

Modernist Echoes: The Role of Tradition, Language, and Myth in Eliot, Shamlou, and Sepehri

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to explore the influence of T. S. Eliot's modernist poetics on the works of Iranian poets, Ahmad Shamlou and Sohrab Sepehri. It examines how these Iranian poets engaged with the concepts of "tradition," "language," and "myth" in their writings, drawing upon Eliot's critical perspectives. The article begins with an overview of T. S. Eliot's significance as an Anglo-American figure of twentieth century literature, and how his modernist themes and techniques resonated with Iranian poets navigating their own cultural transformations. It then reviews relevant secondary sources that provide critical frameworks for understanding the relationships between Eliot, Shamlou, Sepehri, and the broader modernist poetic tradition. The core discussion analyzes how Shamlou and Sepehri, inspired by Eliot's innovative spirit, may have sought to redefine their engagement with Persian classical poetry. They utilized new approaches to language and expression to challenge established forms, especially through using defamiliarization and mythical method, while still drawing upon their rich literary heritage. By tracing these intertextual and cross-cultural connections, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transnational circulation of modernist poetic ideals, especially Eliot's preoccupations, and how they were reinterpreted and reinvigorated within the Iranian literary context. In fact, this comparative analysis sheds light on the complexities of cultural exchange and the evolution of modern poetry across geographic boundaries.

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1. Introduction

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) stands as an influential twentieth-century figure of Anglo-American literature. A poet, playwright, and critic, he is widely considered one of pioneers of modern poetry. Works like his groundbreaking poem “The Waste Land” became a reflection of the disillusionment and despair gripping a world grappling with the social and cultural upheavals of modernity.

Eliot’s influence extended beyond Western borders, reaching and inspiring Iranian poets (Shafiei Kadkani, 2019, 230). These poets, already navigating their own transformations under the weight of a changing world, found resonance with Eliot’s modernist themes. While “The Waste Land” is often considered a radical departure from traditional poetic conventions, Eliot’s work fundamentally acknowledges the intricate relationship between poetic tradition and individual innovation. His oeuvre demonstrates a profound engagement with literary history, even as it pioneers new formal and linguistic territories.

In the same way, poets like Ahmad Shamlou (1925-2000) and Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980) began to re-evaluate their rich heritage of Persian classical poetry. They saw poetry not just as a vessel for tradition, but also as a platform for challenging and innovating (Jafari Jazi, 2023, 327-28). Inspired by Eliot’s modernist spirit, they sought to break from established forms by exploring new avenues of language and expression (Shafiei Kadkani, 2019, 174; Jafari Jazi, 2023, 336-39).

This article delves deeper into this phenomenon. It aims to analyze how these Iranian poets approached the concepts of “tradition,” “language,” and “myth” in their works. The article by exploring the critical perspectives and ideas of T. S. Eliot on tradition, language and myth, attempts to demonstrate how these Iranian poets engaged with their own literary heritage while forging a new path for poetry in the modern world.

2. Theoretical Background

The study of comparative literature often seeks to bridge cultural, historical, and artistic boundaries. One such bridge is formed between Western modernist literature and the evolving literary traditions of Iran. The works of T. S. Eliot influenced global literary movements, including Iranian poetry (Shafiei Kadkani, 2019, 304). His notions of “tradition,” “language,” and “myth” reverberated within the works of Iranian poets navigating their own modernist transformations, particularly Ahmad Shamlou and Sohrab Sepehri.

1. Tradition and Modernity

T. S. Eliot’s canonical essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” outlines his perception of the role of literary tradition in contemporary art. Eliot asserts that innovation in literature must be deeply rooted in tradition, but this tradition is not a static inheritance. Instead, it is constantly reshaped by each generation. For Eliot, the past and present exist in a continuous, dynamic relationship, where modern poets reinterpret and recontextualize historical literary forms to make them relevant for their time (Eliot, 1964, 4). Eliot’s work,

especially in “The Waste Land,” reflects this tension between continuity and rupture, showing how myth and literary heritage can be repurposed to reflect modern despair, alienation, and fragmentation.

2. Language and Defamiliarization

Eliot used a collage-like technique that mixed high and low language, sacred and profane language, to express the chaos and fragmentation of the modern world (Eliot, 1964, 8). His emphasis on the impersonality of the poet also invited an analytical, detached use of language, where the poet becomes a vessel for emotions and thoughts, rather than their origin (Eliot, 1964, 10). The technique of defamiliarization — rendering the familiar strange — was central to Eliot’s work and served as a way to make readers question their perceptions and reexamine the known (Eliot, 1964, 8).

3. The Mythical Method

Eliot’s concept of the “mythical method,” prominently featured in “The Waste Land,” underscores his use of myth as a means to impose order on the fragmented realities of the modern world. By referencing ancient myths, Eliot juxtaposed contemporary life’s chaos with the timeless, universal narratives that structure human experience (Eliot, 1975, 177).

3. Literature review

Although there are many books and articles about Eliot’s poetry and the evolution of Persian poetry after Nima, comparatively little research has focused explicitly on Eliot’s influence on Persian poets. In this section, books, a thesis and articles related to the topic of discussion are chronologically arranged.

Steven Ellis’s *T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2009) is a guide which provides a thorough and insightful overview of the poetry and critical writings of T. S. Eliot. Ellis guides the reader through Eliot’s early poetry and prose, his seminal works like “The Waste Land” and “The Hollow Men,” his religious poems of the 1930s, and the culmination of his poetic career in “Four Quartets.” Throughout, Ellis situates Eliot’s creative output within the broader context of his critical theories and perspectives on poetry, culture, and religion. The book is clearly structured, drawing judiciously on Eliot’s own writings to explicate the key themes, techniques, and philosophical underpinnings of his notoriously challenging body of work.

Wit Pietrzak’s *Myth, Language and Tradition: A Study of Yeats, Stevens and Eliot in the Context of Heidegger’s Search for Being* (2011) argues that the modernist perceptions of myth, language, and tradition lie at the core of modernist poetics, and these concepts are represented by the three major poets examined - W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, and T. S. Eliot. The introduction explains that the book uses Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutics as the central interpretive premise, while also engaging with the philosophies of Nietzsche, Derrida, and

Rorty, in order to delineate a theoretical space within which modernism can be understood as a hermeneutic enterprise.

Mohammadreza Shafiei Kadkani's *With Lamp and Mirror* (2019) posits that the evolution of modern Persian poetry is inextricably linked to the incorporation of European literary and poetic influences. The author argues that Eliot's work significantly shaped the development of Persian poetry after the coup d'état (Shafiei Kadkani, 2019, 304, 305). This interaction has led to significant transformations in poetic language, imagery, and thematic concerns, as Iranian poets sought to reconcile their cultural heritage with the new aesthetic and intellectual paradigms offered by European literature.

Sirous Shamisa's *A Look at Sepehri* (2020) offers a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary Persian poet, Sohrab Sepehri. The book delves into the philosophical underpinnings of Sepehri's poetry, examining his unique perspective on the world. Additionally, it provides a detailed stylistic analysis, exploring the poet's use of literary devices, imagery, and rhythm. Through this approach, Shamisa aims to illuminate the poetic brilliance of Sepehri and contribute to a deeper understanding of his work.

The primary objective of the thesis *The Influence of Eliot's Poetry on Sohrab Sepehri's Poetry* by Aida Amirahmadi (2019), is to compare and contrast two prominent modernist poets, T. S. Eliot and Sohrab Sepehri, to explore the potential influence of Eliot on the Iranian poet. Through a meticulous examination of thematic resonances, stylistic parallels, and linguistic echoes, the study seeks to illuminate the intricate relationship between these two poets. By interrogating their respective employments of literary devices, explorations of religious and philosophical underpinnings, and engagements with concepts of isolation, modernity, and myth, the research endeavors to unravel the complex interplay of influences and intertextualities. This comparative approach not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the individual poetic trajectories of Eliot and Sepehri but also offers insights into the broader dynamics of cultural exchange and the transnational circulation of literary ideas. Ultimately, the thesis aims to elucidate the extent to which Sepehri's poetic vision was shaped by his engagement with Eliot's modernist legacy.

Akbari Beyragh and Sanaei's article "The Comparative Study Between T. S. Eliot and Ahmad Shamlou on the Basis of Modernity Characters" (2011) conducts a comparative analysis of T. S. Eliot and Ahmad Shamlou, exploring the manifestation of modernity in their poetry. By juxtaposing the works of these two prominent poets from distinct cultural and historical contexts, the authors seek to identify commonalities arising from shared experiences of social and political upheaval, resulted from the World Wars and Iran's coup d'état (۶۳). The article posits that the poets' respective encounters with war, societal transformation, and the challenges of modernity have shaped their artistic output in comparable ways. Employing conceptual modeling and comparative literary analysis, the study demonstrates striking similarities in thematic content and stylistic approaches between Eliot and Shamlou, suggesting a potential correlation between shared life experiences and literary outcomes.

Pourmorad Naseri and Ghasemi's study "Mythopoeia in Akhavan's & Eliot's Poetry" (2022) offers a comparative analysis of T. S. Eliot and Mehdi Akhavan Sales, examining their respective uses of myth within their poetry. Employing a Tolkienian lens, the authors juxtapose Eliot's "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" with Akhavan's "Qese-e Shahriar-e Shahr-e Sangestan" and "Khan-e Hashtom va Adamak." By exploring the interplay of imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure, the article illuminates both the similarities and divergences in the poets' mythopoeic practices. Ultimately, the study positions Eliot and Akhavan as prophetic figures who utilize myth to critique the societal and cultural challenges of their respective eras.

4. Method

This article employs a comparative literary approach to investigate the emergence of a new poetic form in Persian literature. By analyzing three pivotal concepts within T. S. Eliot's critical framework and tracing their manifestations in the poetry of Eliot, Shamlou, and Sepehri, this study aims to depict these potential influences, both direct and indirect, of Eliot's work on this poetic innovation.

5. Discussion

Eliot's concept of "tradition" is central to his work. He believed that poets must engage with the past, not simply imitate it. As he stated in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence (Eliot, 1964, 4)." This means that for Eliot, tradition is not a static entity but a living force that shapes the present. Eliot's approach to "language" was equally innovative. He saw language as a dynamic tool that could be used to capture the complexities of modern life. He rejected the romantic notion of language as a transparent medium for expressing personal feelings, instead emphasizing its role in shaping thought and meaning. As he noted in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "the poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together (Eliot, 1964, 8).

Eliot's use of "myth" in his poetry is another significant aspect of his work. He believed that myths provided a framework for understanding human experience, offering a way "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history (Eliot, 1975, 177)."

Iran's literary landscape, influenced by Western literature since the Qajar era, underwent significant transformations. Poets experimented with form, rhythm, and rhyme, seeking to innovate within the Persian poetic tradition. This period of experimentation parallels the developments in English poetry. Both Eliot and Nima are credited with not only revolutionizing poetic form but also with introducing a new depth of content. Their work is

characterized by a pessimistic yet realistic lens through which they examined society and its ills (Zareei, 2012, 31).

Eliot's modernist poetics exerted a transcultural influence, extending to Iranian literary circles. Recognizing poetry's potential for both preservation and innovation, these poets sought to reconcile the demands of tradition with the imperatives of modernity, exploring formal and linguistic experimentation inspired by modernist ethos.

5.1. Tradition for T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," sheds light on his unique perspective regarding the role of literary heritage in the creation of great art. Unlike the prevailing notion of artistic genius emerging from a vacuum, Eliot posits that significant works of literature stem from a deep and ongoing engagement with the established literary tradition.

Eliot emphasizes the necessity for the modern artist to possess a profound understanding of literary history. This knowledge base equips them to create works that resonate with the present moment, drawing upon the rich tapestry of past influences. However, Eliot goes beyond mere reverence for the past. He vehemently rejects the idea of blind imitation, advocating instead for a process of selective and creative reinterpretation. The true mark of an innovator, according to Eliot, lies in their ability to skillfully incorporate elements from the past into a wholly original artistic vision.

Eliot's concept of tradition dismantles the notion of it as a static and unchanging entity. He envisions tradition as a dynamic force in a constant state of evolution. This perspective underscores the importance of successive generations of artists and thinkers actively engaging with tradition. Through this ongoing process of "re-compiling the past," they revitalize and reinterpret tradition, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality. Eliot emphasizes this point by highlighting "time's challenge to established dogma," suggesting that tradition itself must be constantly re-evaluated and revised to remain a source of inspiration. He concludes that "tradition cannot mean standing still," as both time and history are ever-changing forces. For Eliot "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Pietrzak, 2011, 236).

According to Harriet Davidson's analysis of Eliot's ideas, the past and the present exist in a dynamic relationship. The past shapes the poet by providing a foundation for their work. However, the present, through the poet's selective engagement with tradition, also influences how we view the past. This relationship is constantly evolving. Eliot emphasizes that only a poet who has thoroughly explored the literary tradition can be considered truly mature. This maturity stems from "history, and the consciousness of history" (Pietrzak, 2011, 237).

5.2. Tradition for Shamlou

Both poets, Eliot and Shamlou, express anxieties about the excessive influence of technology, fearing it could erase the very essence of human connection and experience. Additionally, they address the transformation of fundamental concepts such as love, reflecting a broader societal shift. However, the most compelling point of comparison lies in their complex relationship with literary tradition. While tradition is often considered the cornerstone of Eliot's critical framework, he himself admits, individual talent should be at the service of tradition (Ellis, 2009, 14). Despite this, Eliot engaged in a prolonged "conflict" with preceding poets, particularly the Romantics. This conflict manifested in his innovation of poetic form, style, and content of his poetry marking a significant departure from his predecessors.

Similarly, Shamlou, far from being a traditionalist, emerges as a key figure in the rejection of established forms within Iranian poetry. Initially drawn to the innovative style of "Nimai," he ultimately championed the even more radical "Sepid" or "White" poetry movement. This form of poetry is unbound by the rigid structures of traditional verse forms and offers a unique approach to structure, rhythm, and what is called "inner music." This demonstrates a continuous engagement with and critique of the existing poetic landscape. This shift resonates with the concept of the "unpoetic" in T. S. Eliot's work (Ellis, 2009, 9).

Shafiei Kadkani's analysis (2019, 517), explores the unique qualities that distinguish Ahmad Shamlou from his contemporaries in modern Persian poetry. Kadkani argues that Shamlou's defining characteristic lies in his innovative approach to poetic rhetoric. According to Kadkani, Shamlou's ability to create a sense of defamiliarization across various aspects of poetry sets him apart. This defamiliarization stems from Shamlou's diverse influences, encompassing other poets, cross-cultural engagement, and his own unique and creative interpretation of these sources.

While Shamlou demonstrates clear interest in certain classical figures – Khayyam, Molavi, Nizami, and Hafez – his views on others are less favorable. Notably, he exhibits a strong aversion to Saadi and Ferdowsi (Jafari Jazi, 2023, 214). Shamlou's views on the role of tradition in modern poetry are equally contentious. He argues for a complete break with traditional forms, believing they have no place in contemporary poetry. This stance even extends to Nima, a key figure in modern Iranian poetry, whom Shamlou criticizes for not going far enough in his innovations.

Shamlou's perspective on Forough Farrokhzad is more nuanced. He acknowledges her skill in crafting "flexible meter," potentially referring to her innovative use of language. However, he simultaneously critiques her work as "overwhelming" and a form of "modern romanticism," suggesting a perceived lack of complexity or originality (Jafari Jazi, 2023, 215).

His rise to prominence can be attributed not to a single factor, but rather to a confluence of artistic merit, personal connection, and a keen understanding of the socio-cultural zeitgeist of his era.

The first element contributing to Shamlou's success lies within the formal and content features of his poetry itself. His innovative approach to form, his adept use of language, and the thematic choices he explored likely resonated with readers on an aesthetic level.

Secondly, Shamlou's own personality seems to have played a role (Jafari Jazi, 2023, 218). There is an alignment between his personal character and the themes or values embedded within his work. This congruence may have fostered a sense of authenticity that resonated with his audience.

Finally, the importance of the prevailing atmosphere and the "epic enthusiasm" of the Iranian people at the time is another element of Shamlou's success (Jafari Jazi, 2023, 218; Shafiei Kadkani, 2019, 510). Shamlou's poetry arguably did not exist in a vacuum. By understanding the social and emotional climate of his era, Shamlou was able to craft poems that spoke to the collective experiences, aspirations, or anxieties of the Iranian people. This ability to give voice to a shared experience likely contributed significantly to his enduring popularity.

5.3. Tradition for Sepehri

Sepehri's poems reveal an openness to diverse religious perspectives. He is especially known to be a follower of eastern mysticism and Buddha's teachings in his poetry. Sohrab Sepehri's belief is not one dimensional as he professes in his poems, he is Muslim and interested in Zoroastrian, Christianity and Buddhism as well. Sepehri's references to the Quran, the Bible, the Torah, and the Avesta all point towards a deep engagement with various religious texts and traditions. Also, Eliot, when he was writing "The Waste Land" almost became a Buddhist (Amirahmadi, 2019, 69).

Sepehri emphasizes the fact that he is open to new ideas; he is not limited to just one strict doctrine. The evocative image of a "floating Lotus in water" symbolizing Buddha serves as a culminating point. While signifying the undeniable influence of Buddhism, this image transcends a singular interpretation. The lotus flower, a symbol of enlightenment in Buddhism, here becomes a powerful emblem of Sepehri's ongoing spiritual quest, a journey that seeks truth and understanding beyond the confines of any one faith.

Sohrab Sepehri's poem "Water's Footfall" hints a Buddhist influence on his perception of death. Sepehri rejects the traditional view of death as a sorrowful end. This aligns with Buddhist teachings that see death as a transformation, not an extinction. (Amirahmadi, 2019, 66)

And let us not fear death.
 Death is not the end of the pigeon.
 Death is not a cricket's inversion.
 Death flows in the soul of acacias.
 Death has a seat in the pleasant climate of thinking.
 Death in the spirit of the village's night speaks of morning.

Death with a bunch of grapes comes into the mouth.
 Death sings in the red larynx of the throat.
 Death is responsible for the beauty of a butterfly's wings.
 Death sometimes picks basil.
 Death sometimes drinks vodka.
 Sometimes it is in the shade watching us.
 And we all know,
 The lungs of pleasure are full of the oxygen of death.
 (Sepehri, 2001, 239; Amirahmadi, 2019, 68)

According to Shafiei Kadkani (2019, 224), Sohrab Sepehri's poetry, while deeply rooted in Eastern philosophy, mysticism, and thought, is paradoxically influenced by the Western worldview. His emphasis on Eastern spiritual concepts, particularly in his mystical and philosophical reflections, is itself partly shaped by his exposure to Western ideas.

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" also holds traces of Buddhist influence alongside Hindu mythology. Eliot's exposure to Eastern philosophy during his studies likely shaped his creative process. The poem's exploration of spiritual emptiness and the search for meaning resonates with core Buddhist concepts of suffering, impermanence, and enlightenment. The potential interplay between Buddhist ideas and the poem's themes suggests a fascinating exploration of meaning beyond Western traditions. (Amirahmadi, 2019, 69)

the Fisher King, a central character in "The Waste Land" stuck in a state of "neither living nor dead," (Eliot, 1963, 54) potentially echoing the Buddhist concept of abeyance. Their search for the "heart of light" might be linked to the Buddhist idea of "shunyata" or emptiness, where things lack inherent existence. While "the heart of light" could represent the positive potential of shunyata, the protagonist's inability to grasp its complexities keeps them trapped in the wasteland, a symbol of the limited earthly existence. This unfulfilled understanding of shunyata, crucial for achieving Buddhist enlightenment or Nirvana, explains why the character remains bound to the wasteland and unable to reach spiritual liberation.

5.4. Language of Poetry for T. S. Eliot

In modernist poetry, Eliot aimed for a new view toward poetry. He rejected the florid language of nineteenth century poetry and instead used a more colloquial style. His poems often included fragments. Eliot's use of language was unique. He incorporated influences from many cultures and languages, from the Bible to slang. This created a diverse and multilingual style that reflected the international spirit of modernism.

However, Eliot balanced this complexity with moments of plain speaking. His poems could shift from complex to simple language, creating a sense of fragmentation and irony. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" exemplifies the use of juxtaposition between levity and seriousness. This technique is evident in the poem's shifts between the profound existential question, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" (Eliot, 1963, 4) and the seemingly mundane concern, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" (Eliot, 1963, 7) This interplay is

further emphasized by Eliot's deliberate use of both elevated and ordinary language throughout the poem.

Eliot's innovative approach to language was connected to his use of fragmentation, montage, and combining high and low language. By using different types of language and writing styles, Eliot created poems that reflected the confusion and chaos of modern life. Notably, the poem achieves its originality by using "everyday referents" like cigarettes and toothbrushes, similar to how Eliot described the work of poet Andrew Marvell. However, Eliot also uses formal vocabulary alongside these ordinary things, which reflects the detached and analytical approach of a classicist. (Ellis, 2009, 25)

Eliot believed the poet's mind as a "receptacle" accumulating a vast array of "feelings, phrases, images." These elements remain in a state of flux until a critical mass is reached, allowing them to coalesce and form entirely "new compounds" – innovative poetic structures. This metaphor portrays the poet as a curator, actively collecting and arranging these diverse elements into impactful verse. (Ellis, 2009, 11)

As W. B. Yeats had said about Eliot's revolution, it is "stylistic alone" and that his work eschewed "any special subject-matter." For Eliot, Poetry must resemble prose, and both must accept the vocabulary of their time; nor must there be any special subject-matter. (Ellis, 2009, 8)

Eliot writes in his essay, "What is a Classic?," about the great poet and the language he uses: "When the great poet is also a great classic poet, he exhausts, not a form only, but the language of his time; and the language of his time, as used by him, will be the language in its perfection. so that it is not the poet alone of whom we have to take account, but the language in which he writes (1975, 126)." The exhaustion of language is the perfection of the poetic idiom to the highest degree so that it can express and thus alter the powerful past texts in the present moment. The historical sense may be seen as the poet's capacity to gather the past into the present in a vernacular refined to perfection. (Pietrzak, 2011, 237, 238)

5.5. Language of Poetry for Shamlou

According to MirzaMohammadnia et al (2022, 180), Shamlou's poems incorporate a unique blend of traditional and modern language, incorporating a wide range of literary and everyday vocabulary. This has significantly broadened the possibilities for Iranian poetry in terms of themes and imagery. His work has inspired and influenced subsequent poets with its innovative and groundbreaking approach.

By creating strangeness in the words and phrases, the poet achieves a kind of non-normality that helps his work to distance itself from the standard and normal language and approach the literary language. By referring to ancient Persian literature, including the language and style of Beyhaqi, and using it, whether consciously or unconsciously, Shamlou has tried to achieve the desired prominence and strangeness in his poems. For this reason, similarities in this field can be found in Beyhaqi's prose and Shamlou's poetry.

Conversely, the strategic incorporation of every-day language within a poem, when congruous with the emotional and semantic context, can contribute to the poem's overall effect on readers. This approach necessitates a discerning selection and careful deployment of such vernacular elements to achieve a desired effect.

The influence of Beyhaghi's vocabulary and style on Shamlou's poetic language can be seen, extending from the most basic elements of sound, or phonemes, to the construction of words and even sentence structure, or syntax. (MirzaMohammadnia et al, 2022, 178-182) Shamlou's deliberate fusion of archaic and contemporary language is identified as a key strategy. This approach, "defamiliarization," disrupts the reader's expectations by presenting familiar elements in a novel context. The creation of these new linguistic combinations is seen as fostering the generation of fresh meaning within the reader's mind. Furthermore, the use of archaisms is interpreted as an attempt to evoke a sense of multiple temporalities within the poem.

Shamlou's poetry hinges on defamiliarization, a multifaceted approach to dismantle expectations and forge new meaning. He revitalizes language with forgotten words, invents novel combinations, and seamlessly integrates non-Persian vocabulary. This extends to sentence structure, where he disrupts norms through rearrangement and word-role experimentation. Further enriching the experience, Shamlou utilizes synesthesia (e.g., "salty smell") to jolt typical perception and invite deeper engagement. Through this multi-pronged approach, his poetry transcends conventional language, making the reader an active participant in meaning creation.

5.3. Language of Poetry for Sepehri

Defamiliarization holds significant importance in modernism, and it is a key characteristic of Sepehri's poetry. One of the mutual elements in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Sohrab Sepehri is *their* use of defamiliarization. According to Bahram Meghdadi, Sepehri's skillful use of defamiliarization allows him to create new words and phrases within his poems, potentially imbuing them with fresh layers of meaning. (Meghdadi, 1998, 9, 46, 67)

Sepehri utilizes defamiliarization to "remove objects from the automatism of perception," jolting readers out of their customary ways of seeing the world. One key method he uses to achieve this is through personification, a technique that imbues inanimate objects with human characteristics. "My soul is young / My soul sometimes coughs from joy." (Sepehri, 2001, 231; Amirahmadi, 2019, 31) By attributing the human action of "coughing" to the abstract concept of "soul," Sepehri forces the reader to reconsider these familiar elements in a fresh light. This unexpected fusion of human and non-human allows Sepehri to heighten the emotional impact of the poem and reawaken the reader's sense of wonder towards the world around them.

Defamiliarization and depersonalization may work together to create distance between the poet and the poem and to challenge the reader's typical ways of understanding.

T. S. Eliot's influential concept of depersonalization referred to as the impersonal theory, advocates for a clear distinction between the poet's subjective experience and the subject matter of the poem. For Eliot the poetry is 'not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality (Ellis, 2009, 13).'

According to Eliot's theory, the poet's role is not to simply express personal emotions or experiences. Instead, the poet acts as a catalyst, transforming raw emotions and lived experiences into a more universal and objective artistic expression. This transformation allows the poem to resonate with a wider audience and transcend the poet's individual perspective.

Synesthesia is a rhetorical device where a poet evokes one sense perception through the language typically associated with another. For example, the line "and the sound of darkness when dropping from a leaf" (Sepehri, 2001, 230; Amirahmadi, 2019, 31) exemplifies this technique. By attributing "sound" to the abstract concept of "darkness," Sepehri disrupts the reader's expectations and forces them to experience the act of a leaf falling in a new and unexpected way.

Sohrab Sepehri utilizes unconventional and enigmatic language to present ordinary experiences in a startlingly new light. By employing unfamiliar expressions, he compels readers to completely re-evaluate their perception of the everyday world. This is evident in his description of a seemingly mundane act - a passerby extinguishing a cigarette. Sepehri transforms it into a captivating scene through his words: "The passerby bestowed the flood of light on his lips to the darkness of sands." (Sepehri, 2001, 289; Amirahmadi, 2019, 33) The cigarette becomes a "flood of light," the lips are personified, and the act of extinguishing is reframed as a metaphorical transfer from light to darkness. (Amirahmadi, 2019, 33)

5.4. Use of Myth for T. S. Eliot

In his seminal essay, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" Eliot viewed the use of myth as a way to bring order, shape, and meaning to the pervasive sense of futility and chaos characteristic of the contemporary world. Eliot perceived the modern era as a "panorama of futility and anarchy," and he believed that employing the "mythical method" could help control and structure this overwhelming landscape. Eliot argued that myth provides a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity," allowing the modern world to be made accessible and meaningful through art. (Eliot, 1975, 177) He saw this mythical approach as a crucial step in making the complexities of the modern condition amenable to artistic expression and interpretation.

Eliot's perspective aligns with numerous modernist theories that position art as a form of aesthetic heroism. In the face of the "fallen" and disordered nature of the modern world, modernism views art as a reliable reality and an organizing principle of a quasi-religious nature. The unity and coherence of artistic expression is posited as a means of salvation from the fragmented order of contemporary experience. (Pietrzak, 2011, 5)

Eliot viewed myth as a bridge between the fragmented, disillusioned modern world and a more unified past. “The mythical method helps to manipulate a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity (Jiao, 2018, 49).” By drawing parallels between contemporary experiences and ancient narratives, he aimed to create a sense of universality and historical context for his poems. This enriched the work by suggesting that the anxieties and struggles of the modern world echoed those of humanity throughout history. Eliot believed that strong emotions could cloud artistic expression. The mythical method, with its focus on established narratives and figures, allowed him to distance himself from personal feelings and create a more objective and universal voice in his poetry. By employing myths as a lens, he could explore profound themes without resorting to overt sentimentality. This approach contributed to the modernist ideal of creating art that was impersonal and detached, focusing on the exploration of ideas rather than the poet’s personal experiences.

Mythical figures transcended mere characters in Eliot’s work, becoming archetypes that embodied universal human experiences. For instance, Tiresias, the blind seer in “The Waste Land,” represents a kind of fragmented knowledge that reflects the poem’s exploration of a world that has lost its unifying myths. Through these archetypal figures, Eliot explored timeless human struggles and emotions, ensuring his poems resonated with readers beyond the specific context of the modern world.

The fragmented nature of Eliot’s poems, with their multiple voices and allusions, mirrored the fragmented nature of modern experience. This fragmentation reflected the widespread dislocation and alienation experienced in the aftermath of a world war. The use of myth, however, also provided a way to connect these fragments and suggest a deeper order beneath the surface.

Eliot’s mythical method and his emphasis on “depersonalization” in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” are interrelated. By using myth as a framework and stepping back from their own emotions, poets try to achieve objectivity and explore universal themes that resonate beyond their personal experiences. This “depersonalization” allows the art to focus on ideas and craft, creating a connection between past and present while offering a fresh examination of the enduring human condition. (Jiao, 2018, 50)

5.5. Use of Myth for Shamlou

Shamlou’s poetry employs myth as a multifaceted instrument for exploring the human condition and critiquing societal structures. His approach to myth was characterized by a dynamic interplay between reverence and subversion.

By incorporating myths from diverse cultures, Shamlou offers a universal framework for understanding human experience. His poetic method involves both traditional narration of myth and its radical transformation to serve contemporary expressive needs. This transformative process includes desanctification, reinterpretation, and hybridization of mythological narratives. (Mohammadi, 111-115)

Shamlou's particular emphasis on the Christ myth is due to his familiarity with Christianity and the appropriateness of the martyr myth for his revolutionary poems. In classical Persian poems, the life-giving breath of Christ has always been considered. But Shamlou destroys this myth by stating that "Jesus died on a cross in vain" (Shamlou, 2019, 393) and presents a new image of it based on the current situation.

Shamlou sometimes deals with the myth in such a way that its sanctity is lost. For example, Shamlou uses the phrases "Esrafil's sloppy jazz" (Shamlou, 2019, 486) as well as Satan's "fringed horn hat" (Shamlou, 2019, 97) in his poem.

Shamlou offers a new interpretation of Achille and Esfandiar's invulnerability in "Song of Ibrahim in the Fire". He expresses their weakness not as heels and eyes, but as "sorrow of love and sadness of loneliness". (Shamlou, 2019, 727)

He also presents a single image to the audience by mixing several mythological narratives. For example, the combination of the narratives of Khizr and Job (Shamlou, 2019, 716) or the integration of the myths of Sisyphus, Christ and Prometheus (Shamlou, 2019, 306). Shamlou also integrates history and literature, and in the poem "Hamlet" he combines the elements of the story of Christ and the story of Hamlet.

5.6. Use of Myth for Sepehri

As Saleh Hosseini says in his book *Silent Lotus* (2023), none of the contemporary Persian poets has used historical and religious allusions as much as Sohrab Sepehri. In his opinion, the main difference between Sepehri and other poets is that the basis of Sepehri's poetry is based on mythology and mythological perspective. (55-56)

Sepehri's serious studies in religions started from the book of "Avar-e Aftab" (Meghdadi, 19). Since writing this book, he has a new view of the world. The importance of myth in Sepehri's poetry is such that if we remove it from the poem, nothing else will remain of it (Hosseini, 56). Sepehri uses the myths of different nations and cultures. The myths of Iran, India and Greece can be seen in his poetry.

The myth of creation in Sepehri's poetry and the return to the mythological era is a time in which eternity is present. (Soleymaninezhad, 120) In this mythological period, events can be repeated and there is no good or bad. This concept is related to nature in Sepehri's poetry. (Sepehri, 2001, 127-129 and 287) The poet, as if tired of the outside world, looks for a mythical man to establish a bond with nature like him (Sepehri, 2001, 173 and 274).

The myth of creation in ancient Iran is rooted in nature. The first humans were created from two plants named "Mashi" and "Mashianeh". (Soleymaninezhad, 120) This myth has been mentioned several times in Sepehri's poetry (Sepehri, 2001, 431). He also has a look at the connection between this myth and the myth of Adam and Eve and the "Fall" and "sorrow" caused by it (Sepehri, 2001, 326 and 395).

There is also a connection between the myth of Jamshid and the myth of creation. Shamisa says about the phrase "dawn of grapes" that "in our national mythology, wine is the

daughter of Jamshid (Yemeh) of the sun or the son of the sun. Therefore, in an unconscious and mythological way, sunrise is compatible with grapes” (Shamisa, 2020, 228).

Sepehri pays special attention to the Iranian myth “Rostam and Sohrab”. “I come from a journey in an epic/ and like water/ the whole story of Sohrab and Noushdaro/ I am fluent” (Sepehri, 2001, 315)¹. In these phrases, the poet has started to retell the myth.

Another national myth in Sepehri’s poetry is Zoroaster and the apocalyptic Zoroastrian saviors. “Evil covered the whole earth/ A thousand years passed/ No sound of splashing water was heard/ And the image of a maiden’s body did not fall into the water” (Sepehri, 2001, 322). These verses refer to apocalyptic saviors and the final victory of goodness with the coming of Saoshyant, the last savior.

Sepehri also mentions the psalms of David and the harps of the Jewish people by the river. “And once again, under the sky of “Psalms”/ on that trip where I came to the riverside of “Babylon”/ the sound of the lyre was muted/ and when I listened carefully, the sound of crying came/ and some lyres without warmth/ to the fresher branches. They used to swing” (Sepehri, 2001, 316).

These verses refer to a part of the Psalms that refers to the captivity of the Jewish people and the hanging of harps on the willow trees by the Babylon River.

In his poems, Sepehri also pays attention to Greek mythology. “The conquest of a city by the hands of three or four wooden horsemen” (Sepehri, 2001, 284), which is a reference to the story of Troy and the wooden horse and finally to the burning of the city.

Another myth that inspired Homer’s *Odyssey* is “Circe”. “I will build a boat / ... I will still row / I will not fall in love with the blue ones / not with the mermaids that come headlong out of the water / and in that lonely ray the fishermen / will cast spells from their fishing rods” (Sepehri, 2001, 363).” These sea nymphs mislead sailors with their beautiful and seductive song. *Odysseus*, the Greek myth, was able to pass through their island.

Another Greek myth in Sepehri’s poems is *Narcissus*. “Oh, the oldest picture of narcissus in the mirror of sorrow! / Your attraction still took me / to the air of evolution? / Maybe” (Sepehri, 2001, 435).

Narcissus is a symbol of dying in youth. According to this myth, a beautiful young man named *Narcissus* fell in love with himself by staring at the reflection of his face in the water, and after his death, he turned into a flower. *Sohrab* evokes this ancient myth by bringing the words “daffodil, mirror and sorrow”. The words “attraction and evolution” also help this concept more.

Another use of Greek mythology is *Icarus*. In two places of the poem “*Shasusa*” we come across these verses; “I fly, I fly/ on a distant plain/ the sun burns my wings and I fall

¹ All translations are by the authors, except for the cases where the source of the translation is mentioned.

to the ground in the hatred of awakening” (Sepehri, 2001, 140). A few pages later he also added: “A face in the silvery water laughs at death” (Sepehri, 2001, 143).”

One of the most used words in Sepehri’s poetry is the word “lotus” (Sepehri, 2001, 222, 120, 145, 150). One of Sepehri’s poems is “Padme”, which is the Indian name of this flower. Lotus is one of the most important symbols in Indian mythology. The lotus is a sign of human life, a symbol of holiness, and also a symbol of the first creation in Indian culture. “Lotus” also symbolizes the connection between Brahma and Vishnu.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation has demonstrably illuminated the impact of T. S. Eliot’s modernist poetics on the works of two Iranian poets, Ahmad Shamlou and Sohrab Sepehri. The comparative analysis of their engagement with tradition, language, and myth has revealed a nuanced and intricate dialogue between the Western and Iranian literary traditions. By reimagining poetic form and mythological frameworks while drawing upon their rich Persian heritage, Shamlou and Sepehri exemplify the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within a modernizing Iran.

This study’s contribution lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of cultural exchange and the transnational circulation of literary ideas. It underscores the remarkable adaptability of modernist poetics, demonstrating its ability to be reinterpreted and reinvigorated within diverse literary contexts. The resulting emergence of unique poetic voices grounded in tradition yet attuned to the present underscores the enduring relevance of such cross-cultural fertilization in an increasingly globalized world.

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