

## Critique of the Mythical Thought in Mehdi Akhavan Sales' Poetry

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### Introduction

Akhavan Sales's poetry cannot be appreciated out of the conceptual framework which the mythological world has drawn for him. As much as the mythical thought has acted as a means of defamiliarization and thus constituted the form of his poetry, it has also laid the foundations for those harmful points, through these harms, the weakness of mentality and language of Iranian poet-intellectuals in understanding modern rationality is revealed. Akhavan, in his masterpieces such as *Zemestan* (Winter), *Akhare-Shahnameh* (*The End of Shahnameh*), and *Az in Avesta* (From This Avesta), has set foot in an area of mythological realm, where archeology and music, sanctification and demonization, nostalgia, etc., have blocked the way for any experience of historical contemporaneity. We know Akhavan from his archaic and ingenious language and his commitment to meter and rhyme and that traditional tenderness that suits his senses and emotions, and we know more that artistic device of "myth" in the structure and form of his poetry has strongly linked his art of "Khorasan" to that of "Mazandaran" (Akhavan-Sales, 1385: 13) of Nimai Yush.

The point is that this artistic device of "myth" gradually "transcends the limits of its" art-making function "in the poet's" work "and, in the form of a dominant" insight "dominates the artist's mind. Thus, it takes him away from his artistic "motives" and brings him closer to "ideological" harms. As long as we are in the magnetic field of the enchantment of the mind and language of the poet, we will be unable to argue about the "what" and the "how" of his poetry. It is only by taking a "distance" and standing outside the gravitation of his artistic system that one can discuss the merit or demerit of his poetry. What we are looking for in this research is a starting point that will allow the audience to take an "ontological" look, not only at the legacy of Akhavan in particular, but at all contemporary poet-intellectuals in general.

### **Research Methodology, Background and Purpose**

Most of the research that has been done so far on myths in contemporary poetry and Akhavan's poetry is of admiring nature, but lacks the pathological analysis and the distance that has been adopted in this research. Therefore, in this research, by giving concrete examples, the author has tried to discuss and analyze the artistic heritage of the Akhavan from a pathological point of view in the light of mythical thought using critical analytical method of Enlightenment thinkers.

### **Discussion**

At the beginning of this research, I will try to introduce the framework of mythical thought to the reader in a short introduction. Now, in this section, by presenting discussions on the form of Akhavan's poetry

specially from his three collections, *The Winter* (1335), *The End of Shahnameh* (1338) and *From This Avesta* (1344), which have formed the basis of his artistic life, in a more objective way. I also try to further explore the generalities of the aforementioned theoretical view.

### **The Music of Akhavan's Poetry**

What forms the mythical thought in Akhavan's poetry is its music. It is music that allows him to fly his mind and language to "God and beyond the desert of God" (Akhavan, 1384: 76). The magic of the music of Akhavan's poetry is the first factor that empties its poet and his audience of "individuality" and leads them to the unitary world of primitive myths.

### **Mythological Language**

Following the dominance of the mythical mythological in Akhavan's poetry, after music, what tangibly evokes the audience from today to yesterday is the poet's retrospective language. The diction and syntax that Akhavan uses is a parole that will have no future other than the mythological past of language.

### **Revivalism**

In the poem "Payam" (Message) by relying on this archaic language, Akhavan finds it possible to sanctify and purify everything that is from the "heritage of the past" with such a mythical self-confidence:

### **Freedom**

The first victim that the heavy weight of a mythological past in his poetry takes in the poet's mind and language is the concept of "freedom." From the point of view of mythical thought the "individuality of the subject does not have a mentality of its own, independent of its own people and tribe, its existence is transmuted in his people. (Cassirer, 1399: 39).

### **Alienation**

The immediate consequence of the lack of individual-based freedom in Akhavan's poetry is nothing but the sorrow of homelessness and alienation. The grief and sorrow of many Iranian poet-intellectuals should not be taken as the grief that lies in the essence of the thought which is independent and free of tradition. On the contrary, in mythical thought, "man sees himself as real only when he stops being himself and yield to imitate and repeat the actions of the other" (Eliade, 2005: 49).

### **Spiritualism**

For the mythical man, the meaning of existence is nothing but the spirit of God. He sees a kind of unitary mysticism behind all the natural events and phenomena that affect him. In myth, it is "effect" that takes the place of "reason". We see Akhavan as a "sentimental" poet-intellectual rather than a "contemplative" one, and this in itself has nothing to do with the valuable merit of "feeling and emotion" which is one of the fundamental principles of any pure art. In the face of the

tragedies of his time and the life around him, he sometimes shows such fervor that even deviates him from the path of decorum.

### **Epic Hero**

It is in line with this belief of mythical man in the spirit that the epic genre is formed in Akhavan's poetry. He is always striving for a God-hero who will save him, his society and history from deception and decay. Accordingly, Akhavan is a poet who strongly believes in God. That godly metaphors change color in his poems. Hence, God-centered metaphors are present in his poetry in different forms.

### **Tragedy**

Shafi'i Kadkani in his book about Akhavan, after stating: "Glory is tied to a tragic view", comes to the definite conclusion that "in Akhavan's masterpieces, that tragic view is always a significant element and the dominant feature" (Shafiei Kadkani,-----). What might be added to the above statement is that basically the Iranian epic is formed in continuation of the ancient myths of God. In tragedy, the fame and defame of the epic hero comes out of nothing but his "confrontation with death" (Farhadpour, 2007: 1386) By pondering on the fate of the epic heroes that Akhavan portrays in its famous poems, it is easy to see that they are engaged in a kind of ritual act rather than a "tragic death" and thus are away from feature of tragic hero.

### **Ideology of Myth**

The lack of historical realism in Akhavan 's poetry, which has led to a kind of hostility to the present and a desire to change it, is an immediate

consequence of his mythical thought, which, like an absolute "ideology," has always blocked the way of free thinking to him and his fellow intellectuals. It should be said that this is the very essence of ideology, which "constitutes a set of discourses, images and concepts through which we live our relationship with historical reality" (Ferber, 1392: 110). For instance, the idea of duality finds such a place in the mythically tainted mentality of Akhavan that sees everything in black of the Demons or white of Amshasbandan.

### **Conspiracy Theory**

In the black and white mental world that the poet and his intellectual followers live, everyone is an accomplice with "Shaghad" and it is only the poet himself and his leftist party who are "Rostam" of the time:

"O troubled poor man! Sing another song/ The lovely Pourdastan [Rostam] will not escape the half-brother's well/ Died, died, died/ Tell the story of Pour Farrokhzad now!" (ibid., 75).

And surely "Pourfarkhzad" was the same "Pir Mohammad of Ahmadabadi" for whom he wrote:

"O rarest of the rare men of the time/ who hasn't been anyone as glorious and auspicious as you / A long time has passed but none as courageous/ as you have come to the battle front" (Arghanoun, 102).

We see how "emotionally" the poet-intellectuals of the 1950s judge a "political matter" that is extremely "rational" and what "mythical" sympathies they have for Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh.

### **Conclusion**

In Akhavan's view of existence and man after the Iranian Constitutional Movement, mythical thought forms the predominant feature of the content and style of his poetry. As an example of a prominent Iranian poet-intellectual, he uses metaphor instead of history in the axis of substitution, and replaces the reality of the basis of Iran, with all its good and bad, with its exemplary and sacred past. In this way, what fails is the independent and mature thought that is the legacy of Kant and the rationalist thinkers of the Enlightenment. With Akhavan's poetry, the audience cannot see tradition from a modern perspective. On the contrary, this tradition and above all the poet's mythical view leaves no room for the experience of Iranian modernity. In this essay, by highlighting the vulnerable areas of Akhavan's mentality and language, the author aims to take his poetry as a testimony to the failure of that anti-mythological wisdom that at the threshold of modernism is still insisting on its ancient past.

**Keywords:** contemporary literature, Akhavan Sales, myth, Enlightenment, history, pathology

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