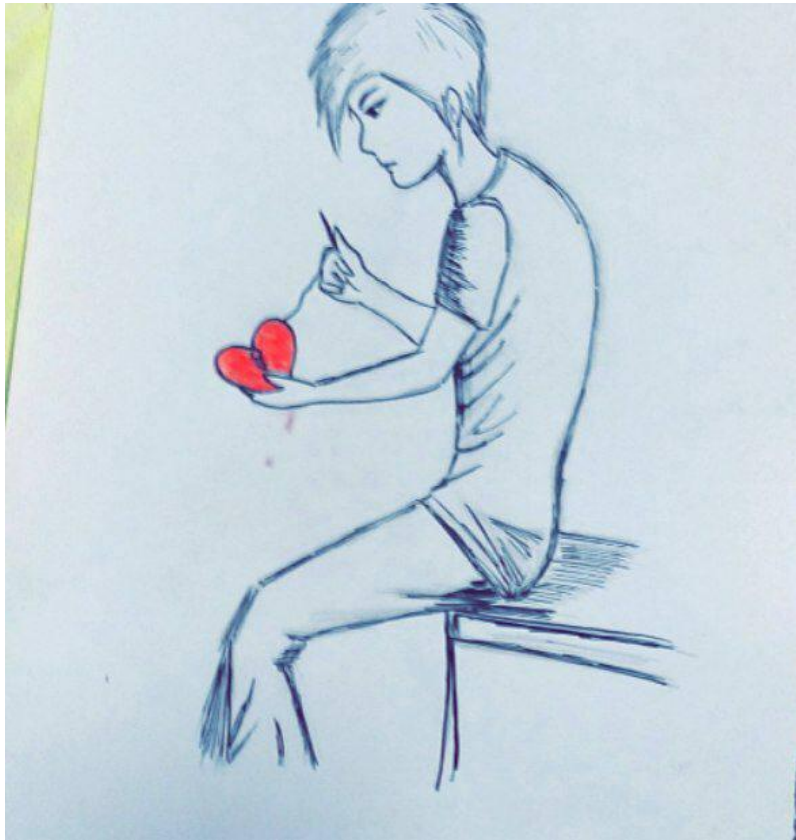


Idan Abbas

The data revealed that a few artist resorted here in his dramatic representation to the open, unlimited representation of the intended meaning! This has placed the character in the center of the dramatic work influence! He has drew his painting in a picturesque space in which the mass dives. It is noticed here that the character is aspiring for escaping a tragedy. He has also resorted to focusing on the character in this drawing and gave him a very influential role.

The artist also created the plot through the sequence of actions that actively interact with the topic – through a person sitting a slanted table sewing his broken heart! His heart was wounded – that is why it is the only part in the drawing that is in red! Such a heart is beating with life, but angry with it at the same time! This heart was wounded by a certain cheating, but being treated with stitches!

The idea represented the frame for the drawing which is no more than an interwoven texture linking the treason to what the character's action! The character is trying his best to chin up and overcome this dilemma. Here is painting (2): Chinning up!

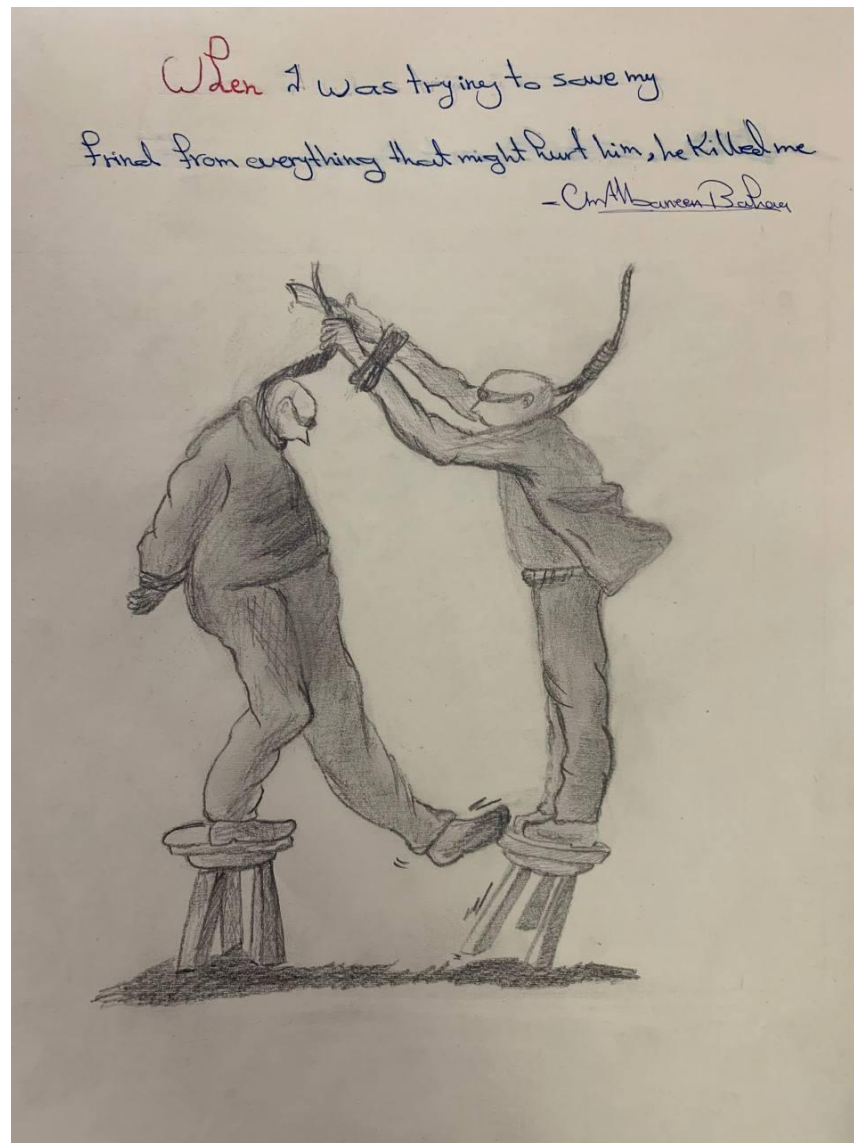


Om Al-Baneen

As clearly seen, there are two persons in this drawings. The first person is trying to save the second. But it is noticed that the second – although the first person was trying to help him, kicks the chair, with this kick executing the first! Is this the reward for the one who tries to help him?

Through this scene, the artist showed that hegemony is prevailing in this painting. This is done through the central mass to which the topic points. The lines in this art pierce are dramatic and their movements are distinguished through the two characters. The lines that are risen towards heaven – represented by the two hands of the first person – were once expressing nobility, selflessness, and faithfulness to (save) a friend. But the lines employed in the embodiment of the second person are declining! This clearly denotes to the moral looseness of the second character.

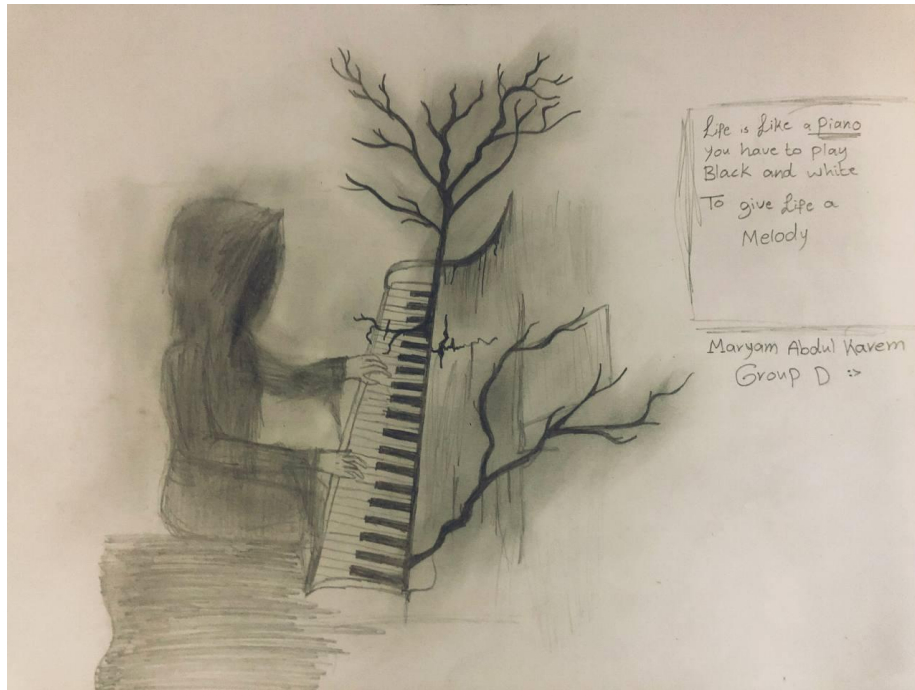
The way the two persons behaved in this drawing takes the receiver to a dramatic plot that utilized the duality of faithfulness and treason! This was revealed through the psychology of the art-word that is infused with pain, pity and anger! The artist showed the dramatic image of execution in a special manner with a clear beginning, but no end! Here is drawing (3), Betrayal!



Mariam

The idea in this art-work is personal (and social) one. It talks about a girl's state of mind during the year divided between happy and sad days! But the general atmosphere suggests that there is another philosophy, which the artist tried to uncover!

The lines of the pencil were slanted, going upward and forward. All these lines gave a dramatic form with different denotations! Piano playing refers to the daily struggle of life! As regards the tree trunks that sprung from the piano - without leaves - representing the days that passed announcing the dawn of the age and a painful experience! The artist here recounting what happens to people in their daily routine - not negatively influenced by it herself. The proof of that are the lines which show no decline. This artist describes her state of mind in a dramatic manner. It is realized that the psychology of the painting is relaxed for the space is open as the drawing is never framed. Below is drawing (4): Life is ups and downs!



Life is like a Piano
you have to play
Black and white
To give life a
Melody

Maryam Abdul Warem
Group D =>

Abrar Faeq

The artist expressed her own pain and suffering! She is so weak that she cannot face her problems – be they social or romantic. The drawing at first shows an individual state of mind where the declining lines clearly represent her vulnerability!

The painting is occupied by a lady – who is the main mass in the drawing – sitting on a chair putting her head down on her arm, crying. What a miserable state! This is a dramatic scene showing the sad situation the lady encountered! The plot in the painting is well-knit, depicting the inner struggle! This artist has drawn this art piece not for the sake of art, but rather for personal purposes! The main idea in this painting is realistic, dealing with a sociological state facing many girls. The idea was very courageous – taking into account the topic sensitivity. This painting, last but not least, is an embodiment of the fragility of the woman! Drawing (5) Crying is as follows:



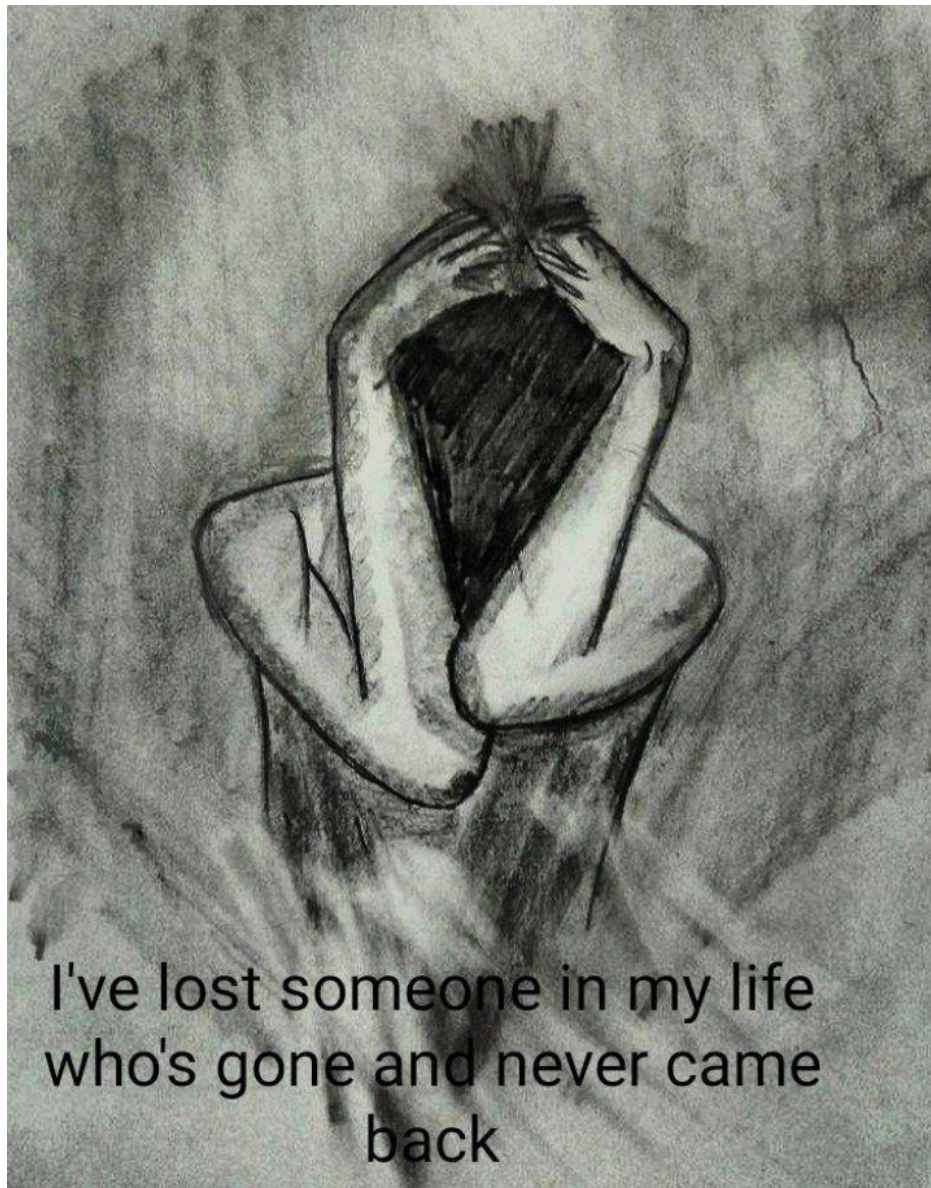
Iqbal

The drawing below – and the written narrative – show that the artist has uncovered loss. According to her, this loss is perpetual! We, as spectators, are unsure of the real situation that has led to the departure of that person. To her, he/she is so dear. We are also uncertain whether this person is a male or a female. She just did not mention!

Examining the psychological aspect of the painting, it can be realized that this loss is affecting her gravely. She is actually holding her head with both hands as if she is telling the world that she does not want to see anyone. She is retreating to herself searching for the security that is lost. She maybe tries to gather her strength! She is indeed thinking of ways of salvation – though it was she who did

imprison herself inside a dark world. She does not want to see anyone. This is partly because she wants to hide her tears, weakness and pain. Another reason for covering her face could be that she is diving into her unconscious, seeking to re-discover herself! Once she is so strong, she is now so vulnerable: she does not know what the fate hides for her!

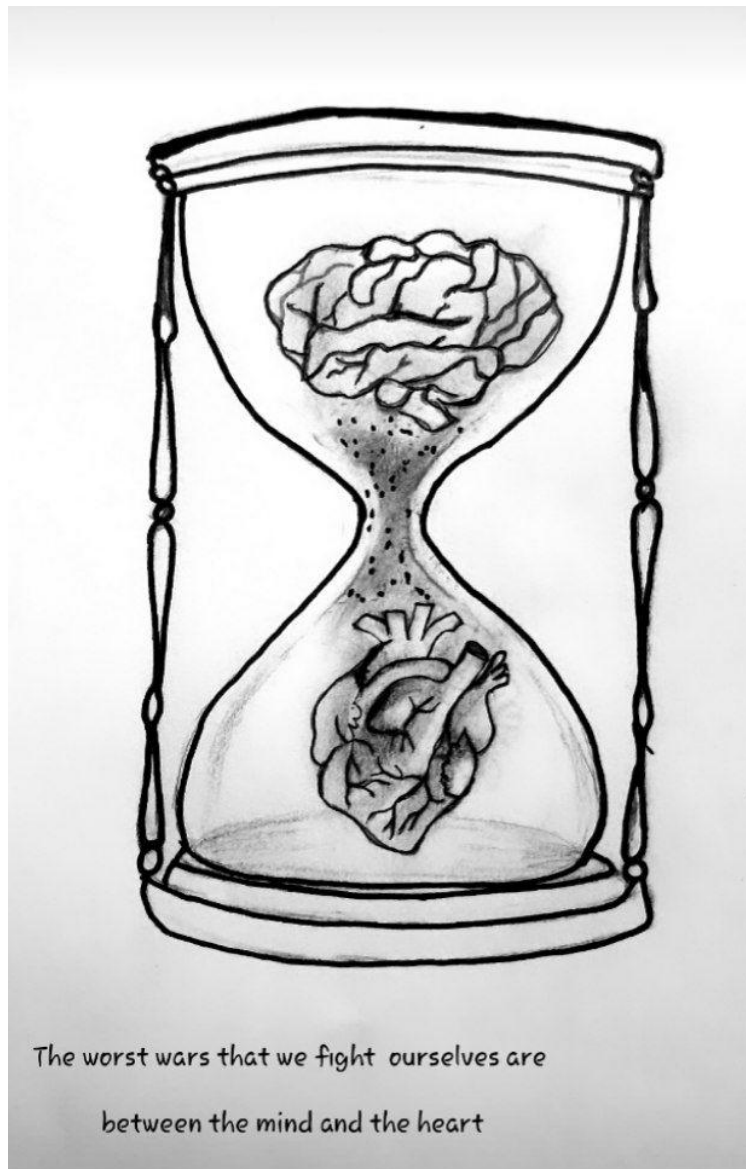
The setting for this scene is before or at bedtime! This is overtly recognized in the way she is dressed: she is in a bed dress - as she is revealing her slim, so beautiful arms and shoulders. This setting is telling: the person she is badly missing could be her lover. She could be now thinking of the vehement love story that she cannot regain. Below is drawing (6) Loss:



Maryam Al-Mousawi

This student revealed a universal issue - a battle fought inside each of us! It is the inner struggle! We are faced with many incidents where we need to make a choice. Our passion aspires for some pleasure while our mind seeks perfection.

Examining the drawing, it can be recognized that the heart and the mind are placed inside a sand glass. This clearly refers to the temporality of our life. Time is passing and we need to make the right decision quickly. The clock is ticking thus we should not wait long! Heart-Mind Conflict is drawing (7):



Discussion

The collected data uncovered that the participants did speak about sensitive experiences - mostly sad! For example, two of the six showed women hiding their heads. This might never have been revealed by traditional interview or questionnaire techniques. As these students were asked to draw, they just drew their sadness without even thinking about it – it just happened unconsciously. So as we close our mouths - holding a pencil and a sheet of paper - the unconscious self is activated! This is never surprising given the miserable situation the Iraqi students find themselves in. Iraq Educational system has been deteriorating since 1980s (Issa & Jamil, 2010) and never better. Many people have been trying to escape and seek asylum in some foreign countries (Koikkalainen, Kyle & Nykänen, 2020; Yijälä, 2017).

Om Al-Baneen painting revealed betrayal. But this betrayal is not a normal one! It is too serious and from a really close friend! Though female, she showed this treason in the guise of two males. Although on the surface it seems that this issue is not directly linked to her, the link to her own life can be seen in the written narrative of it! Again, this drawing has implications in her and all the Iraqi students' own life: life is really full of betrayals in Iraq where no one is actually safe! Due to the daily life hardships, true friendship is something extremely rare.

The inner conflict portrayed by Mariam Almousawi is a universal theme. We are all facing the dilemma of trying to make the right choice between our mind and what our heart wants! It is the "worst" and the fiercest battles that one can fight - a daily issue revealed through Mariams' drawing. It is important to note in this respect that Iraq has been in multiple conflicts since 1980s. This is unconsciously

reflected in the students' description of the painting. Multiple conflicts and wars have beset people's daily life (Rawaf, *et al.* 2014).

Hope and resilience were also clear in the data. This is not unusual for students who are at the 1st stage of the university. They are still young and still strong. They think that they can beat all the difficulties with their will.

Conclusion

This study was theatrically based the creative methodology where drawings are mixed with narrative! This paper included seven first stage university students' participants. Creative methodology was utilized. This methodology revealed aspects of the participants' lives that cannot otherwise be captured by traditional research methods (Leitch, 2006).

Since this research paper is qualitative in design, its findings cannot be generalized. That is, they cannot be thought of as representing/or including all the students in the Translation Department or even the first stage students of this departments. Future studies could involve students from all stages in this Translation Department; further studies may involve students from other locations in Basra (or other provinces) where English is taught - such as the English department at the College of Arts or College of Education!

This empirical study is the first to be conducted in Iraq as involving the use of drawings + narratives. Thus, the authors recommend that such a methodology be included in the curriculums of both college of Arts as well as colleges of education in Iraq.

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