

A comparative study of axial themes in Ahmad Shâmlu and Charles Baudelaire's Poetries

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Ahmad Shâmlu is considered as the founder of the “White poetry” in Persian literature. A wide range of themes are treated in his poetry, from love and woman to liberty and egalitarianism, as well as death and existential issues. Charles Baudelaire is not only known to be the pioneer of a school called “Decadence” but also a forerunner of Symbolism in French poetry. The principal themes used in his works are city and urban life, woman and love, death and spleen, liberty and modernity. Despite a hundred years dividing Shâmlu and Baudelaire, we could still search some similarities between their works and personalities. In this paper, based on a comparative study, we will try to study some examples of these essential topics. Besides that, through this research, we shall try to point out to the resemblances and the differences between the conceptual approaches of the Iranian and the French poet in regards to these themes. The method used in this research is a thematic one, borrowed from the approach of Philippe Chardin in his article “Thématique comparatiste” (published in *Précis de littérature comparée*, Paris, PUF, ۱۹۸۹). We will treat three issues in poetry of Shâmlu and Baudelaire: in the first part, we shall study women and love in work of each poet; secondly, we will focus on themes such as death and spleen respectively in their poetries; last but not least, we shall concentrate on liberty and social values in imaginary of Baudelaire and Shâmlu.

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Love and women: One could not be amazed by the degree at which this thematic is important in Shâmlu's poetry, as well as in Baudelaire's poetical creation. In several poetry collections, such as *Fresh air*, Ahmad Shâmlu is known as a great lover and composer of love poems. Particularly, after finding the real love of his life, Aida Sarkissian, Shâmlu makes plenty of Romances and Nocturnes. Although, in this collection, he admires the feminine consecration for their hero husbands, the majority of which were martyred at the time of ۱۹۵۳'s coup d'état (mostly recognized as Ajax Operation), in two collections published afterwards, named *Aida in mirror* and *Aida, tree, sabre and souvenir*, he combines a post-coup deception and a conception of happiness based on life. Speaking of Baudelaire, we see that he has never achieved the happiness nor found the real love. Torn up between ephemeral pleasures from easy girls and idealistic love to aristocratic women, the French poet wasn't apparently able to feel some kind of happiness. His sonnets as well as prose poetry provide witness to this fact.

Spleen and death: The second part of our article is dedicated to the place of themes like death and spleen in the work of the two poets. Considering that Baudelaire was deeply influenced by the concept of spleen, also essential to the stories of Edgar Allen Poe, which he translated in French, we have also investigated the death thematic, a close philosophical concept as much important. Based on this approach, it was essential to treat the same notions in poetical work of Ahmad Shâmlu, a poet profoundly concerned about consequent issues of life and death. In a poem about Turkmen girls working hardly in the north-east desert in Iran (included in *Fresh air* collection), the Iranian poet does not hesitate to admire their attendance, but at the same time their patience and the visceral spleen characterizing their routine life. In numerous poems, especially in his middle and late periods (۱۹۶۰-۱۹۹۰), Shâmlu is specially interested in matters like death and existential issues. One could not ignore the importance of these themes in the imaginary of both of these two poets, neither the divergence of their treatment, in the context of two totally different cultures and societies separated not only by a one-century gap, but also by an ideological cleavage.

Liberty and egalitarianism: This thematic is also an extremely important subject treated by the two Iranian and French poets, as well as by almost every great writer throughout the world. Liberty is an etiquette usually used to describe the world-vision of Shâmlu (appearing especially in the title of a documentary made about

him, entitled *Ahmad Shâmlu, the great poet of liberty*). Yet he was also a poet constantly adoring other social values, particularly equality and fraternity between different classes of the society. Baudelaire was also a fervent admirer of these values, but in a rather different way. Criticizing modernity as well as valorizing this phenomenon and reminding of its ineluctability, the “decadent” Parisian poet of the second half of the nineteenth century castigates the social inequalities ravaging the City of light and his society in general. Far from being a socialist, the poet of *Flowers of evil* was a partisan of an unlimited liberty, a trait shared by the Iranian poet who was quite an anarchist. Through an analysis of their works and points of view, we will present a schematic scale allowing to analyze their world vision. A review of their lives is naturally developed in this paper.

To recapitulate, we have referred to research works from eminent Iranian scholars and literary critics such as Parvin Salâdjegheh and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkâk (for the parts pertaining to the Iranian poet), and figures like Dâriush Shâyegân and Mohammad-Ali Eslâmi-Nodoushan for the part related to Baudelaire. The two aforementioned have also translated the works of the French poet. The first conclusion which we could make is that contrary to Baudelaire the poet and the critic, who believed strongly in Gauthier’s “art for art” doctrine, Shâmlu offered an image of Sartre’s social and political engagement in literature. Another conclusion which we draw in this short article is that the Persian poet lived and generated his first period (۱۹۴۰-۱۹۶۰) in a transitory and tumultuous period of the Iranian society, but the French experienced an age of almost quiet passage towards republicanism in society and post-romantic symbolism in literature. Last but not least, we should consider that in difference with Baudelaire’s skeptical look on women and love, Shâmlu had an optimistic view of these categories.

Key words: Shâmlu, “White Poetry”, Baudelaire, Love, Death, Spleen, Liberty.