

A Comparative Study of Individual Personality Components in the Poetry of Simin Behbahani and Ghada al-Samman: A Horneyan Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Simin Behbahani and Ghadeh Al-Sman have an idealistic spirit that undoubtedly Horney's personality psychology can help in solving problems that cause isolationist behaviors or social conflicts by discovering the mentality of individuals. In the society of these two poets, the female gender has limitations and sufferings that have prompted them to educate this segment of society by describing their conditions and ideals. Analyzing the poems of Simin and Ghadeh is important to show the hidden aspects of the personalities of the people of their time. This research, using a fundamental and descriptive-analytical method, attempts to examine the similarity of individual components in the poems of these two poets and, on this basis, to state which personality type Horney intended was more reflected in their poems. As a result, Simin's poems express an unfavorable social atmosphere that causes the individual to criticize in order to face the anxiety that results from it and to seek refuge in solitude when he is disappointed in achieving his ideals. The results of the research show that the two poets have reflected all three personality types in their poems; However, based on the findings, in individual similarity, the "isolationist" personality type has the highest frequency, which is seen equally in both poems; because in this case, the individual's tendency to react to emotional emotions is greater.

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Introduction

The role of idealism in literature serves as a crucial mechanism for poets to address social anomalies, class struggles, and gender discrimination. This study explores the poetry of two prominent literary figures: the Iranian poet Simin Behbahani and the Syrian author Ghada al-Samman. Both poets act as representatives of modern female literature in their respective cultures, addressing themes of love, political oppression, and the specific limitations imposed upon women.

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the psychoanalytic theory of Karen Horney. Unlike Freud, Horney emphasized that human behavior is shaped by environmental and social factors rather than purely physiological or innate drives. Central to her theory is “basic anxiety”—the feeling of isolation and helplessness in a potentially hostile world. Horney identified three neurotic personality types that individuals adopt to cope with this anxiety: the *compliant type* (moving toward others), the *aggressive type* (moving against others), and the *detached type* (moving away from others). This research aims to analyze the subconscious manifestations of these personality components in the works of Behbahani and al-Samman to determine which of these types is most prevalent in their poetic reflection of social and individual struggles.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical and qualitative approach within the framework of comparative literature. Using a library-based methodology and document analysis, the study examines the poetry of Behbahani and al-Samman. By applying Horney’s psychological criteria—specifically her classification of personality types (compliant, aggressive, and detached)—the researchers conduct a comparative analysis of shared themes such as homeland, loyalty, masks (hypocrisy), entrapment, instinct, and solitude. The study focuses on how these poets project their internal psychological states and social reactions onto their literary landscapes.

Results

The analysis reveals that the poetry of both Behbahani and al-Samman reflects all three Horneyan personality types. However, the findings indicate a significant prevalence of the “detached” personality type in both

authors. This detachment is manifested as a mechanism to cope with the social anxiety and unfavorable environments surrounding their lives. The poets' work demonstrates a recurring cycle: the individual experiences intense social anxiety due to restrictive gender and political norms, attempts to confront these issues through social critique (often expressing aggressive or compliant tendencies depending on the context), and ultimately, upon failing to achieve their ideals, retreats into solitude. The "detached" type appears most frequently as it serves as a safe harbor for expressing emotional reactions without the risks associated with public confrontation. While both poets display this trait, their modes of expression differ: Behbahani uses sharper, critical language, whereas al-Samman tends toward a more meditative and patient temperament.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Simin Behbahani and Ghada al-Samman effectively utilized their poetry to voice the "female pain" prevalent in their respective patriarchal societies. Both poets exhibit a strong sense of autonomy and social commitment. Their work reflects the psychological trauma caused by systemic limitations, where the lack of freedom leads to the internalization of anxiety.

From a Horneyan perspective, their move toward the "detached" personality type suggests a strategic retreat from a society that does not support their full flourishing. The poets' ability to channel these psychological struggles into literature serves as a form of "self-understanding," which is a prerequisite for positive change and self-actualization. Ultimately, this comparative analysis validates Horney's theory as a robust framework for interpreting the complex interplay between societal environment and the formation of the individual literary consciousness, highlighting how these women utilized their artistic agency to articulate resilience in the face of despair.