The Study of Structure of Paintings Related to Confrontation of Khosrow and Shirin from the Semiotics viewpoint

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Abstract

In the history of Iranian art, the greatest and most important paintings provided by the Iranian painters deal with visualization of literary books. One of the famous literary types is lyrical literature and romantic stories which has gained a wide range to express the emotions and feelings of the poet in Persian literature. Therefore, love stories and scenes of lovers’ confrontation are of the main visualized themes in Iranian painting. On the other hand, love stories have created opportunities to display divine and mystical love metaphorically in terms of the narratives of earthly love, and have been taken into consideration by Iranian illustrators and painters. Visualization of lovers' confrontation has structural basics and features which seem to have common structure and common spirit when placed together. In the current study the comparison of two painting related to Khosrow and Shirin in two different times has been examined in a qualitative and descriptive method. This study aims at identifying common features and the general principles of these paintings based on the foundations of visual arts and with the help of analysis and interpretation of two iconic models related to the confrontation of Khosrow and Shirin, and discusses about how the artists used this kind of visualization in their works. The results showed clear differences in Semiotics point of view such as: the arrangement of the figures, the usage of colors, element composition, and also a discrepancy in viewpoints of two painters about the mystical or the earthly love of Khosrow and Shirin.

Keywords: Iranian painting, confrontation of Khosrow and Shirin, Semiotics, structure of painting, visualization

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Introduction

A lot of vocabulary has been used in Iranian texts to express the phenomenon of “love” some of which has been existed for a long time. In the ancient Avestan, the Goths and Middle Persian language texts, many times have been talked about kindness and friendship. Words like “aghasheh” could be found in Rudaki’s lyrics. Love, kindness, fascination, aghasheh, magic and mania are all the words used or are using in Iranian texts for expressing the phenomenon of love. In poems, part of the stories of Shahnameh, the poems of Ganjavi, Khajavi Kermani, Ayuki, Jami, Vahshi Bafghi, Ahli Shirazi, etc. have expressed love stories, and many poets have also studied the nature of love in a state separate from the features of Sufism, such as Hafiz, Sa’di, Baba-Taher, Khayyam, and Rudaki, who have had romantic lyrics, as well as have studied the nature and efficacy of love.

Research Methodology

In the current study, the research method is qualitative and descriptive and mainly focused on content analysis method. Selection of the works for structural and semiotic criticism is based on the two different periods of time and style.

Research Findings

Iranian Painting is recognized as an original and perfect art all over the world. Using their structure and artistic principles in contemporary illustrations can also help the strength of artworks. On the other hand, with this, the Iranian identity of these artworks can be preserved in contemporary artworks. Based on the principles of visual arts and the semiotic approach and with the help of the analysis and interpretation of several outstanding examples of the romantic meeting of Khosrow-and-Shirin, as one of the most beautiful romantic stories of Iranian literature, the identification of common features and the general principles of this type of illustrating and the way which the artists use these principles in their works has been studied.

Finally, these common principles can be used in contemporary paintings which require the presence of a strong structure.

Love in Persian Painting

Love is the heart and diamond of Persian art. Diamond and heart are allegories that reveal the aesthetic and practical aspect of love respectively. Iranian painting with its elegant appearance and transcendental themes is full of secrets in which the discovery of those secrets is the concern of every artist and scholar. Finding the relationships of the concepts with paintings is a complex and technical task that requires recognition of at least these three fields:
1) The field of shape

2) The field of content

3) The field of intuition and mysticism

The history of Iranian Painting in Iran and the main schools of Seljuk, Ilkhani, Teimuri, the first Tabriz, Qazvin, Shiraz, Bukhara, the second Tabriz and Safavi indicate a close relation between the internal changes in Islamic thought and Islamic Painting of Iran. This leads to an upward trend in aesthetic deepening. In the historical trend of this field, to the extent that the themes gradually progress from surface to depth and become meaningful from the nature to supernatural (Rahnavard, 2003: 70).

Art in the visual realm of Iranian art and culture has appeared with three types of expression:

(A) The abstract expression that appears in carpet-weaving in Slavic and Khatami figures, as well as in Bottehes, Toranjs, Lachaks and Gerehs. It also appears in other types in calligraphy art.

(B) The figurative expression that appears in Persian Painting in Gol-o-morogh, as well as in the drawing of Qajar cafes and paintings.

(C) Functional expression that is used in the use of synthetic arts (Afrough, 2008: 80).

Definitions of Love

‘The beloved’, in the Persian literature, is the allusion of a person who is loved and ‘lover’ is the person who loves the beloved. Generally, the beloved is interpreted as a woman. The meaning of love in the Moein’s dictionary is as follows:

1 - Loving strongly. 2 - Fascination, affection. 3 - Pleasure; Platonic love not associated with sexual orientation. Also, in Dehkhoda's dictionary, it is as follows: Love, (Aqrab al-Maward), Aghasheh.(Refer to Aghasheh)

Aghasheh in Moein’s Dictionary: a plant that is high-scrolling with coarse leaves and thin stems. Its fruit has a laxative effect but it is not toxic. Liking is called love when it reaches its highest point and does not follow any particular reason (Amin, 2009: 10).

Love in Persian literature

Ghanaei literature is one of the famous literary types in Persian. Ghana, literately means music in Arabic. Ghanaei poetry is some sort of a poem that narrates the emotions and personal feelings of the poet in its broadest conceptions and has found a wide range in Persian literature (Rezaei Ordani, 2008: 2).

• Ghanaei Poetry began to develop from the middle of the 3rd century AH and the oldest ones can be found in the literature of the Hanzaleh-Badghisi (220 AH).

• Abolmayed Balkhi and a person called Bakhtiar, who lived in fourth century, have rhymed the story of Yousef-and-Zuleikha. This story was rhymed by poets such as Noureddin Abdul Rahman Jami (in 888 AH) and Hussein Nazem Heravi (in 1058 AH) and Beyg-Azar-Bigdeli (in 1176 AH) in the ninth and eleventh and twelfth centuries.
Onsori is the oldest poet of the fifth century who has rhymed the romance stories. Wameq-and-Azra, Kheng-Bot and Bot-e-Sorkh, Shadbohr and Ain-al-Hayyat are the names of the stories that he has rhymed.

In the early fifth century, the story of Varagheh- and-Golshah was rhymed by Ayuki (contemporary poet of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi).

In the middle of the fifth century, one of the ancient Persian stories called Weis-va-Ramin by Fakhredin-Asad-Gorgani was written between the years 456-455 AH.

Rhyming the stories reaches its highest points, by the Ganjavì-Nezami, at the end of the sixth century AH. These stories include: Khosrow-va-Shirin, Leili-va-Majnoon, Haft-Tan, Eskandar-naameh (historical-epics) and Makhzan-al-Asrar that create Panj-Ganj or khamseh of Nezami.

Also, Farid-al-Din-Attar is a famous poet and great mystics of the sixth century that the Dokhtar-e-Tarsa-va-Sheikh-San'an is the longest story of his Mantegh-al-Tair book. The story of Rabeie-and Becketash is also one of his romance stories.

The first great imitator of the Nezami, Amir Khosrow Dehlavi (725 651) in the eighth century AH, is known for his stories such as: Shirin-va-Khosrow, Leili-va-Majnoon, Hasht-Behesht and Aaienei-e-Eskandari.

After Amir Khosrow, Khajavi Kermani (752 689), has written the Kamal-Naameh, Gol-va-Nowruz, Gohar Naameh and Homay-va-Homayoun.

The most famous Iranian storyteller after poets of the sixth and seventh centuries is Noor al-Din Abdul Rahman Jami whose Masnavis such as Salaaman-va-Absaal, Yousef-va-Zulikha and Leili-va-Majnoon are all beautiful romantic poems in Persian language.

**Love in Islamic philosophy**

There are several definitions for love in Islamic philosophy. Among these, what is mainly referenced is the intensity of enthusiasm towards unity. God is the first beloved, because all the creatures are eager to Him. He is the source and origin of them, and also the reason for their continuity and perfection. In holy Quran, the word ‘love’ has not been used to show the relationship between man and God, but the word "hobb" has been expressed (Chaman Khash, 1385:56).

From Avicenna’s point of view, every creature has an innate love that is the cause of its existence. In Islamic philosophy, love is divided into two Mystical-Heavenly, and Virtual-Earth divisions. The same divisions have been repeated by Sheikh-e-Ashraq, Khajeh-Nasir-Tusi and Mulla-Sadra. The development of the word love to the concept of the divine love is a bridge, which Muslim scholars have created between Islam and pre-Islamic thoughts and myths since the late second century onwards.

(Amin, 2009: 27).
Love in Iranian culture and mysticism and Hafez's trainings is firstly, divine love (love for the spirit of the world), and secondly, terrestrial love (love for the world) (Chaman Khash, 2006: 57). According to some mystics such as Sheikh-Ruzbehan in Abharul-Asheqin, love is one of the divine attributes. (Amin, 1388: 11).

The Philosophy of Love in Ancient Iran and the Asian-Aryan Religions

The ancient Iranian philosophy was closely associated with religious beliefs, and these beliefs were on the one hand in the ritual of the kindness (Mithras), which is the kindness of God, the love and the covenant between the Creator and the Creatures, and on the other hand, it was rooted in the Elamite religions.

The daughter of the Lady of Sepant-Armeti (= “Sepnardand” in Persia) as the daughter of Ahura-Mazda, the Guardian of the Earth, is the spirit of love and the manifestation of affection, which all types of love were all the manifestations of her existence (Amin, 2009: 22).

In Buddhism, human desire, in other words, sensual, material and terrestrial love is considered as the root of dissatisfaction and grief of man. The human emancipation of grief requires the abandonment of virtual love and the perception of enjoyment from the absolute love, which is, in fact, the public goodness. The source of these mystical thoughts is the Buddha's words. In the ancient Chinese philosophy, which has been around for three thousand years, it has been stated that it is impossible to think clearly and rationally when anger or lust or hate or sexual-love affects a person.

Types of true and virtual love

The most important division of love is into heavenly, true and spiritual on the one hand; and terrestrial, virtual and apparent on the other hand.

Ein-oil-Ghazat-Hamedani, in explaining the levels of love, has said that love has three aspects: the minor, the great and the middle. Ebn-e-Davood-Esfahani, in the third century in the book of Al-Zohreh considered the earthly love as "martyrdom", which is the supreme type of worship, in condition of hiding by lover and not getting lusty. Plato has considered love to have different degrees, including human-to-human love (male and female love) and the human love to the origin.

Famous lovers

Famous lovers are couples of usually heterosexual (male and female) and sometimes homosexual whose myth of love between them has gone beyond the time and place and become popular in national or even international level. Here is a list of famous Iranian lovers, arranged based on the oldest literary versions:

• Yousef-vaa-Zuleikha (Aboulmyd Balkhi, Bakhtiari: fourth century)
• Wameq-vaa-Azra (Onsori, fifth century)
• Varagheh-vaa-Golshah (Eioughi, fifth century)
• Veis-va-Ramin (Fakhreddin Asad-Gorgani, fifth century)

• Dokhtare-Tarsa-va- Sheikh San'an, the story of Rabea'va-va-Baktash (Mantegh-ol- al-Ta'ir Attar, sixth century)

• Khosrow-va-Shirin, Leili-va-Majnoon (GANJAVI-NEZAMI, sixth century)

• Homai-va-Homayoun (Khajavi Kermani, eighth century)

• Jamshid-va-Khorshid (Salman Savaji, eighth century)

• Soleiman-va-Belghais (Feizi-Fayyazi, eleventh century)

Semiotics of Shirin’s bathe painting

The paintings of Khosrow and Shirin's story have been created in trainings of Shiraz, Isfahan, Qazvin, Herat and Tabriz and have several scenes. One of the most frequent scenes in the romance stories is the scene of Shirin’s bathe, and one of the most beautiful paintings of this scene is the painting of the Soltan- Mohammad which is examined in terms of semiotics.


Nature represents paradise and a metaphor of heavenly lasting beauty. Water is a symbol of purity and consummation. The spring is the symbol of inside the earth, the inside secret and the heaven. The horse implies a palfrey of soul that carries love.

Shirin at the bottom, Khosrow on top, from a feminist perspective is due to the patriarchal view of society. But from the ontological point of view of woman, since woman is the root, and as well the mother of the human destiny, her link to the spring indicates that she is connected to the origin and reveals the pivotal role and the position of women in all aspects of life in the practical and opinion realm.

Shirin hangs her clothes and crown on the branches of the tree and symbolically deprive herself of high social status, not only wash her body in the springs, but also removes the dust of the soul. Furthermore, it comes close herself to the specific clarity and transparency of woman’s soul which covered by social position.
The mountains and the blue and purple shoals have camouflaged Shirin like a shelter, and have separated Khosrow from Shirin like an obstacle in their lives. And the blue and violet colors are the symbol of the passionate love, but not the usual red fire, it is, in fact, the extraterrestrial or Ahura fire. Nakedness of Shirin is the symbol of her release from existing constraints. Placement of Shirin, spring and trees in the center of visual focus are due to the attention of the painter to the importance of Shirin as the main hero of the story. She is a love-making and ethical-drive, and this turns bully Khosrow, into a modest and moral man. The high position of Khosrow is due to his supreme position from Khosrow's selfish point of view, not the painter’s. Although, the first person who is the symbol of the first-beloved is Shirin, the tree , with a pale green color, which Shirin lied down under it and hanged her clothes on the horns of it, indicates the high eternal love which have got the mystical color to show each of them in a separate rank in the form of first-beloved.

The frame of this image is vertical and static and the viewer's point of view is from the bottom to the top. The main composition of the image is circular and spiral in such a way that the important elements are located in the intersection of the golden points or close to it. The important point of this painting is its two-dimensional form, which the artist with a brief indication of Shirin’s state and body retained her decency, as well as keeping the audience imagination open. Furthermore, balance and some kind of symmetry are observed in the non-symmetry arrangement of elements. He also, used the color contrast, in a best approach, to show the main characters and important elements. The evolutionary rhythms of the rocks and the soft motion and curve of the plants as containing elements of the characters, along with the colors that can express the inner feelings of the two individuals, induce an emotional and aesthetic atmosphere that reminiscent the European romanticism paintings, as if the Iranian mystic artist has achieved this artistic expression much earlier. The mystical view of the Iranian artist in the selection of green and golden colors for expressing the roman atmosphere can be clearly identified, along with the warm colors of the rocks created a harmonic charming beauty. In this painting, human is portrayed as a component of nature and in perfect harmony with it. Although, the whole painting expresses the love between Khosrow and Shirin, the audience does not feel the despicable love. In spite of the nakedness of the Shirin body, the skilled painter is depicted Shirin in a manner that her sexual organs are unclear. Even the type of her sitting is such that his decency and dignity are reminded to the audience.
Image 2- Khosrow finds Shirin while bathing. Painted by unknown painter in the eighteenth century, the Brooklyn Museum.

The next painting, dating back to about four centuries after the first one, the same story is illustrated with oil painting technique on the canvas by the unknown painter and is preserved at the Brooklyn Museum of New York.

This painting, which has an almost square frame, the contrast of the color quality is clearly reduced and the space with the arched box is closed. There is no light of heaven anymore, and the lighting of space is closer to reality. Shirin is sitting next to the creek of water and bathing. She has depicted with a naked body and her state is more comfortable than the former painting. Her maid has tried to cover her body from the sight of others, while her undressed body has painted with precise voluming, and only the lower part of her body was covered with a red cloth that could be a symbol of earthly love. The interesting point in comparison of these paintings is that, the color of haunches’ covering cloth is opposite, the former was depicted blue and the later was depicted red.

In addition, nature does not have the same importance as the previous painting, and only has been mentioned briefly. Human beings, more obviously than any other element, appear in this painting that can be influenced by the western humanist point of view. Even the painting technique is strongly affected by the influence of European culture and its dominance on Iranian art and culture in this period.

The arrangement of the figures and even their looking type are far from Iranian modesty, and it seems that the artist has just portrayed the appearance of the story. There is no mystical expression of their love anymore. The colors do not have the polish and shine of the first painting, and they do not express the rich mystical concepts and have a realistic expression. The framing type is almost square, which matches the earthly concept of their love. Volume and the three-dimensional expression, also keeps the audience in the initial layer of painting and decreases the mystery and depth of the painting.

Image 3- The comparison of the dominant colors used in two paintings (Right: first painting, left: Second painting)

As it is clear from the image 3, in the first painting, the colors are brighter, clearer and more qualitative and purer than the second painting. Using the golden and bright colors is remarkable in the first painting.
Conclusion

Regarding the former mentioned issues of love and its types, and the examination from different perspectives, it can be concluded that, in the eyes of Iranian noble poets and artists, complete love is the divine love. Even the earthly love can provide the background for realizing the true love. In fact, love stories could be considered as a parable or symbol of divine love. The hardships and difficulties of the story can also express the steps needed to be taken, to achieve this divine love. Finally, it can be said that the love of Khosrow and Shirin is also spiritual love, and as mentioned in the former discussions, this love is a deep in heart love, not an earthly love; and is a spiritual kindness rather than physical one, and certainly it’s not a virtual love that Raazi and Avicenna considered as a physical illness.

In the first paintings, the feeling that the viewer receives from the painting is passion, affection, purity, decency, and a different and supreme love. But in the second one, the audience is faced with a type of earthly love along with lust and receives a feeling like what existed in the real world. What can be inferred from the comparison of the abovementioned paintings is that, the difference in points of view is the result of the changes in lifestyle and the impacts of European culture and art on the arts and culture of Iran and the formation of modern art in recent periods. This depicts the changes in principles of Iranian painting art, as a result of these effects. Many artists have benefited the deep concepts and ideas of Islamic mysticism and the divine philosophy of ancient Persia and have displayed some of its effects in the structure of their artworks in the form of symbolic elements. This important principle in Iranian painting along with the effects of modern art and other coincident events, especially during the Qajar period, was gradually forgotten and replaced by different execution and expression methods.

From the visual point of view, using the specific elements and qualities has been considered by Iranian painters. In the first painting, that clearly express the original Persian painting, the vertical frame, the spiral composition and the attention to the golden points of the frame, the harmony of bright and pure colors, especially the use of golden and blue colors, contrast of the main elements with the background field, the use of soft curves and shapes, the use of writing alongside the painting, flat coloring and the much use of elements of nature are important things that can be mentioned as a valuable standard for today's painting. Deformations, exaggeration, simplification, variety of viewing angles and the elimination of realistic voluming are an attempt to bring objectives to subjectivities and approaching them to the philosophical and mystical origins. The painter avoids too much explaining in order to awaken the audience's imagination and connect it to the divine world and divine love.
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