

# Romantic Nature in the Poetry of Simin Behbahani (With a study of the Collection of Poems "A Line of Speed and Fire")

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**ABSTRACT:** Romanticism is one of the most complicated literary movements in our contemporary world which has its origins in European countries and its true starting place in Germany. Among the distinct features of this movement are the centrality of feelings, emotion and imagination in literary works and it has impressed many poets and writers so far. Thereby, it has also left its mark on contemporary Persian literature, in a way that we could introduce Simin Behbahani as one of the most prominent iconic figures of this movement in Iran. The romanticism employed in the poetry of Simin Behbahani in her collection of poems "A Line of Speed and Fire", could be divided into two individual and social spheres. In this article, the former has been analyzed.

**Keywords:** Simin Behbahani, "A Line of Speed and Fire", romanticism, nature.

## INTRODUCTION

Simin Behbahani, the contemporary skilled poet, is most renowned for writing ghazals and as could be gathered from her titles "Nimaye Ghazal" (the Nima of Ghazal) and "Ghazal Banu" (the Lady Ghazal) and so forth, it is crystal-clear that in her poems there is more inclination and disposition toward ghazals. This skilled writer of ghazals, has borrowed many common themes of the Romantic Movement for the effective communication of her ideas. The Romanticism dominant in her poems in the first collections, include themes and motifs such as: description of scenes and events, a stirring of emotions and feelings in the reader, love, delight and grief, poverty, horror, death and darkness and sin, which pervade everywhere in her poems. (Abu Mahbub, 2008)

Among the most noteworthy components of individual Romanticism in the poems of Simin Behbahani which will be analyzed next, one could refer to the followings:

### **Naturalism**

One of the chief illustrations of Romantic Movement is naturalism which could be studied in the poems of Simin Behbahani. The description of components and elements of nature could be seen in abundance in her poems. By communing with nature, the poet gives artistic expression to her mental pains and with the vivid descriptions she gives of them, in fact she escapes from the physical time and place of her dark age, and depicts them by borrowing from nature.

"In Romantic poetry, nature gives life to humans, provides artistic inspiration, becomes their spiritual guide and mentor, has emotional outbursts and bemoans her days, and indeed the bond between human states and different states of nature, and the sense of identification between the two have been deemed as the major principles of Romanticism." (Pur-Ali Fard, 2003). For instance, in the poem "Don't read":

Don't take as the assembly of suns/  
the deceitful sight of sunflower farm

It's dark and the fiery-looking fly/  
hasn't warmed the breaths of this winter night. (Behbahani, 2012)

Comparison of 'the sunflower farm' to 'the assembly of the suns' is striking. Furthermore, by bringing up words like 'the firefly' and 'fiery-looking' it alludes to a parable in "Kelile and Demne"(Panchatantra) concerning the lion and the cow.

### ***Description of firm and stable manifestations of nature***

One of the components of naturalism is the description of firm and stable manifestations of nature. Besides reminding us about her fascination with nature and its various manifestations, with her inclination toward nature Simin Behbahani expresses her intentions and goals through this, as in the words: desert and wilderness, spring, tree, and so forth. For instance, in the poem "Desert" we read:

Hideous thorns  
Hideous, old thorns...  
In their silence, the giant windstorm  
In the furnace mouths, roars and roars and roars...  
(Behbahani, 2012)

Desert is one of the symbols of firmness and stability in nature of which 'the thorn' is an inseparable part. Thorns have no shape and meaning, don't grow but in the desert, and welcome all ups and downs. In this poem, we see that the poet points, with a touch of sarcasm, to people who, with their calm and quiet, let the 'windstorm', which is flamboyant like a 'giant', 'roar' into the 'furnace mouths'; and the desire for water and the expectation of the cloud, which are signs of dynamism, motion and vivacity, have been away from them for ages and although they have a might like that of the sword and a sharp tongue, they have given in to bondage and captivity and have preferred silence.

In the poem "Spring", we can see picturesque images and desirable descriptions of nature; by comparing the spring wind to Jesus' enlivening breath, Simin Behbahani expresses her innermost feelings; by seeing the dew that has dripped down the plants and the velvet cloak which she has envisaged for the pussy willow and the yellow jasmine branches which, fountain-like, have sprung to the poet's mind; all these images are the cause of joy and mirth in the poet, and that's why she sustains a dynamic bond with all these components and elements. "Art is the reconciling and mediating force between humans and nature. The Romantic poets face nature with a special feeling and emotion, and nature is also the spring of emotion, feeling and deliberation for them. Indeed, the imagination of the romantic poets or artists creates a kind of affinity and mutual bond." (Jafari, 1998)

### ***The Components and Elements of Nature***

"The canebrake":

The canebrakes, the signs of the wailing cane/ Music they are all in the hands of fate(Behbahani, 2012)  
In this couplet, a perception of the elements and components of nature and an unmediated bond between the poet and nature is quite evident. Meanwhile, the poet has become one with nature and has employed novel and striking illustrations to explain her thoughts and ideas, in a way that she has thought the 'canebrakes' to be signs of 'the wailings canes' and 'the music' written 'in the hands of fate'.

### ***A Bond with the Poet's Spirit***

With desirable imagery, Simin has shown a special affinity between nature and her spirits and in her feelings and emotion creates a deep bond with nature; as if nature is part of her spirit and concretized will. For instance in the poem "the Canebrakes", nature has been linked to the spirit of the poet, in such a way that she expresses herself with an introspective view. The lines which, through superficial eyes, look insignificant, she regards to be expressive of a thousand pains, and the wailing of a thousand humans in pain, which have grown in utter darkness:

Play or read! For, silent lines as these  
Express a thousand songs and a thousand griefs  
And a thousand yellow moans, that without relief  
Have grown in the silence of the dark abyss  
These flames that run in the canebrakes deep  
Wreck thousands and thousands of nests indeed...  
(ibid)

In the poem "the sky is red", we see that the poet sees the outer space, the heavens and the earth, the moon and Mars, and all that appears to her, in the blood red color which symbolizes martyrdom:

The sky is red/ its galaxy too  
The moon and the Mars/ its lights too (the stars, here)(ibid, 597)

### ***The Epic Flavor of Nature***

Simin Behbahani gives an epic flavor to nature from time to time, so that 'liberty' kisses upon the burial 'ground' of the martyred, in memory of the free souls, and this way expresses that even the sun and the moon, despite all their light, fall short of the brightness of their names and that no voice has resounded in the ears of the century but that of their heroic thunders and that as if they've fallen into a peaceful slumber; since with the epic they created they, raised right and righteousness up in the heights of time:

Liberty kissed upon the ground of dead  
Such reward bestowed on your every step  
You two fires, two flames, and moons, and suns!  
You two brightest of all! What name can I call you by...(ibid, 518)

### **Description of Nature**

Regarding the function of imagery in her poems, Simin Behbahani said in an interview: " I speak in the language of images. Images have different dimensions... for me, things are never what I simply see on the surface."( Abu Mahbub, 2008)

In a ghazal, Behbahani describe spring in such similes and beautiful and desirable images that a spring of color, scent and smell, freshness and vivacity swiftly surge up in the heart and soul of the readers, and the vivacious and joyous spring greenery which 'dance' precariously in the spring breeze are crystallized in her views, and the flowing breeziness of spring surges in the 'blood' running in her 'veins' and shows herself among those who await the arrival of spring, as the prophet of spring with tiny signs of the sprouts. She has compared the green branch of the trees, which are opened to the heavens, to her hands raised in prayer, and her silent prayers to a bird of her heart which flies its wings away to the blue. She develops these fanciful and pleasant ideas very beautifully and swiftly, to give a fascinating description of spring. 'The golden palanquin' and 'the simin (silver) tapestry' are metaphors for the sun and the moon:

Dance in the mirth of springtime/ the greenery in my crystal eyes  
And Surge from flowing life/ the blood in my veins red and dark  
The mists of pain from foot to top/ washes the rain with my joy many a time....(behbahani, 2012)

### ***Flight and Journey:***

"Frustration with the present time and place and flight into other spaces or times, an invitation to a historical or geographical journey, a real journey or one on the wings of fancy, are some other features of Romantic works. In a geographical journey, the Romantic writer flies the bird of imagination toward other lands and faraway countries. No wonder why there could be seen a constant desire for flight to the lands faraway in Romantic works. Historical journey is another type of escape from reality." ( Sayyed Hossayni, 1992)

Simin Behbahani's approach toward nature and the juxtaposition of these accurate points with a natural delicacy, have revealed new mysteries to the readers. In the poem "I sell the soul", she describes the coldness in her soul and body and by pointing to the coldest place on earth-'the pole'- she escapes and travels from her present time and place, and meanwhile, 'red brimstone' which symbolizes her blazing poetry and achievements, comes to her aid:

It's cold, cold, my dear one/ I have but frozen to the bone  
As if my home and hearth/ is the earth on the pole  
I say to myself: aye/what you have is red brimstone  
Outbursts a hundred flames/ the poem which is my firework (Behbahani, 2012)

### ***Flight from the Dark Days of her Age:***

To escape from the dark days of her age with which she has become tired and frustrated, Simin Behbahani takes refuge in imagination and fancy and by comparing her mind to a 'barren and arid' desert, she describes the growth of poetry in it as the 'cottonwood'-a tree with triangular leaves and clustered flowers which grows only in the desert-and the 'thorn' grown in the plain and wilderness and she sees her imagination as entangled in the storm of horror, as if it's a cloud running from the wind; life has ceased to interest her as before and appears in disarray, confusion and tremor, and she has illustrated the 'splendor', vivacity and delicacy of 'youth' which was once like the 'brittle' springtime stem, as a shadow imprisoned in the misty glasses:

In my barren and arid mind/ the violence of a poem many a time  
Grows as the cottonwood of deserts dry /and the many thorns of the wild...( deserts, here)  
Where is the splendor of leaping time/that delicacy from foot to top?  
Beautiful and brittle once/as the stems of the springtime  
( Behbahani, 2012)

### **A Sense of identification with Nature**

Another prominent theme of Romantic Movement is a special attention to nature and a sense of identification of humans with nature. By employing the manifestations of nature, Simin Behbahani portrays 'lies' as a 'foils' adorning the bare branches theatrically and as a sign of duplicity and deceit. In the following example from the poem "Don't Read" which has been dedicated to Muhammad Behbahani, this could be clearly seen:

It's a lie/ the foil tied to the branch leaves all

Nor is the sky kind/where the shining sun hides(ibid, 509)

Indeed, "the poet must see the individual and social and human states among symbols, similes and metaphors based on manifestations of nature." (Baraheni, 1992)

In Behbahani's poems, these picturesque images and similes could be seen frequently; as in the poem " seed by seed", where she compares her redness and greenness to a 'plant' whose 'stem' (the body) is 'thirsty' and to overcome her thirst, she drinks of the clouds of scent and light and voice and the stem (the arms) of this plant closes imploringly at the heights of the pine (the body of the beloved) as a mandrake. The presence of repetition and also the contrast of thirsty, thirsty, thirsty and stem, stem, stem add to the beauty and musicality of the poem.

Thirsty, thirsty, thirsty, the plant I am/ stem, stem, stem, my corpse

Drop, drop, drop, I drink/ the cloud of scent and light and voice (Behbahani, 2012)

### **Union of Love and Nature:**

The flower is a symbol of nature and a carrier of messages from the lover to the beloved. 'The red flower' is a token of passionate love and 'the yellow flower' is a sign and trace of coldness and frustration in romantic relationships. In being graced and not being graced with love, Simin Behbahani has rendered the heart in the colors of red and yellow flowers and has sustained an inseparable bond between love and manifestations of nature, where she says:

Take this flower and that one in yellow dye/ take this heart and that one cold as frost  
Yet he blood red of a burning love/ shall find warmth in your heart (ibid, 538)

She has turned to the 'spring' season for inspiration, which is a firm and durable symbol in nature and a token of genesis and creation, and has associated her profound love with it. As spring is the beginning of 'sprouts' even in 'every old branch', she has yearned, along with the growth of spring, for the seeds of love to begin to sprout in her own nature, and has compared her heart to a 'bud' waiting to 'blossom'. In the words: sprout, spring, the old branch, bud, and apple, Mora'at Nazir (a figure of speech in Persian poetry, juxtaposition of associated words in a poem) and also beautiful and pleasurable similes have been employed:

Oh love...!

Oh love! Sprout for spring has come/ every old branch has sprouts from new seeds

The apple and the heart are also in blossoms/ Eve in ever restlessness indeed

Oh love! Teach me how to bloom/ the heart is the bud of gardens waiting (ibid, 528)

## **CONCLUSION**

Simin Behbahani is one of the highly accomplished female poets in the Persian Romantic Movement. Among the individual themes of her poetry one could refer to naturalism, the charm of speech, love, individualism, frustration and self-exile, grief and solitude, imagination and fancy, and moan and complaint. Naturalism is one of the most important manifestations of the inclination toward Romanticism, which is of great eminence in the poetry of Simin Behbahani. Description of firm and stable symbols in nature, and components and elements of nature could be seen in abundance in her poems. It is in the bond with nature that the poet gives expression to her mental pains and with the descriptions she renders of them, indeed she escapes from the present place and time of the Dark Age in which she resides.

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