



LOVERS IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM: ALDA MERINI; PARVEEN SHAKIR

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Abstract

Alda Merini and Parveen Shakir can be described as two female poets who were born in two different geographies, grew up in diverse cultures, gained variant life experiences, were kneaded with different pains but carry the happiness and pains of the same feeling in their hearts; Love. Alda Merini, as one of the leading female poets of Italy, brought the theme of love, which she addressed, together with the reader with a protestant attitude and in this respect, revealed the combative aspect of love. Parveen Shakir, on the other hand, made a balm out of the sprout of love that sprouted amidst impossibilities, which she added to the dough of the land she was born in, and managed to become hope for women in Pakistan. This article focuses on the way two different languages and two different names process love in the same language and tries to present a literary analysis of the life stories of two combative women.

Keywords

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ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜN PEŞİNDE AŞIKLAR: ALDA MERİNİ; PARVEEN SHAKİR

Öz

Alda Merini ve Pervin Şakir iki farklı coğrafyada doğmuş, farklı kültürlerde yetişmiş, farklı yaşam tecrübeleri edinmiş, farklı acılarla yoğrulmuş ama kalplerinde aynı hissin mutluluklarını ve sancılarını taşıyan iki kadın şair olarak nitelenebilir; "Aşkın". Alda Merini İtalya'nın önde gelen kadın şairlerinden biri olarak ele aldığı aşk temasını, protestan bir tavırla okuyucuyla buluşturmuş ve bu yönüyle aşkın mücadeleciliğini açığa çıkarmıştır. Pervin

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Şakir ise, doğmuş olduğu toprakların hamuruna kattığı acıklı bir yaşam öyküsüne, olanaksızlıklar arasında yeşeren aşk filizini merhem yapmış ve Pakistan'daki kadınlara, umud olmayı başarmıştır. Bu makale, farklı kültürlerde varolmuş iki farklı ismin, aşkı aynı dilde işleyişine odaklanmakta ve iki mücadeleci kadının yaşam öyküsüne edebi bir analiz sunmaya çalışmaktadır.

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Alda Merini was born on March 21, 1931, as the newest member of the family of Nemo Merini and Emilia Painelli. She lived during the Second World War and was forced to hide with her family during the bombing. Unfortunately, her parents didn't support her career, but as she grew up, her passion for poetry grew with her. She attended the Istituto Laura Solera Mantegazza, and she tried to pass the entry exam for the Liceo Manzoni, but ironically, she didn't pass the Italian language test. However, her teacher recognized her value as a poet, and she sent her first poem to Giacinto Spagnoletti. She was also noted by Salvatore Quasimodo and Eugenio Montale. In 1947, she spent a month in the mental health clinic Villa Turro in Milan, where she was also diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She wrote about this experience in "L'altra verità, diario di una diversa" (*The other Truth. Diary of a Misfit*), published in 1986. In this period, she was also very close to Giorgio Manganelli and Luciano Erba.

In 1950 she published her first poems in "Antologia della poesia italiana contemporanea 1909-1949" (*Anthology of Contemporary Italian Poetry*), and in 1951, under the advice of Eugenio Montale, the editor Giovanni Scheiwiller decided to publish other poems of Alda Merini in "Poetesse del '900" (*Women poets from 1900*).

In 1953, she married Ettore Carniti, and she published "La presenza di Orfeo" (*The Presence of Orpheus*), "Paura di Dio" (*Fear of God*, 1955) and "Nozze romane" (*Roman Wedding*). In these years, she also gave birth to her four daughters, and she dedicated a poem, "Tu sei Pietro" (*You are Pietro*) to her pediatrician. Unfortunately, due to a dispute with her husband, in these periods, she was sent to another mental health clinic Paolo Pini, from 1964 to 1972.

In 1979 she wrote "La Terra Santa" (*Holy Land*), and she won the prize Premio Librex Montale in 1993. She struggled to publish her works due to the death of her husband, until she met the editor Vanni Scheiwiller, who helped her publish "La Terra Santa" in 1984. In the same year she married the poet Michele Pierri, who deeply appreciated her poems. She moved to Taranto with him and in 1985 she wrote a collection of twenty poems "La gazza ladra" (*The Thieving Magpie*) and "Vuoto d'amore" (*Empty Love*). In these years her husband Michele Pierri was diagnosed with a terminal illness, unfortunately after his death her sons decided to send her again to a mental health hospital. After her release she was treated by the psychiatrist Marcella Rizzo, thanks to whom Alda Merini finally reached a state of serenity and peace of mind. In

this period, she published *Fogli bianchi* (*White sheets of paper*, 1987), *La volpe e il sipario* (*The Fox and the Curtain*, 1997) and *Testamento* (*Testament*, 1988).

In 1989 she started her life again in Milan, she used to spend time at the Chimera café, and there she wrote *Delirio amoroso* (*Love Delirium*, 1989) and *Il tormento delle figure* (*The Figure's Torment*, 1990). In 1991 she published *Le parole di Alda Merini* (*The Words of Alda Merini*), *Ipotenusa d'amore* (*Hypothene of Love*, 1992), *Aforismi* (*Aphorisms*, with photographs by Giuliano Grittini, 1993) *La palude di Manganelli o il monarca del re* (*The Manganelli Swamp or the King's Monarch*, 1993) and *Titano amori intorno* (*Titan's Loves Around*, 1993). After winning the Premio Librex Montale for poetry, she became famous amongst Italian poets and is now considered at the same level of Attilio Luci, Franco Fortini and Andrea Zanzotto. In 2007 she won the Elsa Morante Ragazzi prize, with the work "Alda e io - favole", (*Alda and me, Fairytales*) fables written in collaboration with Sabatino Scia. On 17 October 2007 she received an honorary degree in Theory of Communication and Language at the School of Educational Sciences at the University of Messina.

Alda Merini was one of the most influential figures of the 20th-century Italian literature. Her deep respect for poetry leads her to become an exceptional author. She dedicated her life to poetry as it was an important part of her life and helped her to live better. In an interview, she clearly stated that the poet is like a catalyst of cosmic energies, and the universe suggests the poet what to write.

We can find her temoignances in various books where she accompanies the reader in her reality, crude and alive as it is. These works are revived by her voice, which we can feel loud and clear through the descriptions of the events that will later leave a mark on her life. She was capable of perceiving with all her being, but this deep feeling of love wasn't always returned. She gave more than she received, and she cared the most for the important things in life, like kindness, respect and the search for truth and identity. As she stated in an interview with Tommaso Pedone ("Interview to Alda Merini", Tommaso Pedone, Italy, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXF-cK7Yngo>) she believed that people think too much about material things and therefore they can't see the true beauty of life, they miss the most important part of it. She died on November 1, 2009, in Milan.

Parveen Shakir was born on November 24, 1952, in Karachi, Pakistan. Parveen Shakir, who received her primary education in the institution called Rizviyah Colony in Karachi, continued her education at Rising Sun and Rizviyah Secondary Girls after graduating from this institution, since the British missionary school provided education until the fifth grade. Shakir, who completed her college education at Sir

Sayyid Girls College, started writing poetry during this period and wrote her first poems for the college's magazine. In her first year at college, she wrote a poem called Barsat, and Parveen Shakir clung to her work passionately and continued to write poetry, even though she was criticized by her father, who read it, and warned that she had no talent in this field and that she should not write poetry again. Her teacher, Irfanah Aziz, a poet in college, encouraged Parveen Shakir to write poetry and asked her to write a poem when Pakistan's liberation day, which was instrumental in the poet's first successful and serious poetry attempt, Subukh i Vatan:

The darkness suddenly disappeared. It has progressed and enlightened the hearts of slaves, the bright news of freedom!

In the following years, Parveen Shakir started to work in the radio and prepared a radio program called Kehkeshan. The poet, who won a two-year higher education program scholarship in 1968, wrote the English Language and Literature department with the guidance of her teacher and completed this program with second place. Parveen Shakir, who started teaching English at the Government Abdullah College for Women in 1973, continued this duty for nine years. During this period, her close friend Abdullah Alim sent Parveen Shakir's writings and poems to *Funun* magazine, which was published in Lahore and accepted as one of the important journals of Urdu literature, edited by Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, one of the most important writers and poets of Urdu literature. It was started to be published by Ahmad Nadim Qasmi. Her works published in *Funun* magazine brought fame to Parveen Shakir and she began to be characterized as an important poet for Pakistani and Urdu literature. Parveen Shakir married her aunt's son, Nasir Ali Sayyid, on October 14, 1976, and her son was born in 1979. After her education, Parveen Shakir started her professional life as assistant director of customs office and was later appointed as the secretary of the Central Board of State Revenue in Islamabad (Shabnam,2004:11). The poet, who ended her marriage in 1987, lived here with her son because of the rule that he must give her son to her husband if she marries again. The poet moved to America in 1987 and returned to Islamabad after a year. The poet was awarded the Faiz Ahmad Faiz Award, India's prestigious literary award, in 1989, and went to India to receive the award. Receiving an offer to teach at Hartford University of Connecticut, the poet accepted this task and moved to America. Parveen Shakir, who taught South Asian Literature at Hartford College for Women and Trinity College, went to Pakistan in 1991 for the award to be given to her by the Pakistani State, and after receiving the award, she returned to America to study at Cambridge Massachusset. Parveen Shakir, who received her master's degree in public relations titled "The Role of Media in the 1971 Pakistan-India War" from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, returned

after completing her education and was appointed as the director of the revenue office in Rawalpindi. She completed her MBA program from Harvard University in 1993. Parveen Shakir had a traffic accident in Islamabad and died on December 20, 1994.

Parveen Shakir is characterized as a poet who was influenced by the Romanticism movement and the progressive movement, which made important transformations in Urdu literature, and at the same time transferred her individual imagination and creativity to her poems. Love stands out as one of the main themes of Parveen Shakir. In her poems, separation and pain are a diet of pleasure and happiness from love. Parveen Shakir is also a poet of hope and despair. She questions her own self and position in herself and in others and forms the basis of her poetry on this ground. The lines "Where am I in your life? In the morning breeze? Or in the first stars of the night?"(Shakir, 2019: 111) stand out as an example of the poet's distinctive ability to make concepts such as love, pain, hope, despair, expectation and disappointment dance harmoniously in the same pot.

Especially in her work called *Khusboo*, she worked on love in all its dimensions and composed her poems with a romantic and realistic understanding. Especially the resentments, defeats, excitements and passions created by unrequited love in the individual stand out as the main themes used by the poet in her poems. While Parveen Shakir portrays love and the pain it produces in her poems with a realistic style, she ignores the boundaries drawn by the conservative society she lives in and draws new boundaries for herself with this new and brave style.

"In a similar fashion, the new women poets, including Shakir, have written on a range of experiences within marital love which no male poet ever wrote about in Urdu. Sexual intimacy; pregnancy; childbirth, infidelity; separation and divorce -these are topics that one would look for in vain in the books of contemporary male poets, not to mention their predecessor. To give one example, only due to these women poets we now have some fine poems, on the experience of being mother; sad to say, no male poet has yet written in Urdu a poem about being a father" (Bakht and Lavigne, 2004:11).

Although Parveen Shakir's main theme is love, she has not been one of the other romantics who have closed herself off to the pains of society. Another striking theme in Parveen Shakir's poetry is the pains caused by the coup periods in society and in the individual. Martial law was declared in Pakistan in 1957, 1969, 1977 and 1999, and the country was governed by military governments. The laws enacted in this period greatly restricted the rights and freedoms of the society, so poets and writers also got their share of these restrictions. The coup year that directly affected Parveen Shakir's

literary works. The coup led by Zia ul Haq was described as the coup that had the most profound impact on Pakistan's political history, and the decisions taken during this period shaped the present and future of the country to a large extent. Parveen Shakir, who lived in this period and experienced the pains of the coup period, described this period as a disaster and reflected the grief that this process created in her in her poems. The poet, who is observed to feel the responsibility of raising awareness of the people in her poems written for the coup period, also does not hesitate to criticize the people on the grounds that they did not resist this oppressive government. In this period, in which she presented the most precious examples of her socialist realist style, Parveen Shakir made themes such as freedom, justice, oppression, equality, rebellion the main themes of her poems, and in this way, she aimed to ensure that the people rebel against the oppressive government and regain a democratic identity. The poet was also enraged by politicians and other people who put their own interests before the interests of society by adapting to the corrupt administrative order and stated that such people corrupt the trust and merit-based structure of the country. One of the most important reasons for Parveen Shakir's adoption of the socialist realist style is that she was influenced by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's poetry style. The poet's nourishment from Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's literary education gave her diversity and difference both in terms of style and theme. Aftab Ahmad finds out on this subject that Parveen Shakir often included romantic and aesthetic themes in her poems in her early poetic years, but she also opened her poems to the painful aspects of life due to the thorny webs that life brought before her (Tanveer, 2014:13). Parveen Shakir has published her works named 'Khushbuu', 'Sad-Rang', 'Khud-Kalami', 'Kaf e Aina' and 'Inkar' and these works have been published in their entirety in the collection named 'Mah e Tamam'.

Love in Parveen Shakir's Poems

The feeling of love, the fact that love exists as a taboo in the society in which she lives, and the uneasiness and disappointment caused by her sometimes not being able to find a response to her love, have been the source of Parveen Shakir's intense use of this theme in her poems. The poet was severely criticized by this conservative point of view, not only for the bold love concepts she embodied in her poetry, but also for her behaviour and thoughts in her real life. However, despite all these pressures, Parveen Shakir described love in a brave manner both in her life and in her verses and conveyed it to the readers.

In Parveen Shakir's poems, however, she chose to work on the sad aspect of love and developed a conception of love in which she generally formed the dough of separations rather than reunions. The poet also sees love as a freedom and believes

that conservative societies can be transformed with the rebellious and combative aspect of love (Shakir, 1997). Parveen Shakir opposes the structure of male-dominated societies that postpones love and strongly rejects the imposition system in which women play a passive role in love. Therefore, this aspect of Parveen Shakir is the source of many innovations that will produce significant gains in the social life of Pakistani women.

“No discussion of modern Urdu poetry is complete without the name of Parveen Shakir. She ranks not only among the top Urdu poets, both male and female, but is also one of three female poets who could be regarded as pioneers in defying tradition by expressing the ‘female experience’ in Urdu poetry” (Bakht and Lavigne, 2004:5)

“Parveen Shakir's experiences, loves, pains, defeats, rebellions, in short, herself, in this work, in which she describes bravely and sincerely, her emphasis on the unity of soul and body in women's love, has caused her to receive many negative criticisms. While some critics have evaluated the way she describes the feeling of love for men as disrespectful to women and damaging to their dignity, some critics have claimed that Shakir's poems are the spokesperson of Eastern women whose emotions are repressed” (Özcan ve Köycü,2003:154-155).

Despite her conservative society, Parveen Shakir has never avoided revealing her feelings and has suffered in many parts of her life because of this feature. Parveen Shakir deals with the theme of love in her poems, she fills this theme with sub-concepts that are also based on love, such as separation, loneliness, longing, disappointment, happiness, sexuality and reunion.

The night stands on the first threshold of loneliness;

Hands outstretched; it beckons me.

I wonder:

Should I take these hands

And, step by step

Descend into the basement of quiet,

Or stay in my room?

The moon knocks at my window! (Bakht and Lavigne, 2004:19).

When Parveen Shakir published her first book, *Khusboo*, she presented a new theme to the readers, which was perhaps not so boldly dealt with before in Urdu literature: Love.

Undoubtedly, love has been a theme used by many poets in their poems in previous periods. However, Parveen Shakir dealt with love in such a bold and

rebellious way that perhaps this theme took on its true meaning in Urdu literature with it. In Parveen Shakir's book *Khusboo*, lyricism is generally dominant, and poetry on social and political issues to which the poet is sensitive is as little as possible. In this book, the poet opened up her inner world to the reader and perhaps reflected her real and imaginary experiences to her poems with all their nakedness. Parveen Shakir's bold style is as sincere as possible. Because she did not calculate the reactions she might receive in the face of her obscene expressions, and she never adopted a dishonest tone. This new style, in which the theme of sexuality is used as a sub-concept of love, has received more praise than the reactions it has received.

In her poem *The Heart's Laughter*, Parveen Shakir presents a young girl's concepts of love, hope and despair that trigger or restrain each other in a way that creates deep feelings in the reader. This poem is also valuable in that it describes the despair and hope of a woman who has suffered moral betrayals:

The girl whose face always betrayed
her melancholy.
whose lips, if smiled even for courtesy's sake
it seemed her eyes would spill
if she continued to laugh for another second;
who came to college so punctually
that you could time your watch;
who kept aloof and never came out of her shell,
absorbed in the thought of friends
in yore and yesteryear
That grave, gloomy girl
Gave way to my persuasion
And accompanied us to the picnic.
I saw
She, too, was sitting in water
With the rest of the girls
She was also playing with waves
I cannot say what made her laugh
With the other girls
I watched and watched
Her face beamed, her teeth grinned, her lips smiled,
And with them twinkled her eyes (Hasani, Baig and Baig, 2010:6-8).

In the poem named *Anniversary*, Parveen Shakir deals with the first childlike excitement, the first passion created by love in individuals with a bold and romantic

style that defies conservatism. It is considered a turning point in Urdu poetry that a woman poet reflects such passionate concepts in her poetry and conveys them fearlessly in this environment where women are reluctant to even talk about love:

This was the day
When we had met
Four years ago
On this very lawn
under the cool shade of violet vines
The moment when our bodies
did get the first sensual experience
and taste of their existence;
our souls enjoyed their new golden births
To this day
That special moment
caresses our souls with its balmy hands
Still it makes our eyes glow
It makes our bodies glitter as yet
To that moment we will remain indebted.
Come, let's make a prayer in this auspicious moment!
Let's raise our hands and pray
with the deepest, utmost intensity of love:

Whenever the sun rises of the 26th of June, together shall we catch sight of it. (Hasani, Baig and Baig, 2010:15-16). Although Parveen Shakir is the poet of the seedlings of hope and freedom, sometimes in her poems, she often deals with the existential pains and fragile dreams that love or social problems create in the individual and pulls the reader into a pessimistic spiritual cycle (Tanveer,2014). In the verses below, Parveen Shakir conveys the selves of hope and despair, love and pain, joy and sorrow, reunion and separation, contrasting but triggering and nourishing each other, in a romantic style. The poem is also a rare example of the spiritual and emotional transformation of man based on the outside world:

I used to see in terms of colours
and think in term of scents
I was under the illusion
that life was alighting on my window

with a candle of silver dreams in its hand
like a harbinger of light
Clad in moonlight I flew in fog and mist,
Up above in the sky
holding the hands of violet clouds
Cloud-like tones fell on my ears like drizzles,
rose-like faces illuminated my eyes
I enjoyed the silken company of the wind
and the gifts and blessing of the evening breeze.
Life was an uninterrupted series of dreams
But when I opened my eyes
the scenes and sights were all gone
and it was twilight.
The colours no more; no more dreams!
All I had was unmitigated agony
No moonlit night, no flower sight;
no sweet, sympathetic talks; no morning walks;
no evening by the lake;
no footsteps, no knocking at the door.
Words were all devoid of meaning;
symbols had turned sterile.
The apparels of pink dream were burnt to ashes
Reality with its stark nakedness
And unsparing ruthlessness
Was dawning on my body and soul
That benign, shady cloud was gone
leaving me alone in the lurch
The blistering heat of the earth
Was prickling in my eyes (Hasani, Baig and Baig, 2010:17-18).

In her poem *Ecstasy*, the poet combines depression, hope, happiness, exhaustion and numbness in one pot, creating a rare example of her unique style with magnificent harmony:

A deep-dark scarf
Schimmering in light-green light;
Melting in strong arms, a delicate one;
The skirt ruffled, the veil in disarray;

The fire in cheeks, mellowing the cool of the air;
Soft hands, playing with silky hair;
The shadow of a playful moment on red lips;
Whispers of love in shy tones;
One shared sound, beating in two hearts.
Trembling lips had only one prayer to God:
Let these moments stay for a while! (Bakht and Lavigne, 2004:22)

In another poem of the poet, Caution, fear, disappointment and bohemian cognitive expressions are noticeable:

Even in sleep,
I hide my face with a veil.
I am scared
Lest a quiver of my eyelashes,
And the shimmering pink on my cheeks
Unveil this happiness of mine
That grows stars in my blood.
A smile in my sleep
Might betray my cherished secret. (Bakht and Lavigne, 2004:20).

Love in Alda Merini's Poems

Alda Merini was deeply involved in poetry since she was 15. In her early career, in 1947, Silvana Rovelli sent some of her poems to the literary critic Giacinto Spagnoletti. As he was positively impressed by her works, he introduced her to various influential authors of the time, in one of the most remarkable literary circles in Milan. Among them we can find Pier Paolo Pasolini, Maria Corti, Luciano Erba and Giorgio Manganelli, with whom Alda began a tormented love affair, that ended in 1949. Her passion for literature leads her to meet a lot of relevant poets of the time like Eugenio Montale and Salvatore Quasimodo, with whom in 1950 she also got romantically involved. The relationship lasted until 1953 (<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/BIOS/A0202.html>). In 1950 Spagnoletti published Alda Merini's poems "Il gobbo" and "Luce" in his anthology *Poesia italiana contemporanea*. Her poetry was so well perceived that it captured the attention of Quasimodo, Pasolini and Montale. Montale suggested to Vanni Scheiwiller to include Alda Merini's lyrics in his anthology *Poetesse del novecento*, published in 1951. It seems that her love she constantly gives was intermingled with the love for poetry. In her

compositions she really gave space to something unspoken that people could usually perceive as scandalous, but in her style the language and form she uses enhance her innocence. The result is a crude reality seen with the eyes of a pure soul. This oxymoron lets her poems sing in the mind of people that, by reading her lyrics, find an accurate description of the world perceived through the experiences of the author, without filter or a language that could hide the true meaning of her thoughts. An essential and authentic poetry. It's with this very style that Alda Merini describes her craving for love, as she did in these verses coming from a platonic love for Eugenio Montale:

To Eugenio Montale:

Your golden grapes
Lost lemons

In the womb of other women
Who only dreamt of you

It happens to me also, master,
To make love
With those

I've never met (<https://www.frammentirivista.it/alda-merini-ritratto/>)

There is also another side of her poetry, a love for existence and perseverance, the hope that forced her to continue looking for what she really needed.

I don't need money
I need feelings.

Of words, chosen with care,
Of flowers, like thoughts,
Of roses, like presences,
Of dreams, that inhabits trees,
Of songs that make statues dance,
Of stars that murmurs to lovers' ear.

I need poetry,
This magic that burns the heaviness of words,

That revives emotions and gives new colours
(<https://www.poesiedautore.it/alda-merini/io-non-ho-bisogno-di-denaro>)

In the first part, where she stated: "I don't need money, but feelings. / Of words chosen with care, / of flowers as thoughts, / of roses called presences" She didn't describe only the things that she needed the most in a relationship, but also in life. She lived for her poetry as she was giving birth to her own emotions; in these breaths of life, we can see the true essence of love, but above all the fundamental aspect of this feeling that would have eradicated her solitude: presences, one of the elements that give this emotion a meaning.

Another character trait of Alda Merini was her dedication to love. She believed that love was like a torch for the poet ("Interview to Alda Merini", Tommaso Pedone, Italy, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXF-cK7Yngo>). This is another essential theme that transpires from this poem; she writes about the dreams and songs she could never reach, and of the stars that murmurs to lover's ear; though she didn't have this anymore, she needs poetry to find the magic that burns the heaviness of words, that revive emotions and gives her new colours.

Her passion and love were represented in many other poems, more like a craving and a leading light than just luxurious feelings. In the poem "To Love you can't resist" she expresses the desire of a lasting love, of grasping the beauty of love, both physically and in an ethereal way.

To love you can't resist

For the hands want to possess the beauty

And never let to stun years of silence.

For love is to live two thousand dreams

Until the sublime kiss(<https://www.poesiedautore.it/alda-merini/allamore-non-si-resiste>)

In this poetry we can see the style of Alda Merini that comprehends Realistic and Romantic traits. In the first part of the poem there is almost a sense of abandonment, of trying to preserve a love with imaginary hands that slips away and almost fades out of stunning years of silence. Silence intended maybe as time without feeling love, or even worse silence intended as a lover who makes you feel alone even in his presence. So, there is again in the realistic part of her poem the theme of abandonment and solitude. This feeling is promptly swept away by the romantic part, where she mentions dreams and sublime kiss, as these were her desire to receive affection as it should be. The author left the reader with a picture that we are free to

guess and imagine. To dream how a life with true love could be, extended to two thousand years, and how it will end with a sublime kiss.

She translated these deep feelings into poetry as a freedom of expression, she felt relieved for being able to look for her true being in all her life she always managed to define herself, even when she was signed and struck by the bad experiences that fate kept throwing at her. The most extraordinary thing was her will to keep defining and looking for her identity.

“These years in a mental hospital... I didn’t turn crazy to think of how to become famous, I was no one anymore (...) this means in that period I was very happy of being forgotten, because apparently my brain was saturated, I didn’t want to work, or maybe I wanted to remove something unpleasant (“Alda Merini – Dall’altra parte del cancello”, Simone Cristicchi, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7bymfrwsE8)”

Being famous as a condition itself can lead people to question their own identity, because to have fame means to give others a perspective of oneself that doesn’t fit with whom we really are. Famous people must act in a certain way, they have to follow a code in public, and this forced behaviour can lead to a disintegration of personality. People don’t see the person, but the image of her that everyone is reflecting and distorting. Alda Merini lived a slice of life that confirms this theory. In a period in which she most needed humanity and understanding, when she was in the mental hospital, and she asked a stranger for a coffee:

“You know, when I was in the mental hospital, I didn’t even had coffee, I shouldn’t drink it... One day I asked someone if he could offer me a coffee, exactly here on the canal. I asked him “Could you buy me a coffee?” I was exhausted. You know what he told me? “I don’t buy coffee to crazy women. That crazy woman was Alda Merini.”(<http://www.aldamerini.it>).

This event contributed to the building of her character. She became what she was also thanks to the misunderstanding, prejudices and pain she was forced to bear, and she did it gracefully with a respect that not anyone is capable to carry after all she went through.

All this solitude was also exacerbated when in 1965 her husband Ettore Carniti committed her in a mental hospital, away from his presence but above all away from her daughters.

Alda Merini described the value of solitude, and how the wrong people can ruin our inner and sacred world if we let them enter our life.

That’s the value of solitude: the aura that rarely rises, - that theorists call mysticism -, that deep down is something very heightened that comes from a purified environment. A molest presence can break everything.

Alda Merini, as her daughters also stated, was truly in love with his husband. He was jealous, a hard worker, and he couldn't comprehend the importance that Alda Merini gave to poetry. To the contrary, he was indifferent to her interests and passions (<http://www.aldamerini.it>). All this indifference will lead to a difficult period for her, moments of solitude and injustice, were, between 1965 and 1972, she was forced to live committed in the mental hospital Paolo Pini. She remembered her first experience in there as shocking and confusing. She said that she was still a child at heart with few experiences even though she was married and with two children, and that her soul was still clean and pure. She stated that before that period she was a happy mother and wife, even though she would tell her husband how she was feeling tired, and that sometimes her mind went numb. She said that she opened to him, but he didn't understand, and her condition worsened. After the death of her mother and the exasperation caused by the continuous work and poverty, she had a heated fight with her husband; he decided to call the ambulance. She couldn't imagine that she would have been left in a mental hospital. Unfortunately the laws in that period wasn't at all respectful for people with mental illness, and in 1965 the law also stated that women had to obey to their husbands' will; Alda Merini had bipolar disease, something that nowadays can easily be treated, then she was a woman, that means that she was completely at the mercy of her husband who had to decide if she had to be committed. So, without any consultation from her part, she was left in a mental hospital¹. Her daughters were sent away from her, and that was the worst part. She even stopped writing for all the period she lived in that structure.

This is a temoignance of her first impression of the place:

So I didn't know I was being committed, and I didn't even know that mental hospitals existed because I never saw them, but when I was there I think I became suddenly crazy when I realized that I entered into a maze from which it was very difficult to get out (Alda Merini, *L'altra verità, diario di una diversa*, pp. 13-14, BUR.).

The fight that caused all these sequences of events was also generated by the behaviour of her husband; their daughters discovered what really happend only in a second moment, after they were sent to other families. That night Ettore Carniti came home after hanging out with some of his friends, and he had spent all the money meant to sustain the family. That night she threw a chair to him, and she hurt him. Before this event, she was hurting a lot too, not for jealousy but because she was beaten by her husband whenever he was drunk, but she loved him, and she fell into the illusion that he would change.

In the following poetry Alda Merini expresses all the daily injustice that she was forced to deal with. All the women can relate with her verses, written in a chant that, despite everything, is almost shouting her ability to fight, love, and protect.

To all Women

Frail, opulent woman, moulder of
Paradise
You're a grain of guilt
Even to the eyes of God
Despite your holy wars
For emancipation.
They broke your beauty
What's left is a skeleton of love
That still shouts for vengeance
And only you manage to
Still cry,
Then you turn around and see your children,
Then you spin around, and you still don't know what to say
And you fall silent amazed
And then you become great as the Earth
And you raise your chant of love(<http://www.aldamerini.it>).

She learned from her experiences, and shaped poems and books out of them. During her experience in the mental hospital, she looked for a connection with the few people she was allowed to keep in touch. In her writings she was always very respectful and kind. Sometimes it seems like she was seeking guidance from others during the darkest time of her life, even though she didn't know that in the future a lot of people would have learned a lot from her letters and works, and that she'd become an example for her readers.

Everyone as a reader, as a student but above all as a human being, should take her as an example, an inspiration, a great poet and teacher of life.

Alda Merini stayed as she was, the pure essence of her being enhanced and reinforced her personality through art and poetry. She liked to talk and meet interesting people and took inspiration from them to create significant stories. That's

why she used to give her poems as a gift to the ones important for her. They were like a token, a piece of her being, that will never fade.

She could be considered a poet anthropologist both for her experience and her contact with society. She could see through the soul of people and reach that solid advice from the universe that helped her to write. That's why her poetry is gentle and pure but at the same time strong and empowering, she told the truth in a romantic but at the same time realistic style. We can see as her life continued, how she managed to survive her own fate and mind, how she conceived the people around her as the true reflection of existence. She used to joke with the interviewers by telling them that she was undisturbed until they arrived, they disturbed her calmness. It was more a calmness as a tranquillity, a lonely bliss that she conceded herself in the last years of her life. The same feeling she had after she healed her soul. This is the main problem of our society, misunderstood individuals are labelled as fools, whilst people just want to be heard and comprehended as they are, as human beings. A lot of people would avoid suicide and mental illness if they were heard, or if we could just give them a smile.

That's why Alda Merini was always craving for love or just human contact, she talked to the poorest people and gave them a piece of her life, a time well spent as she surely managed to enlighten – even if for a moment – the existence of other human beings. In a society always centred on productivity and consumerism, where the art was starting to be put aside, (as her husband did with her passion for poetry) she clearly was caught in a storm of misunderstanding that went beyond her control.

She wasn't loved as she wanted, she lived with an abusing husband, her daughters were later taken from her, and this influenced deeply her affective sphere. This is something it shouldn't ever happen, but despite everything, as a person who was victim of society, she tried to be an example in every aspect of life.

As she stated about herself:

"They live apart from me, in foster care in faraway families, only two of them, but I don't like to talk of my children... They love me, as everyone... we must pay attention not to confuse fanaticism with love. I mean there isn't the poet, there is the human form of the poet. I think that I've been much greater as a human being than as a poet. Maybe they praise this in me" (<https://www.aldamerini.it/>)

Conclusion

Alda Merini and Parveen Shakir are described as two innovative and protestant voices of contemporary Italian and Urdu literature. Rather than the classical themes of

Italian literature, Alda Merini followed themes such as love and the melancholy, longing, happiness and sadness derived from love and tried to overcome the difficulties in her life by holding on tightly to this concept. The poet, who blended mystical concepts with contemporary literary style, presented Italian literature with a new understanding of poetry in which passion and tension were at the forefront. The psychological problems she struggled with for most of her life did not discourage her, on the contrary, they caused her to hold on to poetry more. Merini, who formed the basis of her poetry from pain and the painful traces left in her mind, made love the main actor in the process of coping with difficulties and integrated this theme into her works with this understanding. The basic principle that makes the poems of Shakir, who represents Eastern culture, and Alda Merini, who represents Western culture, special is the female language that stands out in their poems, in other words, the female identity and the ability to hope against despair.

Parveen Shakir is a female poet whose level of consciousness is beyond the conservative understanding of literature and society that was established in her country during the period she lived. The sociological traumas in her environment, combined with the cognitive and emotional problems in her life, provided the inner accumulation that would lead her to become one of the most important poets of contemporary Urdu literature. The emotional breakdowns in her marriage and the search for ideal love in her mind, in particular, deeply affected the poet and she processed love in her poems as a happiness that arises from pain and turns into pain. The poet's concept of love is uncertain, unattainable and burning when reached.

The theme that unites Parveen Shakir and Alda Merini in a common ground and forms the subject of this study is love. In the poems of both women poets, love appears as a means of escaping from the pain of life and eliminating cognitive dissatisfactions. The process in which platonic love begins to turn into a destination has determined the main theme of both poets as longing for the beloved, and these two women poets have transformed their platonic love into a universal hope. In the poems of Parveen Shakir and Alda Merini, the aspects of love that create anxiety, longing and pain come to the fore, and the two poets reflect the psychoanalytic, emotional and affective concepts they derive from their different life experiences in their poems in a romantic yet protesting style.

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