

The contrast of ugliness and beauty with destruction and peace in lyric poetry based on the approach of Claude Strauss

* Saeed Emami¹ -  ghasem Sahrai² 

1. Ph.D. Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Lorestan University, Iran. (Corresponding author) Email: Saiid.emami@yahoo.com
2. Associate Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Lorestan University, Iran.

Article Info(1-23)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received:
۲۹ August

۲۰۲۲

Accepted:
۲۱

November
۲۰۲۲

Keywords:

Ugliness
Beauty
Destruction
Peace
Lyrical
literature

The famous structuralist Claude Louis-Strauss, in his structural research, came to believe that the human mind has a specific structure that follows dual oppositions. In this article, an attempt has been made to show the foundations that strengthen the belief in the opposite relationship between beauty and ugliness and their relationship with destruction and peace. Also, the conflicting themes of ugliness and beauty and their relationship with destruction and peace should be defined and described based on the plan based on presence and absence, and the contrasts should be defined. After examining poems such as Khosrow and Shirin, Laili and Majnoon, Haft Peykar, Homai and Hodayun, Weiss and Ramin, and Gol and Nowruz, the existence of a conflicting structure between the relationship of ugliness and beauty with destruction and peace is clear and it also became clear that the infrastructure of this confrontation, in addition to the structure of the absolutist and antagonism mind of man, has been strengthened and turned into a culture by the dualistic thinking and rituals that believe in the antagonism of Ahura Mazda with the devil and the creatures of these two. Although the concepts of ugliness and beauty are relative, blackness is one of the most obvious characteristics of ugliness in themes that talk about this concept. In addition, disproportionate organs such as the nose, ears, teeth, etc. are other characteristics of ugliness. On the other hand, beauty is mentioned with characteristics such as the brightness of the face, and the proportionality of the body. The bi-polar and absolutist structure of the human mind causes these contradictions, but the rituals and religions that interpret the world as dualistic turn this feature of the mind into a belief and as a result into a general culture that permeates all aspects of life as a result and also takes root in literature. It is like this that through the language and structures of the text, one can understand the infrastructures and recognize the effective factors in the culture. Although in the beginning, it was the man who created the language, civilizations and people expand their meanings through language to the point where man becomes a prisoner of language, and it is the language that creates culture, even though there would be no traces left of those civilizations and people.

Citation: Emami Saeed, Sahrai ghasem (2023) The contrast of ugliness and beauty with destruction and peace in lyric poetry based on the approach of Claude Strauss . Modern Literary Researches, 2(1) 1-24

Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature

© The Author (s).



DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1402.2.1.1.5](https://doi.org/10.28211/413.1402.2.1.1.5)

Introduction

Concepts of beauty and ugliness, while relative and culturally variable, have consistently played a definitive role in shaping literary archetypes. In the Iranian cultural context, specific physical traits—such as dark skin, deformity, or animalistic features—have historically been codified as markers of “ugliness.” Conversely, beauty is associated with symmetry, light, and radiance. This research explores the systematic relationship between these aesthetic markers and the narrative functions of “destruction” versus “prosperity” in classic Persian lyrical romances. Using the structuralist framework of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the study posits that this literary dichotomy is not merely a stylistic choice but a manifestation of a deep-seated binary cognitive structure, reinforced by ancient dualistic cosmologies (such as the conflict between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman). The objective is to uncover the underlying substructures that define the relationship between physical appearance and moral agency in the literary landscape of the 5th to 8th centuries AH.

Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in structuralist criticism. The study focuses on seminal lyrical romances, including *Khosrow and Shirin*, *Leili and Majnun*, *Haft Peykar*, *Homay and Homayoun*, *Vis and Ramin*, and *Gol and Nowruz*. The analytical process involves identifying narrative events as structural units—analogueous to Lévi-Strauss’s *mythèmes*—and analyzing the symbolic relationship between characters’ physical descriptions and their narrative outcomes (destructive or constructive). The study utilizes an “absence-presence” logic, wherein the depiction of an ugly, destructive character implicitly affirms the structural value of a beautiful, constructive alternative.

Results

The analysis reveals a pervasive binary pattern across the examined texts:

1. **The Dualistic Foundation:** The research identifies the dualistic worldview of ancient Persian religions (Zoroastrianism,

Zurvanism, and Manichaeism) as the primary cultural catalyst for this literary structure. The dichotomy between the beautiful/light-giving creator (Ahura Mazda) and the ugly/dark/destructive force (Ahriman) has been internalized in the human psyche, shaping literary archetypes where ugliness is inevitably linked to chaos and destruction.

۲. Structural Oppositions in Narrative:

- **Characterization:** Characters described as “ugly,” “black,” or “deformed” (e.g., the ugly messenger in *Khosrow and Shirin*, the demon-like messengers in *Leili and Majnun*, or the monstrous adversaries in *Haft Peykar*) are consistently linked to catastrophic narrative outcomes.
- **Symbolic Language:** The presence of blackness is frequently employed as an index of destruction. Dark figures are often depicted as agents of harm, whereas beautiful figures (like the “light-like” messenger in *Leili and Majnun*) serve as agents of salvation and restoration.
- **The Logic of Absence:** The study demonstrates that when a narrative portrays an ugly, destructive agent, it structurally reinforces the value of beauty as a source of order. The binary opposition is so ingrained that even when one pole is absent, the cultural expectation of the other remains latent in the reader’s mind.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the depiction of ugly characters as destructive and beautiful characters as prosperous is not coincidental; it is a manifestation of a deeply embedded structuralist binary in the human mind, culturally institutionalized by ancient dualistic beliefs. Through the examination of Persian lyrical literature, the research shows that these texts function as mirrors of a profound cultural substructure. Literature acts as a repository for these binary cognitive models, revealing how ancient ontological beliefs—that the world is divided between forces of light/beauty and darkness/ugliness—continue to manifest in language and characterization long after the religious systems that fostered them have evolved. Thus, through the analysis of textual surface structures, one can discern the rigid, underlying logic of the human mind’s need to categorize existence into conflicting, absolute poles.