



Extended Abstract

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An Analysis of the Love Affair in Nizami's *Khosrow and Shirin* from the Perspective of Schopenhauer's Philosophy of “Will to Live”

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Introduction

Romantic narratives are very essential components of human culture. Nizami's world famous *Khosrow and Shirin* versified story is an oriental love story that depicts some very unique and delicate approaches to the important question of love between a man and a woman. Each great story may still have some hidden traits which could be revealed by interdisciplinary approaches. Since the time of its creation, this love story has become a model for many other poets to copy from. In order to better understand what makes this story unique, one needs to shed light on different aspects of the story. Thus, in our comparative research, we looked for a suitable philosophy to analyze the purposes of the characters and to have a fresh look at this infamous love affair.

The German philosopher Schopenhauer is one of the famous philosophers who has discussed directly and openly the concepts of physical love. He considers the main goal of romantic relationships to be reproduction with the motive of mutual procreation. In his view, the selection of the mate is based on external beauty and with the aim of compensating biological imbalances. He declares that without having intercourse and producing children, the lovers eventually would get bored and tired of each other; therefore, his principle of “will to live” is what makes both parties blindly fall in love and continue to nurture their love until their goals are achieved.

Purpose, Methodology and Review of Literature

The purpose our research is to find reasons for the romantic acts of the male and female characters in this love story. In order to do so, we made use of Schopenhauer's views on the subject. We identified eight major components about the purpose of romantic relationship directly from Schopenhauer's book, *The World as Will and Representation*, and evaluated the stages of *Khosrow and Shirin*'s love relationship according to them.

By careful reading and note taking based on library method, we organized the plot into subsections from before falling in love until death; we then gathered from each subsection all the verses essential and related to our research from Nizami's poetry; and then compared them with Schopenhauer's components. After each explanation, the results were refined into tables in a

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condensed format, to be able to better encapsulate the essence of what is happening at that stage, whether in acceptance or in opposition to this philosopher's views.

Though there have been many researches conducted on Nizami's *Khosrow and Shirin*, a study that compares the purpose behind the lover's motives based on Schopenhauer's works –or any other philosopher's point of view for that matter– is unprecedented to this date.

Discussion

By analysing the subsections of the plot, it became clear early on that Schopenhauer's principles apply to the initial stages of the love affair of Khosrow and Shirin. The young characters are both selfish and merely consider the physical attraction and each other's status as the sole driving force of their lustful love, especially when they initially fall in love only based on a portrait of the male and the descriptions of the beauty of the female provided through their caregivers, without even having met. This attraction continues into the famous scene where Shirin bathes at the spring and Khosrow secretly watches her through the trees, not knowing this is the girl of his dreams whom he is on his way to meet, which becomes one of the masterpieces of Nizami's imagination in the medieval ages. In this scene, the plot twists toward erotic thoughts and direct bodily descriptions, which are noticeably in accordance with Schopenhauer's concepts of physical attraction based on natural selection. From here on the love rivals for each character appear in the story and a few love triangles occur which mostly correlate to Schopenhauer with a few exceptions, since Shirin begins to shift from mere physical attraction to a more meaningful love with more spiritual characteristics at its core. As the tragic plot unfolds, she persists on her loyalty to her lover Khosrow even after he is slain by his son from his first wife, and eventually takes her own life at his tomb before being abused by the young usurper who makes her immoral offers. This final act portrays itself in defiance with Schopenhauer's merely physical reasons on sexual love. It is interesting to notice that Khosrow, who spent most of his life chasing other women including Shirin, in the final years, eventually becomes loyal to her and does not even wake her up on his final breaths since he is not willing to disturb her by seeing him die, which leans toward contradicting Schopenhauer.

Altogether though, the scale of moral and spiritual virtues weighs heavier towards Shirin who has many traces of Iranian and Armenian mythology of deities similar to Anahita, which is further discussed in our paper.

Another outstanding aspect of difference in the plot of Nizami's version of the real historic characters –of Shirin as the concubine and Khosrow as the King, as Ferdowsi puts it in *Shahnameh*– is that he puts Shirin as the heir to the throne of Armenia in his story and elevates her status beyond belief. Therefore, Nizami's Shirin –as she transforms– is probably closer to his personal views of a supposedly perfect woman rather than the reality of an everyday woman in a love relationship according to Schopenhauer.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that in the relationship of the two characters, none of the factors such as distance and abandonment, not establishing a marital relationship for a long time, the presence of competing narrative elements such as Khosrow's loveless marriage with Maryam, mother of his child, and introducing Farhad, Khosrow's love rival, could result in a permanent reduction of attraction between the two lovers. Even after they finally get married, they remain in love until death. Yet, Shirin contradicts Schopenhauer's views more than Khosrow. This research reveals that Nizami's idealist view of romantic relationship first builds a lyrical-sexual theme but with a spiritual infrastructure, toward the end of the plot, it leans toward the facade of spirituality, moving away from its initial compatibility with Schopenhauer. Near the end of the tragic story and their deaths, Nizami's narrative stands in opposition to Schopenhauer's point of view by honouring Shirin's spiritual position to the highest levels of ethical belief and

highlighting Shirin's insistence on chastity in accordance with the regional and personal ideals, myths, and beliefs.

Keywords

Khosrow and Shirin, Romantic, Love, Schopenhauer, Nizami

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