

**The Reflection of Confessional Poetry Motifs in English and
Persian Poetry:
A Study of Robert Lowell's and Sohrab Sepehri's Selected Poems**

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Comparing the continent, English poetry enjoys a specific and peculiar place. According to Dr. Mojtaba Minavi it is only English poetry which possesses a particular position among other European countries; for the Germans revealed their capacities in music, the Italians in drawings, and the Russians in Novels, but the English like the Iranians indicated their capacities and spirits in poetry and mysticism. Confessional poetry in its historical course in the Western literature changed to be a different genre comparing with other similar kinds and genres during the past ages. English sonnet in the ۱۶th century (the Renaissance period of the English literature) while imitating the Italian ones, like those of Petrarch, achieved a high place after William Shakespeare composed his sonnets and lyrics. This kind of poetry experienced its changes within decades of one century, and in the next century (the ۱۷th c.) was mixed with elevated thoughts and viewed a thoughtful mode and then in the Romantic age flourished differently. Therefore, the English confessional poetry while seeing a cross-like-course, viewed various knotty and crucial changes in different ages. In the mid-twentieth century, another kind of confessional poetry, resting on individual and social backgrounds, appeared in the American literature, and while having cardinal differences with those of the past, it has been called and referred to as “Confessional Poetry”.

It seems that in both English and Persian literatures, the poet's mind and its mental operation have been central in literary criticisms and ontological reviews. Particularly in Persian poetry, where Ghazal (or Sonnet) and lyrical poetry have

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been viewed as typically high, spontaneous, and sentimental kind of poems, and in poet's volumes, an important part has been allocated to the lyrical poems so much that the poet had been bounded to compose lyrics, or to respond to internal and psychological moods or apocalyptic fervors. Hence, it is not strange to find lyrical poems and ghazals in poets' volumes from the ۱۲th century to the present in Persian poetry, even in those of Shahriyar and Emad-e-Khorasani's. However, in the history of English literature, poetry experienced a different direction. In its hundred years' ups and downs, English poetry, from the middle Ages to the present, viewed emotional reflections and also self-centered attitudes from the part of poets and the societies.

The term "Confessional Poetry" with its modern concepts and significance, was first introduced and presented by Macha Louis Rosenthal when studying Robert Lowell's book *Life Studies*. Such poetry, includes a biographic structure (an autobiographical frame), and first-person narrator (I). Therefore, it insists on the personal flavor and the poet's life and its atmosphere. Further, it has no interest to follow the poet's outside and nonrelated matters. Confession emphasizes the re-telling and reproduction of some personal experiences which are taboo to reveal due to the social norms and rules; such as: psychic complexes, mental crisis, emotional failures, childhood bitter experiences, perversions and private relations, etc. In other words, the term "Confession" is connected closely to legal issues, religious matters, and psychological affairs, and can suggest sin, mental collapse, crime, and criminalities. Thus it is not strange if some poets in this school evade to be recognized as the narrator of their poetry, and by taking distance they introduce an imaginative narrator in their poems. That is why a poet like Anne Sexton openly confessed that she is a confessional poet and does not care if she is identified as the speaker in her poems.

It is possible to name any kind of poem a confessional one, for many believe that poetry is the overflow of emotions and personal sentiments. This view emphasizes the ardor and overflowing aspect of the poet's emotions, but it is important to know that confessional poetry is particularly those poems which were emerged in the mid-twentieth century in American literature and were assumed as a vehicle for reflecting and mirroring miseries, pure pains, mental tremors, and the poets' internal apocalypses and anxieties. This school of poetry was formed in the ۱۹۵۰s and ۱۹۶۰s in USA, and the poets started to define poetry differently and far from what the modernists chose to see it. Hence, poets like Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John

Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and William De Witt Snodgrass tended to write poetry different from those of the modernists and what T. S. Eliot called the New Criticism Poetry.

In order to enlarge their writings, the confessional poets applied Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy methods in their poetry. In other words, many of the confessional poets experienced such medical methods directly or indirectly. Though this school of poetry was advanced among male poets, many female poets are connected with such kind of poetry and its implements. J. A. Cuddon in his book, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, reveals three fields for the confessional texts: ۱. Confessional Literature; ۲. Confessional Novel; and ۳. Confessional Poetry. In defining confessional poetry, he avers that it probably refers to the poetry which is called lyrics and ipso facto, because it is a report of the mental condition and the poet's internal emotions and his/her attitudes toward life (for example those of William Wordsworth, John Clare, and Gerard Manley Hopkins). However, a group of poetry reflects openly the inside moods, and by an analytical method discloses pains, anxieties, and mental complexes and also the poet's internal joys and pleasures.

In the middle of the Twentieth century, Confessional Poetry along with other literary trends flourished and paved the way for reflecting human's anxieties and dreads. Macha Louis Rosenthal (۱۹۱۷-۱۹۹۶) for the first time introduced the term Confessional Poetry in his study on Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (۱۹۵۹), a volume of poetry. Among the most significant properties of Confessional Poetry are the outcry of inner feelings and emotions, depicting hidden desires and aspirations, revealing personal and family privacies, presenting particular real names of people and places, using simple and lucid language, Verisimilitude, and finally attracting reader's confidence toward the text and its atmosphere. Such motifs can be traced in many Persian modern poets such as Sohrab Sepehri (۱۹۲۸-۱۹۸۰). Sepehri's «The Sound of Water's Steps» and Robert Lowell's «My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow» are two typical pieces of confessional poems which are discussed and reviewed in this article. Hence, by comparing and presenting details of confessions in their two selected poems, this research attempts to unfold their anxieties as modern poets and to clarify their mental stream of confessions.

Key words: Twentieth Century Poetry, Confessional Poetry, Self-revelation, Robert Lowell, Sohrab Sepehri.