

A Discussion on the Relationship Between Poetry and Painting in the Mirror of Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou's Concrete Poetry

*Yagub Norouzi¹  Barat Mohammadi²  Nouria Yahu³ 

1. Associate Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Maku Branch, Islamic Azad University, Maku, Iran. (Corresponding author) Email: yagub.norouzi@iau.ir
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Maku Branch, Islamic Azad University, Maku, Iran.

Article Info (۳۲۴-۳۰۵)

ABSTRACT

Article type:

Research
Article

Article**history:**

Received:

۲۰۲۵/۰۲/۱۰

Accepted:

۲۰۲۵/۰۸/۳۱

Keywords:

art
Beauty
painting
concrete poetry
Mohammad Ali
Sepanlu

Poetry has always borrowed things from other arts for beauty and impact; it borrowed the rhythm from the art of music and tried to approach music; From the techniques of performing arts in order to approach the art of performance and from painting in order to visualize and objectify concepts. The poetry flow of concrete poetry, which is also known by other name visual poetry was formed in the early 20th century in Europe under the influence of visual arts, cubism and imagism. This type of poetry aims to approach the art of painting, and the poet tries to present many concepts in a visual form, in the form of paintings and images, by using the visual possibilities of writing. Contemporary Iranian poets, inspired by this poetry movement. The reason for the tendency towards this movement lies in its artistic nature; Because art aims at perfection in deep structure and surface structure, and visual poetry, in addition to beauty and listening pleasure, also has visual beauty and an effort to create harmony between the theme and the form of writing. In Sepanlu's poems, we can see beautiful examples of concrete poems. By visualizing the poems, he has sought to convey and induce concepts and create harmony between the theme and the visual body of the poem. The necessity of the present research comes from the fact that so far no research has focused on the visual effects of Sepanlu's poems. The current research aims to analyze Sepanlu's concrete poems with descriptive-analytical method.

Citation: Norouzi, Yagub, Mohammadi Barat, Yahu Nouria (2026) A Discussion on the Relationship Between Poetry and Painting in the Mirror of Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou's Concrete Poetry. Modern Literary Researches, 5(1) 305-324

Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature

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: 20.1001.1.28211413.1405.5.1.12.7

Introduction

Poetry throughout history has continually engaged in interartistic dialogues, adopting rhythm and cadence from music, dramatic tension from performing arts, and visuality from painting to render abstract mental concepts tangible. In the early twentieth century, this synthesis culminated in the emergence of “Concrete Poetry” (also known as visual or plastic poetry) across Europe, deeply influenced by avant-garde artistic movements such as Cubism and Imagism. Concrete poetry departs from purely auditory traditions by prioritizing typographic, spatial, and graphic arrangements on the page, effectively transforming the written word into a canvas. In contemporary Persian literature, modernist poets have explored this visual dimension to transcend conventional syntactic norms and unify form with content. Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou stands out among contemporary Iranian poets for his deliberate utilization of visual and spatial techniques to evoke meaning. This study investigates the intersection of poetry and visual arts through a rigorous examination of Sepanlou’s concrete poems, exploring how typographical engineering generates aesthetic pleasure and reinforces semantic transmission.

Method

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in interdisciplinary literary criticism, textual analysis, and semiotics. The primary corpus comprises selected visual and concrete poems from Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou’s poetic oeuvre. The theoretical framework integrates established models of concrete poetry and aesthetic harmony (drawing on concepts from Apollinaire, Gomringer, and contemporary Iranian stylistics). The analysis evaluates how graphic interventions—such as word fragmentation, stepped layout, vertical alignment, and pictorial typography—interact with textual themes. The investigation examines the functional convergence of painting and poetry across three operational dimensions: spatial representation of physical forms, graphic externalization of abstract emotional states, and the cognitive enhancement of audience reception through visual memory.

Results

The analysis reveals several distinct structural techniques and aesthetic functions through which Sepanlou bridges poetry and painting:

- **Cubist Deconstruction and Typographical Pictorialism:** Parallel to Cubist painters who deconstruct natural perspective into geometric fragments, Sepanlou breaks linear syntax and conventional orthography to construct graphic figures on the page. In poems depicting physical objects—such as corridors (*dehliz*), trees sinking roots into the earth, mountain ranges, staircases, and descending rain showers (*ragbar*)—the layout mirrors the physical properties and spatial trajectories of these referents.
- **Phonetic and Morphemic Splitting:** Sepanlou strategically splits words across lines (e.g., dividing *ragbar* into discrete graphemic units) to visually simulate the fragmented rhythm of falling raindrops, establishing an organic unity between visual form and auditory imagery.
- **Spatialization of Abstract Concepts:** Abstract existential themes are translated into physical space. The concept of acute loneliness (*tanhaei*) is rendered through isolated, vertically stacked single-word lines; the idea of descending into an abyss or the grave (*maghak*) is structured as an inverted triangle moving from broad surface to a narrow base; and feelings of suspension (*mo'allaq*) are mirrored by hanging poetic lines.
- **Aesthetic and Cognitive Dualism:** By engaging both the visual and auditory faculties of the reader, the poems produce a heightened aesthetic impact. The visual configuration acts as an immediate cognitive shortcut, allowing the reader to perceive and retain the core emotional and conceptual message before processing the full syntactic text.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou's concrete poetry represents a deliberate and sophisticated convergence of literary text and visual art. Rather than functioning as superficial ornamentation, Sepanlou's graphic and spatial arrangements serve as integral semantic components that embody the modernist pursuit of organic unity between

form and content. By adopting techniques analogous to painting and graphic design—such as stepped versification, typographical deconstruction, and geometric contouring—Sepanlou enriches the expressive capacity of contemporary Persian verse, providing both aesthetic pleasure and enhanced cognitive engagement for the reader.