

A Comparative Study of the Audience Element in Contemporary Persian and Arabic Poetry: Case Study; Ahmad Shamlou and Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, the audience and understanding of it constitute one of the fundamental requirements of any literary work. A work remains alive and dynamic only as long as it has an audience. When a capable writer or poet takes up the pen to create their artistic work, the most important element they consider is the audience.

Given the socio-political transformations occurring in the present era, audience awareness in contemporary Persian and Arabic poetry has gained increasing significance. In this period, the poet no longer writes poetry merely for personal expression or addresses only the court and a small circle of society; rather, they align with the broader community and compose poetry influenced by the social issues and events of their time. The aim of this research is a comparative study of audience awareness in the poetry of two contemporary poets from Iran and Iraq (Shamlou and al-Sayyab). Considering the common cultural, social, and political contexts of the poets' lifetimes, it must be said that both composed their poetry consciously, knowledgeably, and with an understanding of the audience's needs. Both are poets committed to society and have placed their poetry in the service of humanity, empathizing with humankind and the surrounding community. Hence, they share a common audience: the most significant addressees of their poetry are humanity, God, the beloved, natural phenomena, and mental concepts, among which humanity—in its various states and forms—occupies a special place. This research employs an analytical-descriptive method to conduct a comparative study of the poetry of Shamlou and al-Sayyab, seeking to answer the following questions: What is the position of humanity as an audience in the poetry of Shamlou and al-Sayyab? Moreover, what are the differences in tone and theme when addressing God in the works of these two poets?

Methodology

The present study has been conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach within the framework of comparative literature studies. In this research, a collection of poems by Ahmad Shamlou and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab was first compiled and studied through library-based methods. Subsequently, employing note-taking techniques, samples of poems by the two poets in which the audience is present either directly or indirectly were extracted. In the next stage, the collected data were categorized based on audience-awareness components (such as type of audience, tone of address, socio-political context, and function of the audience within the text). Finally, a comparative analysis of the poems was carried out relying on the descriptive-analytical method within the framework of the American School, aiming to examine the structure and content of address in the poetry of the two poets while elucidating the similarities and differences in audience-awareness in contemporary Persian and Arabic poetry.

Results and Discussion

Ahmad Shamlou and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, two prominent figures in contemporary Persian and Arabic poetry, lived under similar socio-political circumstances. Both faced tyranny, poverty, discrimination, and oppression, and their poetry reflects these lived experiences. However, what links their poetry—particularly in terms of audience awareness—is their committed view of humanity, society, and existence.

In Shamlou's poetry, audience engagement is aimed at awakening and raising consciousness. He speaks to contemporary humanity, writes of its pains, and calls it to action. Addressing humanity in Shamlou's poetry is sometimes direct and rhetorical, and at other times takes the form of a dialogue with the beloved or God, yet in all cases, the audience carries the weight of meaning and message. Through poetic language, Shamlou builds a bridge between the poet and society, making the audience not merely a listener but a partner in thought and suffering. In contrast, al-Sayyab also places the audience at the center of his poetry, but with a different tone. He speaks more to an internal, personal, and sometimes imaginary audience—one that could be God, a woman, or even the poet himself.

In al-Sayyab's poetry, the audience is often situated in a position of suffering, poverty, illness, or exile, and the address assumes a soothing, confessional, or protesting function. Using emotional imagery and novel metaphors, al-Sayyab invites the audience into his own suffering, subjective world. In addressing God, both poets employ a language of protest, albeit with different approaches. Shamlou, with a philosophical and dialectical perspective, challenges God and ultimately arrives at reconciliation; whereas al-Sayyab, in an elegiac tone, regards God as a refuge for his pains and asks for death. This difference reflects the two poets' distinct ways of confronting existence and human destiny. In addressing the beloved, Shamlou sees the beloved as a symbol of freedom, beauty, and liberation, speaking to them with poetic and sometimes mythical language, whereas al-Sayyab links the beloved to the contemporary woman—a woman who is both beloved and a social fighter. This perspective transforms al-Sayyab's poetry into an arena for the representation of women in Arab society. Ultimately, the audience in the poetry of both poets is not a passive listener but an aware, empathetic agent.

Conclusion

The present study shows that the audience element in the poetry of Shamlou and al-Sayyab is not merely a linguistic and literary construct but a reflection of their worldview, social commitment, and lived experience. Both poets, within similar socio-political contexts, have chosen the audience as the communicative axis of poetry with society and have used address with God, humanity, and nature to express human suffering.

In addressing God, Shamlou adopts a philosophical and protesting view, challenging human creation and ultimately reaching an inner reconciliation; whereas al-Sayyab, with a pained and personal tone, sees God as a refuge for his sufferings and asks Him for death and peace.

Concerning humanity, Shamlou sees humans as a social and active audience, placing his poetry in the service of awakening and resistance; while al-Sayyab portrays humans as deprived, lonely, and victimized. Shamlou's address to humanity is conscious and stirring, whereas al-Sayyab's is elegiac and empathetic.

Regarding nature, both poets use natural phenomena as an audience or a context for address, but Shamlou's approach is more metaphorical and philosophical, while al-Sayyab employs nature for emotional and social imagery. Both poets, by addressing natural phenomena in symbolic language, explore social issues and their personal states.

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