

## *A Comparative Study between Adonis and Shamloo*

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### ***Abstract***

*Modernism is the parcel and product of life in a new era which is dramatically different from previous times since this new era has been witnessing dramatic changes in all aspects namely social relations, economy, science, technology, art, literature. One of its manifestations in literature is modern poetry which breaks from traditional poetry linguistically, grammatically, and thematically. Poets in the Middle East have also embraced this new movement and mirrored its new techniques in their poetry. However, the works of these poets were analyzed separately. Accordingly, this article attempts to redress this scholarly neglect. Thus it seeks to compare and contrast two norm-breaking poets from the Middle East: Adonis and Shamloo thematically, grammatically, and linguistically.*

**Key Words:** Adonis, Shamloo, Modern Poetry, Norm-breaking.

### ***Introduction***

Ali Ahmad Saeed, also known as Adonis is one of the contemporary Arab poet, critic and theorist. He is renowned in Arab literary circles for his innovation and his norm-breaking technique. There is also another poet this time in Persia who is also known as a norm breaker himself, critics often put these two poet in the same category because they both tried to invent a new poetic language. In his book “Adonis Reading in Tehran” Reza Ameri points out this resemblance: “comparing Adonis to Ahmad Shamloo in Iran might be the indication to this fact hat Shamloo also had a keen interest in ancient literature, in fact he somehow reread the Beyhaghi and Hafez... and translated part of the world literature as well including works of

Lorca. This made him who he is and puts him in the same category as Adonis. He could even be a Noble Prize candidate like him.” (Ameri, 2010, 37).

It is important to know that Adonis’ poetic language is mystical and surrealistic, that’s why sometimes it is unintentionally obscure. He believed that how we use language or our word choice is the scale to differentiate between poetry and prose. He stands above the other poets of his own era who try to find a new poetic language by creating new links between words and phrases.

Anyhow Adonis invented a new poetic language and through various poem collections created a unique and special poetic culture while one of the critics believes that in the beginning he struggled with poetic language more than his contemporary poets.

When we read Shamloo it is obvious that he has his unique poetic language. Using innovative techniques, originality and of course his norm-breaking habit the poet creates a special language. This defines his poetry and many critics believe that this norm-breaking habit of his is one of the most outstanding quality of his art.

Dr. Parvin Salajeghé in her book “The Prince of Ceramics” surveys the poetry of Shamloo in detail. She describes Shamloo’s norm-breaking habit as such: “norm-breaking is deviation or exile from the common and accepted norms in the span of a language which using properly can be artistic. It can lead to mastery in language and end those worn out and over used norms in language that can no longer convey a proper meaning or show the beauty or singularity of the language. Norm-breaking is one of the most important qualities of Shamloo’s poetry shown through numerous areas and lead to its outstanding artistic quality.”

In this article we point out and compare some of the most important examples of this norm-breaking in the works of these two poets.

### ***The value of words in poetry***

Since the old days poets and scholars divided words into two class: appropriate and inappropriate. Adonis though believes that in a poem words are worthless by themselves. Their value lies in their versification and their order in the system of language. He also believes that in order to create new meaning in poetry every poet should annihilate old meaning and leave the old or traditional language behind.

Poetic vision in Adonis belief, first of all, is technical structure and then its way of interpretation and presentation. He believes that way of presentation is more important than what is presented. For him the emphasis is on unity of form and content.

For example in his poem collection “Leaves in the Wind” and at the beginning of an ode called “Children” he describes the image of death and life as such:

*In the dust of prayers*

*The dawn was drowned and died*

*But children are like spring*

*Who bear the face of sun (Adonis, 1996, p.123).*

The link between the words in this poetic image is even goes beyond the ordinary boundaries because for the reader the word “mist” carries a negative image but this mist is not an ordinary one, it is linked to the word prayer and praying and thus mist becomes a holy mist.

The Persian poet, Ahmad Shamloo, has another approach to the value of the words and their recreation in order to create his own poetic language. He tries to create beauty and artistic quality, using the archaic potential of the language. Which means that he uses the language of the prose of the first linguistic era of Persian language. He uses its words as well as the archaic form of verbs. For example in his poem we read:

*...learn we wilt with thee that sacred word*

*Though for this*

*An agonizing torment*

*Shall thee endure.*

*Obscurity, Adonis' most important poetic trait.*

Many critics believe that poetic language of Adonis is complicated and obscure because it is highly mystical. One of these critics Dr. Ehsan Abbas believes that this obscurity is because of the tendency of Adonis toward surrealism and mysticism. Dr. Hossein Marveh defends the poetic language of Adonis and describes it as symbolic and mystical. He says: “in the poetry of Adonis language and words deviate from their ordinary referent and meaning. Their form and interpretive and expressive structure have a kind of sentimental value.”

For example in the “Ode on Time”

*Sheaf of time is my arms and my head on the fire*

*What is this blood going down sands*

*The mating of this painful spark with eye, is attraction*

*So that you can see your home like a bullet moves towards God (Adonis, 1996, pp.5-7).*

We can clearly see the use of mystical language in the word “ravishment”. It comes from ravish meaning grab, abduction or destruction. This goes back to the end of the season for corn hence the abduction or destruction of corn.

The other form of obscurity is antithesis and oppositions that one faces frequently in Adonis’ poetry for example in his “First Odes” and in an ode called “Dawn” he says:

*Your son in my joints*

*Like snow, like fire;*

*Oh anxiety which emerges on my path*

*Oh dawn, oh my friend (Adonis, 1996, p.64).*

In this poem we have the opposition between the two words “snow or ice” and “fire”. But this opposition is only superficial because paying more attention we can see that both of those words point to the same incident which is death either by freezing or burning.

In the last part of the poem “the end of sky” the poet says:

*He desires not to know his days, the days devour things, the days create days.*

*Wishes not to recognize the days anymore*

*Days that devour things*

*Or give birth to things (Adonis, 1996, 157).*

Here the poetic image of the day is the same as time. Time that kill things so they can be resurrected again. This shows Adonis’s believe in resurrection and after life, that is how he resolves the antithesis in his poem. Antithesis in his poetry comes from his philosophical and mystical way of thinking which force the reader to think. These oppositions are part of the obscurity and intricacy in his poetry.

One other reason for obscurity in Adonis’ poetry is the use of metaphor for example in his ode “Season of Tears” or “Falcon of Quraish” he uses the root as a metaphor and links it to the word ash creating a bizarre compound

*Give me a leaf to wrap my life in it*

*And traverse on the ashen roots.*

The poet follows by:

*I will open up my veins and drag a river out*

*That carries heaven, whirling around the sunken star (volcanic fires).*

### ***The phonetic structure in the poetry of Adonis and Shamloo***

There is no doubt that Adonis acknowledges the efforts Khalil-Ibn-Ahmad about the laws of rhythm while he believes that poetry is not just about rhythm. Sometimes a poem is sound but not rhythmic and sometimes highly rhythmical passages are not poem at all. He believes that although prose is without rhythm but because of its inner music is part of poetry.

Based on his opinion the music in poetry can be obtained using other ways like beautiful words or quasi poem form. This is no the complete denial of rhythm or rhyme but explains that music in a poem is not just through rhythm or rhyme and rhythm is not the only difference between prose and poetry. The difference is the special way that the language is used. Music in prose is not just the acknowledgment of ancient rhythms, it is acknowledging our music of life and experiences and this is a music made and remade in daily bases. He believes that rhythm only exist in the presence of beauty and grace. Shamloo like Adonis turns away from metric form and tries to find new possibilities in order to create music and rhythm. The use of potentials of words especially tendency toward the use of archaic words give the poet the ability to create a delightful music. Dr. Shafiei Kadkani in his paper point this out and says: “the use of language in its archaic form might be one of the most well-known and highly used techniques to give dignity to language after the technique of using rhythm and rhyme... in Shamloo’s work. This use of language in its archaic form might be one of the most distinguished features that fills the lack of rhythm through rhyming”.

Understanding this point, Shamloo tries to give music to his poem using other means rather than rhythm or rhyme. In general the most important techniques in creating music in Shamloo’s poetry are as such:

- 1- The use of language in its archaic form (prose of the first linguistic era of Persian language).
- 2- The use of similar consonant and vowels and repeating them.
- 3- Using words with the same rhythm or words that rhyme together in or at the end of each line.
- 4- Repetition of one or several words at the beginning, middle and end of each line.

Here for better clarifying the points mentioned examples from the poems of Shamloo is being presented:

*I traverses the seven kingdom in toil and pain*

*Knocked on conjurer's door all in no avail*

*Sought the blue bird out in the wilderness, sought, sought in vein.*

Finally turned into a salamander, burnt in other people's fire

Or

*Leave you wide awake man if there is no one*

*Who shares with you a midnight sun*

*You seek flowers, there are thorns on the run*

*Sweet talk seeker gets disappointed with a pun*

*Norm-breaking, the style of Shamloo's poetry.*

Norm-breaking is very common in Shamloo's work. Sometimes to create his own unique poetic language, the poet, even combines different languages together. For example mixing formal and colloquial language or Persian and Latin. In general norm-breaking techniques of Shamloo can be categorized as such:

1- Mixing formal and colloquial language. For example:

Every foul-mouthed, stinky cow

Turns into an active volcano of fury

Look at this fool, he asks us proof for sun beam

2- Mixing Persian and Latin language.

3- Mixing two stream of narration (persona and poet) using dash technique.

4- Creating three separate languages, colloquial, formal and dramatic. For example:

You sweet boys of father of wilderness

I avow hundreds of separation for a minute of your company

Sea became saline by your tears

Turned away our fortune at our threshold

Tell not the secret of love to the wild

And if your tears became bitter

Cry not over the sea

5- Using hefty words and Arabic word with nunation. For example:

Body of supreme people, I saw, I  
In the high castle wearing golden collars  
And free folks in colorful patched garments  
Singing  
Walking to the gallows

6- Using colloquial words in formal speech. For example:

Time rose up in hasty strides  
Staggering in confusion

### ***Norm-breaking in the use of grammar***

In this case both poets have almost similar opinions. Both believe that the obligation of the poem is to affect the reader and creates reaction and emotion. If the poet has to choose this obligation and the grammar, meaning if the grammar stands in the way one should not sacrifices the meaning and concept to grammar. That's why in many occasions both poets changed the grammar. For example many times in Shamloo's poetry we have the shift in the components of a sentence, using prepositions in other meaning and even creating new compositions.

*Here are several examples to prove the point:*

*And like this, for tyranny, there is no sign more clear than the night.*

*Do that can be done in a shortest of time*

*For the weary henchman's hand is not in his control.*

*For many years to come, recreation of blue, longingly,*

*Is another reminder of the homeland.*

*And look at us, wide awake, conscious observer of our own sorrow.*

### ***Conclusion***

Shamloo, in comparison to Adonis, is less of a norm-breaker and more of an inventor. Besides Shamloo's innovations are limited to literature while Adonis extended his deviations to all part of his life and in the following years to come even changed his religion and demanded a change in the system of family. Exactly this norm-breaking behavior of him turned many critics against him. Another point of difference between these two poets is that

Adonis follows the art for art sake movement. For him the poem is a mean to its own end but Shamloo use an enigmatic language to talk about social problems.

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