



## The comparative study of poems composed by Forough Farrokhzad and Emily Dickenson

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### Abstract

This investigation had been done in the domain of comparative literature between Persian and English literature. The goal of this research was to find some horizons of thoughts between two poetesses with two different cultures and language – ForoughFarrokhzad of Persian literature and Emily Dickenson of English literature.

### Key words

Comparative literature, Emily Dickenson, English literature, ForoughFarrokhzad, Persian literature.

### Introduction

Comparative literature is one of criticism branches of literature which investigates and compares the literary works from different countries and different cultures. ForoughFarrokhzad and Emily Dickenson for their huge similarities in thinking, ontology, politicalhuman studying, society, and personal life had been compared in this research.

### Research Questions

Studying these poetesses' works by pay more attention to their circumstances, social position, and effects that they may had on each other, can make such questions:

Did they live in the same environment?

Did they have any similarities in their thoughts?

Did they have any effect on each other?

### Explanation of Comparative Literature

Comparative literature is a branch, which shows difference between cultures and nations. So giving an exact explanation of it, is a complicated work. Comparative literature is mostly found in works which has multiple languages (Marcel, 1372/1993, p. 36). Kafafi remarks:



“Comparative literature studies the literature conflux in various languages and it’s complex relationship in past and present and its historical relationship in art, literary schools, streams of consciousness, subjects, and etc.” (1382/2004, p. 12).

### **Importance of Comparative Literature**

As GhanimiHelal said (1382/2004), comparative literature is important for it reveals the sources of streams of consciousness and the art of literature. Each stream of consciousness encounters with the international literature at first, and then co-operates to justify the consciousness of human beings. In comparative literature we can find the equal points in people’s minds more than anything else (p. 491). It can be said that comparative literature makes a new era in literary investigations, and must be known as a different literature branch.

### **A brief History of Comparative Literature**

As comparative literature was born in French, it can be considered a French science. The word “Comparative Literature” introduced by Francois Villemain - a professor of Sorbonne University - while teaching foreign literature in 1207 (Damrosh, 1383/2004, p. 127).

The French School of comparative literature was the center of attention until 20<sup>th</sup> century after the second World War, when the necessity of knowing other nations in order to attain peace appeared (Damrosh, 1383/2004, p. 128).

Comparative literature is one of the branches of literarycriticism which investigates the cultural relationship between nations through literature; on the other hand, I think it is a cultural interaction among nations over time.

Goethe, the German poet had a great influence on development of the concept of comparative literature. Goethe, willman, and John Jack Ampere had a great rule to create comparative literature. As Saint Bo mentioned: “Ampere was the greatest person who established the history of comparative literature”. Some English and German works appeared after him from poets and critics such as Mathew Arnold and Maupassant. Briefly, it should be mentioned, comparative literature didn’t bound to European countries, it was spread to the other countries soon.

### **Comparative Literature Schools**

Literary works in comparative literature compared in 3 fields: languages, cultures, and academic disciplines. As the word “Compare” presents both similarities and differences, we can use comparative literature for any literary works that seem to have some similarities and differences. Two French and American schools explain comparative literature as below:

### ***French School***

As it mentioned before, comparative literature was born in France, so French school's view point is the most important one. As the aim of comparative literature is to compare the literary influences by focus on lingual, cultural, and academic differences between two nations, it is impossible to compare a pair of literary works created in one nation. Those who communicate by a single language have the same intellectual concepts. So there is no variation or difference among the literary works written in a nation (Taha, 1387/2009, p. 25).

### ***American School***

The American school of comparative literature was introduced during the second comparative literature international congress in Northern Carolina University by René Wellek (1930-1995) just after the Second World War. This point of view emphasises on aesthetics, art, and manner. It traverses beyond the boundaries. (Anooshirvani, 1387/2009, p. 13).

Comparing French school and American school, the French one is trying to find influences which exist in literary works by two nations and creates research boundaries, while American school doesn't allow any boundaries in research (Anooshirvani, 1387/2009, p. 3).

### **Research Data**

#### ***Forough Farrokhzad's life and works***

Forougho Zaman Farrokhzad was born in 15<sup>th</sup> Dey (6<sup>th</sup> of January) 1313/1934 in Tehran. Her parents were Mohamad Farrokhzad and Batul Vaziri Tabar. Her father was a colonel in army and his job was the main reason to be a dictator in home, but her mother was a kind and simple minded person. The family included 6 children, 3 girls and 3 boys (Baghaei, 1390/2011, p. 5).

She received an incomplete early education; she abandoned formal learning after she finished the first 3 years of high school and never received a high school diploma. Later on, for a short period, she attended the Femal Technical School to study painting and sewing, but Forough's main art was writing poem, something that she began in her mid-teens. By the time of her 16<sup>th</sup> age, she began composing sonnets following the traditional poems.

Several factors made Forough's social life. First is her marriage to a government employee called Parviz Shapour, later on a critic and caricaturist. After the birth of their first child, a boy named Kamyar, in 1954, the family moved to Ahwaz. A daring, petite, and attractive young woman-the first to wear new fashion cloths in Ahwaz-Forough couldn't endure being just wife for a long time in a little town. The marriage broke down on that year and Kamyar's supervision went to his father.



Perhaps the most important factor was the way Forough showed her emotions openly in her poems that for centuries were forbidden by religious authorities, and conservative literati. The efforts of benevolent critics who tried to separate Forugh's personal views of morality from the freshness of her ideas and approaches from her versification also fell down the way side.

If Forugh lived longer time, we would find out a better understanding of Iranians society on that time. If her latter poems would be an indication, she foresaw much will happen to Iran during the decade. Anyway, she said her opinion. A brief chronology of Forugh's main activities between 1955 and 1967 are as follow (Bashiri, 1378/2000, p. 1-3).

Some of her works are: *Rebellion, Captive, I Feel Sad for The Garden, Wall, Sin, Another Birth, The Wind Will Carry us Away, We Should Believe that the Cold Season Begins.*

### **Chronology of Forough's life**

#### **1935**

Born in Tehran, one of 6 children of a middle class family

#### **1948**

Finished elementary school; began writing sonnets

#### **1951**

Finished high school; married to ParvizShapour

#### **1953**

Her son, Kamyar, was born; the family moved to Ahwaz

#### **1954**

Her marriage to Shapour is broken down; Kamyar's supervision went to his father; Forugh became devastated

#### **1955**

Asir (the captive), her first collection of poems was published in Tehran

#### **1956**

Divar (the wall), was published. The volume was dedicated to her ex-husband, Shapour; traveled to Europe for the first time and approached a new sight of world and herself.

#### **1957**

'Osiyan (Rebellion) is published; becomes an assistant to movie producer EbrahimGolestan, although their association and friendship became controversial, they worked together until Forugh died.

#### **1959**

She traveled to England to study the art of the film. TavalloDiDigar (Another Birth) was completed. The volume, published posthumously, was dedicated to



EbrahimGolestan who had helped the poetess enormously during their nine years of association. At this year Forugh began editing the film A Fire.

**1960**

Played a role and assisted in the production of the film Courtship dealing with Iranian courtship customs

**1961**

Co-Produced the film Water and Heat as well as made a commercial for the Kayhan newspaper

**1962**

Played a role in and assisted with the production of an unfinished film calledThe Sea. The theme of the film was based on SadeghChubak's short story "Why Did the Sea Become Stormy?" She also worked on a film about a leper colony in Tabriz. The film was called The House is Black

**1963**

Received grand prize for "The House isBlack " at Oberhausen Film festival in Germany.

**1964**

First anthology of her poem was published.

**1965**

Her life was the subject of a 15-minute film documentary produced by the UNESCO

**1967**

Visited Italy. Planed to play on the stage theater based on Bernard Shaw's St. Joan in Tehran; passed away in a car crash (February), at the age of 32.

**1974**

A posthumous collection of her poems was published (Bashiri, 1380/2000, p. 2).

**Life and Works of Emily Dickenson**

Emily Elizabeth Dickenson was born in 10<sup>th</sup> December 1830/1209 in Amherst in western Massachusetts, and died there on May 1886/1265. Her parents were Edward Dickenson (1803-1847) and Emily Norcross Dickenson (1804-1882). The family included three children, 2 girls and a boy. The Dickensons were well-off and well educated (Bohluli, 1390/2011, p. 84).

In 1860 when she was 30, she fell in love with Charles Wordsworth, one of their family friends. After one year Charles left Emily and went to California for work. It was a big romantic failure for Emily. She always was seen with white cloths after that fiasco, and people called her "*Secluded Queen*". On that period Emily composed her masterpieces, but she left home less than before and became seclude. She never married until the end of her life. In 15<sup>th</sup> may 1886 when she was 56 years old, she passed away because of nephrogenic disease. After Emily's



death, her sister, Lavinia, burned her private letters (Bohluli, 1390/2011, p. 86-88).

"During this housecleaning, she found a box which wondered her. More than 1700 poems! Emily kept the poems in order to compose them in 52 pockets. Lavinia introduced the result of Emily's effort to the world" (Movahed, 1385, p. 191).

Emily Dickinson enjoyed the writings of an impressive list of contemporaries such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. she also read from the Victorians, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thomas Carlyle, and George Eliot, and the Romantic poet Lord Byron. She also loved "David Copperfield" by Charles Dickens. When she discovered Shakespeare she asked, "Why is any other book needed?" In her home she hung portraits of Eliot, Browning, and Carlyle (Gamber, p. 2).

After several friends, a nephew, and her parents died, Dickinson wrote fewer and fewer poems and stopped organizing them, as she had been doing for many years. She wrote that "Dyings have been too deep for me." In 1890 Lavinia published Emily's works and since 1920 Emily's works became valuable for the world of literature.(Gamber, p. 3).

A brief chronology of Emily's main activities between 1830 and 1890 follows:

### **Chronology of Emily's life**

#### **1830**

Emily Elizabeth Dickenson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts. She was the second of three children of Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson.

#### **1840**

Emily and her sister Lavinia began classes at Amherst Academy, a converted boys' school. In her seven years of schooling there, she was frequently absent due to illness.

#### **1844**

Second cousin and good friend Sophia Holland died of typhus. Thirteen-year-old Emily was deeply shaken by the girl's death.

#### **1846**

Leonard Humphrey, an educator in his early twenties, took over as principal of Amherst Academy. Dickinson grew close to him as a friend and mentor. He was one of several older men she referred to throughout her life as a master.

#### **1847**

Dickinson completed her studies at Amherst Academy and enrolled at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (later Mount Holyoke College). Mount Holyoke classified its students into three religious categories: women who were



"established Christians," women who "expressed hope," and those "without hope". Dickinson was disappointed.

**1848**

Less than a year into college, Dickinson quitted her studies for reasons that remain unclear—possibly poor health, homesickness, her parents' wishes or her dislike of the school. Her brother Austin arrived at Mount Holyoke to escort her home.

**1850**

Dickinson's friend and former principal, Leonard Humphrey, died unexpectedly at the age of 25. "The tears come, and I cannot brush them away; I would not if I could, for they are the only tribute I can pay the departed Humphrey," Dickinson wrote to her friend Abiah Root.

**1855**

For the first and only time in her life, Dickinson traveled outside the borders of her home state. With her mother and sister, she spent three weeks in Washington D.C. visiting her Congressman father; she then spent two weeks with relatives in Philadelphia. After their return, Dickinson's mother fell ill.

**1856**

Dickinson's brother, William, married Emily's friend, Susan Gilbert. The new sisters-in-law have an intense, tempestuous relationship. Though Dickinson craved Gilbert's approval, the aloof, brooding Gilbert frequently hurt her delicate sister-in-law's feelings.

**1858**

Dickinson started making formal copies of her poems. Some of her verses appeared in the Springfield Republican, a paper edited by her friend, Samuel Bowles.

**1862**

After reading an essay by literary critic and abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dickinson wrote him to ask him to review her poetry. They strike up a correspondence that lasts for years.

**1864**

Poems appeared in *Drum Beat* to raise money for Union soldiers' medical expenses. Dickinson also published poems in the *Brooklyn Daily Union*.

**1867**

Dickinson began to voluntarily withdraw from social life, preferring to speak with visitors through a door rather than face-to-face. It was her most productive period of writing. She stayed socially active by sending numerous letters to favorite correspondents.

**1870**

After repeatedly declining his requests for a meeting or photograph, Dickinson met Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her pen pal of eight years. "She came toward me with two day-lilies, which she put in a childlike way into my hand, saying softly, under her breath, 'These are my introduction' Higginson recalled of their unusual meeting.

**1872**

In 1872 (or possibly in 1873), Dickinson made the acquaintance of Massachusetts Supreme Court Judge Otis Phillips Lord. They exchanged numerous letters over the years. Scholars speculate that the two may have become romantically involved after the death of Otis's wife in 1877.

**1874**

Dickinson's father, Edward, died of a stroke in Boston at the age of 71. He was buried in Amherst. Instead of attending her father's services, she listened to the funeral in her room upstairs.

**1882**

Dickinson's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, died. Her death relieves Emily, who had spent much of the last 30 years caring for her bedridden mother.

**1883**

Gilbert Dickinson, William and Susan's son and Emily's favorite nephew, died of typhoid fever.

**1884**

Dickinson's maybe-boyfriend, Judge Otis Phillips Lord, died.

**1886**

Emily Dickinson died of Bright's Disease—a kidney ailment now known as nephritis. After her coffin was carried—per her instructions—through fields of buttercups, she buried in West Cemetery in Amherst.

**1890**

Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, discovered hundreds of Emily's unpublished poems in her desk after her death. They were published together for the first time four years after Emily's death and become wildly successful, going through eleven printings in two years.

**Contents of Forough and Emily's poems**

We can classify contents of Forough's poems as follows: honesty in declaration of feelings, love, lover, beloved, feminism, disappointment, nihilism, Death, God, faith, religion, decline of values, freedom, and nature (Saeidpour, 1388/2009, p. 38).

The value of Emily Dickenson's works didn't recognize until 50 years after her death. In her poems we can see the equal experiences of life which means she



used her own experiences in life for her poems. The traditional thoughts of her father, that he didn't permit her to read many kinds of books, was the reason that we can't see any pastiche in her poems (Bohluli, 1390/2011, p. 129).

Emily Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, gathered Emily's poems and published them in 1890. Editors changed some of her words, punctuations, and capitalizations to make them conform to a certain standard. Later editions restored Dickinson's unique style and organized them in a roughly chronological order.

Emily Dickinson's poems have many identifiable features. Her poems have been memorized, enjoyed, and discussed since their first publication. Many critics consider her to have been extraordinarily gifted in her abilities to create concise, meaningful, and memorable poems.

The major themes in her poetry include friends, nature, love, and death. Not surprisingly, she also refers to flowers often in her poems. Many of her poem's allusions come from her education in the Bible, classical mythology, and Shakespeare.

Dickinson did not give titles to her poems, an unusual feature. Others have given titles to some of her poems, and often the first line of the poem is used as a title.

She wrote short lines, preferring to be concise in her images and references. A study of her letters to friends and mentors shows that her prose style was composed of short iambic phrases, making her prose very similar to her poetry.

### **Existence of common and contrast between Forough and Emily's poems**

#### **Love**

Love is the deepest and the most beautiful relationship that exists among human beings, and poem is the best way for declaring it, for feeling is the only similarity between two persons. The poet uses all the elements of nature and life in order to describe his/her beloved.

In the works of these two poetesses, love was one of the contents which declared in the form of poem with 2 different languages. This element was more colorful in Forough's poems.

In love, Forough is looking for a relationship without any media. She wants a true love. She doesn't like modern loves which are <Hyperbolic and full of calenture>or <Very elementary and painful>. Foroughbelieves to a true and touchable love.

*Night is colorful with your dream*

*My heart is full of your odor*

*You are my fervid body beats*

*Fire in the shadow of my eyelash* (Farrokhzad, 1371/1992, p. 68).

Emily's European culture, society, and belief was so different with Iranian culture. In her poems love is very generalized and ambiguous. She couldn't talk frankly about love like Forough, because she never got married. We shouldn't forget that she lived 50 years before Forough, and her poems were affected by traditional beliefs of that time.

In Dickenson's time, women didn't have freedom like today. She showed her prudency in her song. For being in a man's arms, she hid herself in a flower:

*I hide myself within my flower  
That wearing on your breast  
You unsuspending, wear me to-  
And angels know the rest  
I hide myself within my flower,  
That fading from your vase  
You, unsuspending, feel for me-  
Almost loneliness* (Qtd. in Johnson, 1995, p. 246)

### **Sin**

Another similarity that I found in their poems was indicating the Forbidden Fruit as a symbol of sin and passion. In Islamic culture the forbidden fruit is Wheat, Forough knew it, but she used Apple as forbidden fruit, which is Israelite. This subject matter shows that she was affected by western culture (qtd. in Akbari, 1389, p. 178).

*Everybody knows, everybody knows  
That you and me, from that morose aperture  
Saw the garden, and picked the Apple  
From that branch* (qtd. in Movahed, 1385, p. 59).

*And now Emily indicates wheat!  
Forbidden fruit a flavor has  
That lawful orchards mocks  
How luscious lies within the pod  
The pea that duty locks-* (qtd. in Saeedpour, 1388/2009, p. 23).

### **Feminism**

Feminist criticism explores the way in which literature and other cultural productions reinforce or undermine the social, cultural, economical, and psychological oppression of women. Feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather than what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in a patriarchal culture, a culture organized in the favor of men (Guerin, Labor, Morgan et al, 1386/2005, p. 222).

In 19-20<sup>th</sup> century women begin to try to gain their rights and the women we are talking about were the poetesses who object the society about women.

Forough is always concerned about the traditions and injustice that existed about women. In Emily's poems, we can find just 2 poems about women and the role that they are playing at home and society. Her poems show the first signs of feminist. Forough's poems are the full fledged objection of Emily. This poem from Emily is similar to Forough's thoughts:

*She rose to his requirement –dropt*

*The playthings of her life*

*To take the honorable work*

*Of woman, and of life-*

*If ought she missed in her new day*

*Of amplitude, or awe* (qtd. in Saeedpour, 1388/2009, p. 46)

### **Death**

Death is an unwanted end for all people and they always think to it, though nobody but a poet can imagine his/her death. In the poems which I surveyed from these 2 poetesses, death had been imagine with different faces. In Forough's works death is a subject that we can find it several times.

In Emily's works, death is detailed, for since she was a child, she encountered with the loss of her friends and family. She wrote about her soul flying and entering to another world. As she wrote in "Poems":

*I felt my life with both my hands*

*To see if it was there*

*I held my spirit to the glass*

*To prove it possible*

*I turned my being round and round* (p.33)

### **God, Faith**

In this research I considered 2 poetesses which one of them born in an Islamic, and another one in a Christian family. In Iran, Forough was talking about a mother that she is praying all her life long, and talking to God. In Emily's poems existence of God and believing in Paradise was crystal clear, too. In her point of view, God is supersensible. Although we can't see him, but his existence is incontrovertible (Bohluli, 1390, p. 165).

*A species stands beyond*

*Invisible as music*

*But positive as sound*

*It beckons, and it baffle*

*To gain it men have borne*

*Contempt of generation* (Dickenson, 1990, p. 44)

### **Nature**

In Forough's poems nature's perspectives had a special position. She used the elements of nature for declaring her own feelings to the reader:

*The sunlight of my eyes, became cold*

*My tears like rain, paint*

*What if I was silent like autumn*

*The leave of my dress my dreams, became yellow* (Farrokhzad, 1371/1992, p. 54)

Emily didn't use nature for expressing her feelings, in her poems we just encounter with nature as nature:

*It shifts from leaden sieves*

*It powders from all the wood*

*It fills with alabaster wool*

*The wrinkles of the road* (Dickenson, 1990/1369, p. 19)

### **Hope and Hopeless**

Hope is an element which helps people to encounter with agony and pain. People like Emily and Forough, that their lives spent in hopelessness always think to death. Forough didn't use the word "hope" unless when she wanted to talk about lack of it. Emily was not familiar with hope either:

*I am not used to hopsse*

*It might intrude upon*

*It's sweet parade- blaspheme the place*

*Ordainted to suffer* (Dickenson, 1990/1369, p. 123)

### **Conclusion**

Comparing two thoughts from two different cultures is one of the most important studies in order to find the root of the thoughts of great people.

In this research we tried to compare the thoughts and poems of two great poetesses from two different cultures and languages. After explaining Comparative Literature, we investigated about Forough and Emily's life, works, and thoughts. We found these contents: love, sin, feminism, death, God, faith, and nature.

Our research showed that these two poetesses had many common and contrasts which were related to their lifestyle, society. They both lived in their society but they were separated and sometimes rejected by people, for their thoughts and appearance were not the same with them. Their appearance was



different with normal people. In our opinion maybe they were more famous and successful if they live these days.

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