

The Influence of Oral Literature (Folklore) on Contemporary Persian and Iraqi Poetry: A Case Study of Ahmad Shamlu and Mu'in Basisu

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Article Info (۴۵-۶۲)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received:
۲۰۲۵/۰۵/۱۳

Accepted:
۲۰۲۵/۰۹/۳۰

Keywords:
Folklore
Oral Literature
Ahmad Shamlou
Mu'in Bseiso
Contemporary
Poetry

This study aims to examine and comparatively analyze the influence of folklore on the contemporary poetry of Ahmad Shamlou and Mu'in Bseiso. The research investigates how these two poets employed oral literature to articulate political, social, and philosophical themes. The methodology is descriptive-analytical, based on content analysis of the poets' works. Due to the textual nature of the research, no statistical population was required in the conventional sense. The findings reveal that folklore, as a rich cultural source, played a vital role in the poetry of both Shamlou and Bseiso. Each poet used folklore as a symbolic and metaphorical medium, creatively reimagining local tales and myths to enrich their works. However, significant differences are evident in their approaches. While Shamlou focuses more on ancient myths and philosophical or humanistic themes, Bseiso employs Palestinian and Arab folklore to directly convey themes of resistance and nationalism. The central conclusion is that folklore, as an essential expressive tool, has enabled contemporary poetry to transcend direct language and become a medium for expressing identity, protest, and hope.

Citation: Al-Latif, Mohammad (2026). The Influence of Oral Literature (Folklore) on Contemporary Persian and Iraqi Poetry (A Case Study of the Poems of Ahmad Shamlou and Mu'in Bseiso). *Modern Literary Studies*, 5(1), 45-62.



Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature
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DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1405.5.1.1.6](https://doi.org/10.28211/1413.1405.5.1.1.6)

Introduction

Oral literature and folklore function as mirrors of a nation's collective identity, worldviews, and moral values. As a repository of legends, myths, proverbs, and songs transmitted across generations, folklore has historically served as a critical tool for resistance, identity preservation, and social commentary—particularly in societies experiencing political and social turmoil. In the context of contemporary literature, both Persian and Arabic-speaking nations, including Iran, Iraq, and Palestine, have witnessed poets turn to these oral traditions to articulate the suffering, aspirations, and social realities of their people.

This research investigates the comparative influence of folklore on the works of two prominent contemporary poets: Ahmad Shamlu from Iran and Mu'in Basisu from Iraq/Palestine. Both poets lived through tumultuous historical periods and utilized poetry as a vehicle for resistance. The study addresses the central question of how folkloric elements (myths, legends, and tales) are utilized in their work, analyzing the similarities and differences in their approaches to using these traditional motifs for modern political and social ends.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology. Given the nature of the research as a textual analysis, the study does not utilize a traditional statistical population but rather a corpus of poetic works by Shamlu and Basisu. The research process involves:

١. Identifying and categorizing folkloric elements within the selected poems.
٢. Conducting a comparative analysis of how these elements are repurposed to express political, social, and philosophical themes.
٣. Evaluating the poets' divergent applications of folklore—specifically Shamlu's reliance on ancient Iranian myths versus Basisu's focus on Palestinian and Arab cultural heritage—to understand how these traditions inform their respective poetic voices

Results

The research yields several key findings regarding the interplay between folklore and contemporary poetry:

- **Folklore as a Symbolic Conduit:** Folklore is not merely an aesthetic ornament in the works of Shamlu and Basisu; it serves as a vital expressive tool that allows the poets to transcend direct, literal language. By creatively reimagining indigenous tales, myths, and legends, both poets add depth and multi-layered meanings to their work.
- **Thematic Divergence:** While both poets use folklore to articulate resistance, their focus differs significantly. Ahmad Shamlu primarily draws upon ancient Iranian mythology and folk tales to address universal and philosophical concerns, such as love, death, freedom, and the search for justice. Conversely, Mu'in Basisu focuses on Palestinian and Arab folklore, utilizing it to express more direct themes of national resistance, identity, and the struggle against occupation.
- **Folklore as Resistance:** In both contexts, folklore acts as a “cultural sanctuary” during crises. It enables the poets to channel collective memory and traditional wisdom into modern poetry, reinforcing the resilience of their respective societies against oppression.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis confirms that folklore remains a powerful, living source of inspiration in contemporary poetry. Shamlu and Basisu successfully transformed their respective folkloric heritages into dynamic media for social and political commentary. While they differ in their choice of material—with Shamlu gravitating toward philosophical and humanistic archetypes and Basisu toward nationalist and resistance-oriented narratives—they share a unified purpose: to reclaim identity through the power of oral tradition.

Ultimately, this study concludes that the integration of folklore empowers contemporary poetry to move beyond elite, individualistic expression, grounding it instead in the communal consciousness of the people. By blending traditional motifs with modern anxieties, Shamlu and Basisu



preserved the continuity of their cultural heritages while simultaneously providing a voice for the aspirations and protests of their contemporary societies. Folklore, therefore, functions not as a relic of the past, but as a vital, evolving tool for artistic and social articulation in the modern era.