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Extended Abstract

The Role of the Implied Reader in the Composition of Two Elegies about Baghdad by Sa'di

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Introduction

The reader-response approach to literary criticism focuses on the active role of the reader in shaping the meaning of a text. This approach examines how readers, influenced by their cultural, social, and historical contexts, interpret and respond to a literary work. Unlike traditional forms of literary criticism, which prioritize authorial intent or the intrinsic qualities of the text, the reader-response theory emphasizes the dynamic interaction between the text and its audience. In this framework, the reader's background, beliefs, and expectations directly influence the interpretation of the text. Additionally, a key function of this approach is analyzing how the implied reader influences the creation of a text, even at the pre-writing stage. This study explores this concept through two elegies by Sa'di, the Iranian classical poet, written in Persian and Arabic. It investigates how Sa'di adapted each poem to address the unique cultural contexts of their respective audiences. This analysis demonstrates the central role of the audience in not only interpreting the texts, but also guiding their creation.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

This study employs a qualitative analysis of Sa'di's two elegies written in Persian and Arabic. The analysis is guided by the principles of reader-response theory, which stresses the interpretive role of the audience in both the creation and the reception of a text. The research involves a close textual examination, comparing the thematic content and stylistic elements of both poems. The existing literature on Sa'di's elegies for the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate includes two significant studies. The first, by H. Jadidi (2007), explores the historical context of Sa'di's elegies, providing excerpts from both the Persian and the Arabic poems and offering a brief analysis of Sa'di's politically strategic approach in addressing the Mongol rulers. The second, by H. Sarbaz and D. Gorgij Zarrinpour (2011), presents a comparative study of Sa'di's Arabic elegy and Shams al-Din Kufi's poem, focusing primarily on their formal structures. However, no study has yet applied a reader-response approach to these elegies.

This research distinguishes itself by utilizing a reader-response framework to examine the creation and reception of Sa'di's elegies. It investigates how the cultural, political, and social contexts of the Persian and Arab implied readers influenced both the production and the interpretation of these works,

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providing a new perspective on the interaction between the poet, the audience, and the text. The primary purpose of this study is to explore how Sa'di's elegies for different audiences –Persian and Arab– reflect the influence of reader-response criticism on the creation and the reception of literary texts.

By analyzing the two poems from the viewpoint of the audience's cultural expectations, this study aims to reveal how the poet's engagement with these expectations shaped the elegiac tone and emotional expression in the texts. The paper also seeks to demonstrate the broader implications of reader-response theory in understanding how authors may anticipate their audience's reactions, and how this anticipation can affect the construction of the text itself.

Discussion

The two elegies by Sa'di share four common thematic sections: the description of Baghdad's destruction, the promise of paradise, determinism, and the praise of Abu Bakr Zangi. However, the treatment of these themes in the two poems differs significantly. The findings of this study indicate that Sa'di's two elegies exhibit distinct emotional tones, shaped by the poet's awareness of his audience. The elegy directed at the Arab audience is characterized by empathetic and sorrowful emotions, reflecting the collective mourning for the fall of Baghdad. The tone is deeply mournful, acknowledging the shared grief of the Arab people who suffered from the Mongol invasion. In contrast, the elegy for the Persian audience is more restrained and less emotionally charged. The tone of the Persian elegy is more reflective, with a focus on the broader historical and moral implications of the event. The comparative analysis reveals how the cultural and historical contexts of the two audiences influenced the emotional expression in each poem, underscoring the role of the implied reader in shaping the interpretation of the text.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how the reader-response approach offers valuable insights into the creation and reception of literary texts, particularly in the context of Sa'di's elegies. The poet's awareness of his audiences, Arab and Persian, significantly influenced the tone, content, and emotional expression of each elegy. By considering the historical and cultural expectations of the audience, the study highlights the dynamic interaction between the text and its readers. The analysis not only enhances our understanding of Sa'di's poetry, but also contributes to the broader application of reader-response theory in the study of classical literature. The study encourages further exploration of how audience reception shapes the literary process and how texts can be interpreted differently based on the cultural backgrounds of the implied readers.

Keywords: Sa'di's Persian elegy, Sa'di's Arabic elegy, reader-response criticism, implied reader

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