

## CHAPTER 12

### A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *ROMEO AND JULIET* AND NIZAMI GANJAVI'S *LAYLA AND MAJNUN* AS UNIVERSAL PORTRAYALS OF UNREQUITED LOVE

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#### INTRODUCTION

*Romeo and Juliet* and *Layla and Majnun* have become the symbols of longing, affection, and destructive love. The tragic end of lovers is not due to hubris or weakness of the characters but one of which destiny plays a role. Young lovers' choices are foreshadowed by hostility between two families, however, when the lovers are about to overcome all the obstacles on their way for a happy reunion, unfortunate events cause tragic ending of the stories. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Nizâmî Ganjavi's<sup>2</sup> *Layla and Majnun* have fictional and contextual similarities although they belong to different cultures and literary forms. Though the similarities could be result of a simple coincidence or the fact that they portray universal theme of destructive love, a comprehensive examination of narratives suggest that the intertextual elements such as context and intensity provide an insight to their relationship. Traditional gender roles are imposed on both men and women in both texts. However, protagonists deviate from expected gender roles by defying social norms for love and die as a result of their transgression.

*Layla and Majnun* and *Romeo and Juliet* are immortal stories of Eastern and Western literatures. Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* is based on English poet Arthur Brooke's narrative poem, "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" (Brook, 1908, xxi). When Shakespeare touched this familiar story with his own art and genius, this play spread not only in England but throughout Europe; this legend became popular in England with the poetry of Arthur Brooke (Brook, 1908, xxi). Harold Bloom notes that "the play is the largest and most persuasive celebration of romantic love in Western literature" (1998, p. 90).

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The story of *Layla and Majnun*, written before *Romeo and Juliet*, has several similarities with William Shakespeare's play because of the tragic love and death of protagonists in both texts. Although the origin of the story is in oral tradition, *Layla and Majnun* legend was first immortalized by Nizâmî-i Ganjavi (1140-1202) in the twelfth century. While preserving the main lines of the story and following the general arrangement and plot, Nizâmî creates a great verse novel from a messy and simple story by making important changes in terms plot and content (Levend, 1959). The obvious logic of comparing both works is that they epitomize the love story of star-crossed lovers. Although they are the products of very different cultures, the similarities in content have often attracted the attention of literary researchers and literary readers. When the stories are examined in terms of their contents, the relationship between the two narratives is too intense. Neither very different literary forms nor the deep differences between languages prevent us from seeing this intense relationship.

*Romeo and Juliet* and *Layla and Majnun* live in patriarchal societies which limit and suppress liberating love. In patriarchal societies, the proper functioning of family depends on male control and the system is based on domination and subordination of woman (Shakespeare, 2005). Women's complete submission and obedience to male control is necessary for the maintenance of the system (p. 15). The ideology situated women to an inferior position and required certain virtues such as obedience, chastity, silence, piety (Traub, 2003). The cultural constructions reinforced the notion that women are the weaker vessel: "woman was seen as a creature distinct from and inferior to man" (Fletcher, 1999, p. xvi). Because of women's supposed inferior creation, it became an axiom that their minds were also weaker than men's. These portrayals required women to be protected, controlled, directed, and ordered by man.

In both texts, however, protagonists deviate from expected gender roles and cause serious threats to the patriarchal authority. In patriarchally charged atmosphere of both stories, the fathers dominate all members of their households. Both heroines reject their fathers' choices of husband. By doing so, they show qualities that are attributed to opposite genders. Values such as valor, intelligence, and bravery are associated with heroines. They do not tolerate excessive emotions by which Romeo and Majnun are overwhelmed by. It is Romeo and Majnun who assume conventional female characteristics. They consider suicide and weep unrestrainedly. In their fervent pursuit of happiness, patriarchal norms serve as drawbacks to set off the devotions of lovers to their blissful union. However, they cannot find peace and solace in life and die in the end without achieving the union

they longed for. Layla and Majnun grow old and die in chaste separation while Romeo and Juliet are drawn into a tragic double suicide.

The study is divided into three sections. The first section examines the trials and tribulations lovers are subjected to. This section analyzes the characters: the rivals, parents, and their supporters. The second section deals with thematic analysis of stories and the characters' deviation from gender roles; the third section concludes the study by locating similarities in the storylines of both works. The analysis employs thematology method which is the contrastive study of major themes.

### **TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS: RIVALS, PARENTS, AND SUPPORTERS OF LOVERS**

Shakespeare and Ganjavi tell the story of unconventional lovers in patriarchal societies. Throughout their lives, the lovers stay true to their love and show several efforts to subvert oppressive patriarchy. All the trials and tribulations lovers face become trivial and further strengthen their love and longing for each other. The reason behind their strong attachment towards each other is those trials and tribulations. *Layla and Majnun* begins with lovers seeing each other for the first time in school. Kays is instantly captured by her beauty and knows that they are destined for each other. They spend their time together and neglect their classes. Kays is unable to learn anything, because "eyes became blind, and ears became deaf to the school and the world beyond the classroom" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 13). Their affection towards each other gets everyone's attention, and rumors ensue "from tent to tent, and stall to stall" (Ganjavi, 1997, p.15). So, he must come up with excuses to see her. Sometimes he pretends not to have understood the subject so that Layla can explain it to him or claim to have lost his books so that he can go to her tent to study. They undermine the school authority as their love defies sanctioned codes of behavior and patriarchal oppression which subordinates and dominates lovers. Instead, Layla and Majnun choose liberating love based on equality and freedom.

Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time at the masquerade held at the Capulet's house. Though Romeo has not fully recovered from his earlier crush on Rosaline, when he sees Juliet, he is struck by her beauty and feels a turmoil in his soul: "Forswear it, sight, For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 29). After the ball, Romeo sneaks into Capulets' orchard. He sees Juliet talking to herself on the balcony and they declare their love to each other. Thomas Moisan states that "through the balcony scene Romeo is figuratively disintegrated and transformed by synecdoche into mere part of Juliet's self" (Moisan, 1991, p. 130).

Consistent with Moisan's argument, Blakemore Evans claims that upon meeting with Juliet, Romeo loses himself in real love, the kind that is beyond posturing (Evans, 2003). Through this transformation, Romeo and Juliet become one soul in two bodies and they defy the patriarchal norms.

The first test for lovers is rival suitors. Kays' rival is Ibn Salam while Romeo's is Count Paris. Both rivals are valiant, wealthy, and quite popular. Both rivals are promised a hand in marriage by their fathers without the consent of their daughters. Both Layla's and Juliet's parents do not turn down the distinguished suitors. Count Paris and Ibn Salam assume that they could win girls' heart by their influence and money. Both suitors act naively and fail to realize the true nature of things. For instance, Paris associates Juliet's incessant crying with his cousin Tybalt's death. Similarly, Ibn Salam tries to win fragile Layla's heart with gifts and money. To charm Layla's father, the mediator says: "His nobility is without question, his honor and integrity are without flaw" (Ganjavi, 1997, p.78). Ibn Salam offers money and treasure but not love. There is no mention of feelings as he approaches marriage as an exchange of commodities which is in sharp contrast with what Majnun offers. For Majnun, love is not a contract between parents but a blissful union of two equal with mutual feelings. His love is not based on subordination and domination but one of which based on equality and reciprocity. After the ceremony, Ibn Salam approaches Layla but she remains faithful to Majnun and reacts violently to her husband's advances. She says: "you cannot take me by force!" (Ganjavi, 1997, p.81). Ibn Salam remains at a respectful distance to Layla while Juliet secretly marries Romeo and ditches Paris. By remaining true to their lover, Layla and Juliet defy the society's conventions regarding marriage.

The second test of lovers is with their parents. In both works, male characters' mothers are more compassionate, emphatic, and protective than female characters' mothers. Lady Montague is grief-stricken and dies because of her son's exile. The broken hearted Majnun's mother also suffers from his son's condition. She advises her son to abandon wilderness and join her: "Come back now while you can and give yourself some peace, I beg you!" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 127). Female characters' mothers, on the other hand, enforce socio-cultural codes and force heroines to live up to expectations of the society. However, they fail in their mission, as the daughters do not give in. Juliet's mother, Lady Capulet tells her fourteen-year-old daughter to marry and become a mother at an early age like she did. Lady Capulet has no doubt that meek and obedient Juliet will respect her mother's decision and forces her to warm up to Paris: "Can you love the gentleman?" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 21). Later nurse and Lady Capulet discuss the future ordained for Juliet. Juliet

dresses her costume as a dutiful daughter, but her silence is an indication of her discomfort: “she must be obedient, never idle, never go running about, keep good company, be seen and not heard, suppress lust, and not be vain” (Becon,1995, p. 26-28). Juliet’s obedience and silence illustrates a portrait of the perfect daughter. Yet, this dutiful daughter scene sets the stage for the deviation from expected roles.

Lady Capulet’s moderate attitude changes by the murder of her nephew, Tybalt. In retaliation, she demands Romeo’s blood. Her daughter’s condition prompts a hasty acceptance of Count Paris’ offer. Juliet asks her mother’s support to change his father’s mind. However, Lady Capulet does not have any power or authority to do so and curses her daughter: “I would the fool were married to her grave” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 96). Despite this, she has no intention of listening to Juliet; “Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee” (p. 96). Lady Capulet understands her mistake when she finds her daughter dead in her bed on the morning of the wedding. Like Lady Capulet, Layla’s mother is equally oppressive and intolerant. She harshly scolds Layla for her involvement in rumors and reminds her to protect her family’s honor and reputation. Layla’s mother withdraws her from school and locks her up in her room: “I must not let Layla do what her heart desires most, because Majnun is truly mad and not to be approached” (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 44). Once Layla is embittered and beyond rehabilitation, her mother looks for remedies. She encourages Layla to go out, travel and enjoy her life. However, in the last scene, she is crying over her daughter’s body: lifting her head, shedding her white hair, and regretting for her harsh and intolerant treatment of her. Both female character’s mothers are torn between their maternal urges and social pressures. They want the best for their daughters and teach to live the life the best way, they know how. The best way for the daughters to get out of their predicaments is making a good marriage. This, however, worsens their situation. Both mothers cannot redeem themselves as they are oppressed by the authority of patriarchy and unable to act on their own accord. They grieve and shed tears over the death of their daughters and regret their mistakes. As such, female characters’ mothers are oppressive and intolerant and lack empathy towards their daughters.

In both works the fathers of male characters are merciful, understanding, and tolerant towards their children. After Tybalt’s murder, the Capulets demand retribution. Montague is unaware of the love and secret marriage of his son and now Romeo is sentenced to exile. After learning all the details of Romeo’s affair and tragedy, Montague is devastated. When the peace between the feuding families is restored, Montague appreciates Juliet’s devotion to his son and declares that a

golden statue of Juliet will be erected in her honor in Verona: "For I will ray her statue in pure gold" (Shakespeare 2005, p. 242). Kays' father, Sayyid is an exalted chieftain who has a unique reputation among Arab tribes. However, he has a burning desire for offspring that "had burned his soul" (p. 10). After a long wait, his wish for an heir finally comes true: "beautiful child like a rosebud" is born (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 10). When he realizes that his son is desperately in love, he goes to Layla's father with all his glory and asks for his daughter's hand in marriage. Because of his son's condition, his request is turned down. He takes his son to the best doctors, applies amulets, and finally takes him to a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, all his efforts prove futile. Much to his dismay, his son wishes his love troubles to increase. Upon Layla's marriage to Ibn Salam, he urges his son to act rationally and give up on his love. He tells his son that he will be very embarrassed when he comes to his senses and warns him "unchain your heart from this self-inflicted slavery!" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 36). The father realizes that the problem is beyond his reach, begins to respect his son's feelings, and stops his efforts to heal him. Majnun finds solace in returning to the desolate desert. Everyone starts calling Kays' as *Majnun*, an Arabic epithet that refers to a person possessed by a genie and hence meaning "bereft of reason or mad, insane, unsound in mind or intellect" (Lane, 1863, p. 462). Grief-stricken, Majnun's father utters his son's name for the last time and dies in agony. In his father's absence, Majnun says to him: "You were my rock, and now you are dust; you were my staff, and now you are ashes" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 95). Upon his father's death, Majnun is deprived of his greatest supporter and protector. Both fathers prove to be tolerant, supportive, protective, and emphatic towards their sons.

The female characters' fathers, on the other hand, are ruthless, selfish, and oppressive towards their daughters. When Ibn Salam, a rich and noble man wants to marry Layla, her father accepts this offer without Layla's consent. When Juliet objects to the decision to marry without being asked, her father's first reaction is to scold her: "unworthy as she is, that we have wrought" (Ganjavi, 1997, p.20). When Juliet insists, he threatens to disown and kick her out. All Capulet dreams of his only daughter is to marry her to a noble and wealthy man. Capulet, who does not see her daughter as an individual with the right to decide, becomes aware of Juliet's deep love and pain after losing her and feels deep regret and remorse. In general, the heroines' fathers do not ask for daughters' consent, impose their wishes on daughters and reflect typical feudal father figure of Middle Ages.

In their quest for a happy reunion lovers have supporters besides parents. Nowfal is a valiant warrior who tries every possible way to make the families accept

the love of Layla and Majnun. He hears a poem by Majnun and gets carried away by this poet's style. He finds the devastated Majnun wandering alone in the desolate deserts and says: "I think it would be an act of charity and nobility if I were to help him attain his heart's desire" (p. 49). He gives hope to Majnun by saying that he will spill loads of gold if necessary, and that he will not hesitate to shed blood. He says: "I shall not rest until I have united you both in marriage" (p. 50). Later Nowfal writes a letter to Layla's tribe describing his intentions: "I am determined to hand Layla over to the one man who truly loves her" (p. 55). However, the answer from Layla's father is that they have no daughters to give to a madman: "Layla is no plaything to be had at will by whoever so desires" (p. 55). Thereupon, Nowfal gathers his army and engages in a fierce battle against Layla's tribe. A mighty battle ensues. Nowfal, who was very sure of his own strength and experience, cannot fathom why he cannot defeat such an easy opponent. He comes to realize that a spiritual power is preventing him from an absolute victory. When scouts bring the news that Majnun is praying treacherously for the opposing army's victory rather than the benefactor's, Nowfal realizes that the situation is more complicated than he thought. After his decisive victory, Layla's father addresses Nowfal: "It is better that she dies a quick death by my sword than be placed in the jaws of a dragon like Majnun!" (p.63). The audacity and rhetoric of Layla's father moves Nowfal, and he resents his decision to fight them. Nowfal fought with the intention of helping a young man with a broken heart but realizing that this young man has no intention of getting better, his victory does not serve its purpose. Angry and disappointed, Majnun goes back to the wilderness again.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the greatest supporter of the young couple is Friar Lawrence. With his tenacious persistence, he performs the marriage ceremony of the young couple. While waiting for the marriage to be the beginning of a blissful union, Juliet's cousin Tybalt unexpectedly attacks Romeo. Romeo does his best to stay out of the fight, but when it becomes inevitable, he murders Tybalt. Friar Lawrence promises to do his best to make everything right. Using his knowledge of herbs, Lawrence prepares a syrup that will give Juliet a temporary state of death to save her from marrying Paris. He writes a letter to Romeo describing their plan. However, due to a plague epidemic in the city, the person who is supposed to deliver the letter to Romeo is kept under quarantine and the letter does not reach its destination. Friar Lawrence, who goes to the cemetery to retrieve Juliet, finds Paris' and Romeo's dead bodies. When Juliet wakes up, Friar hastily tells her what happened and tells them that they must get away immediately. Both Lawrence and Nowfal made great efforts to unite the lovers. Majnun's passive, docile, and inac-

tive personality is juxtaposed with an action man while Romeo's lively, volatile personality is balanced by a wise and faithful cleric.

## **DEVIATION FROM GENDER ROLES**

*Layla-Majnun* and *Romeo-Juliet* are the products of societies with deep linguistic, cultural, and geographical differences. However, there are strong thematic similarities in their contents. The first thematic similarity in both works is destructive love. Lovers are thrown off balance by the force of love and realize their spiritual traits of character unknown previously. Instead of protecting themselves, they submit to the consuming and devastating force of love. Despite all warnings, they do not give up and the protagonists lose their privileged positions, mental health, and finally their lives. Romeo says "Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 23). Although love seems a very gentle and sensitive emotion, when experienced it turns out to be extremely cruel, painful, and rough feeling. In both works, family reputation, bravery, and honor are significant values. Heroes and heroines sacrifice these in the thorny paths of love. First, they are willing to give up their names and families. Juliet says: "Deny thy father and refuse thy name/Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn by my love" (p. 39). Unaware of Romeo's presence, Juliet asks why Romeo turned out to be her family's greatest enemy and demands Romeo to deny his family for her love. The hatred and feud between the families is actually a part of the patriarchal ideology through which men and women to define themselves (Evans, 2003). Juliet's devotion to Romeo overrides the feud or hatred towards Montagues. Romeo also chooses to ignore the pervasive hatred sanctioned by patriarchy.

Kays' father is an honorable and respected leader among the Arabs. Kays is the sole heir of this noble and rich family. However, the pains of love and the difficulties of separation transform him, and he turns into 'Majnun'(madman). When asked her hand in marriage, Layla's father tells Kays' father that it would be an honor to be related to a noble person like him, however his son is not worthy of his daughter. Layla's mother warns Layla about the rumors and says that they are a reputable and noble family, and that she should not defile her family's name. Similarly, Romeo's good qualities are even endorsed by his family's rival, Lord Capulet when Tybalt is thwarted by his uncle as he prepares to pick a fight with Romeo. Capulet says: "And, to say truth, Verona brags of him to be a virtuous and well-governed youth" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 30). Romeo, whose valor, and dignity are approved even by his opponent, loses these characteristics when he falls in love with Juliet. He becomes "effeminate" (p. 70). Romeo is expected to be a rational,



valiant, and strong man who does not fall prey to the emasculating power of love. When Juliet's cousin, Tybalt tries to pick a fight for the second time. Romeo, who had secretly married Juliet on the morning of the same day, fails to assuage to his insults. Despite Romeo's extremely gentle demeanor, Tybalt continues to challenge him and asks him to draw his sword. Romeo dismisses Tybalt's provocations with mild and kind words: "I do protest I never injured thee" (p. 70). Unable to bear Tybalt's insults and challenges any longer, Mercutio draws his sword and strikes Tybalt. Tybalt stabs Mercutio and kills him. Nicholas F. Radel (2000) argues that "Mercutio's death makes a man of him, but Romeo's violent response is simply a continuance of Romeo's feminine passion and lack of masculine reason" (p. 96). Romeo regrets that he could not prevent Tybalt and blames Juliet: "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 70). On another occasion, when Romeo laments his banishment, Friar Lawrence asks him to measure up: "Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art/ Thy tears are womanish" (p. 108). Similarly, the Nurse says to Romeo; "Stand up stand up; stand, and you be a man" (p. 88). The implication is that Romeo fails to act like man because he is judged by patriarchal norms. Similarly, Majnun father wants his son to stand up for himself and be a man "If you are a man, then you must live like one" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 89).

While Romeo behaves effeminate, Juliet exhibits behaviors contrary to the expectations of the society. She is very outspoken and straightforward in expressing her love. Carlyn E. Brown (1996) argues that "Juliet has moved from a passive victim of star-crossed love to lauding her as a self-willed, courageous, intelligent young woman who initiates and controls action" (p. 333). Thus, she becomes a self-willed and courageous woman who takes initiative and makes her own decisions. The most shocking defiance of traditional gender roles takes place when Juliet proposes to Romeo: "If that thy bent of love be honorable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow" (Shakespeare 2005, p. 150). Daring to propose, Juliet exhibits traits of the opposite gender contrary to the ones prescribed by the patriarchy. A woman has to act indifferent even if she should harbor any feelings for the man seeking her love (Belsey, 2001). Love or longing is the domain of man, and a woman has no right to do so, let alone declaring it. Despite all the warnings and pressure of patriarchy, Layla who fell under the spell of love ignore all warnings. She gives up her reputation, close circle, and the bright future ahead. Layla says: "How it grieves me to think that our hearts were once as one" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 48). When Juliet hears that her beloved cousin, Tybalt has been killed by Romeo, her world falls apart because Romeo will be exiled out of Verona. Both heroines embody gender-defying characteristics that transgress strict social boundaries.

Coming from a noble and valiant family, Majnun also turned into a weak and effeminate person after falling in love. With the agony of separation and the weight of love, he cries, whines, and writes poetry. Forced to break up with his lover, the tormented Majnun is depressed by the patriarchal pressure and takes refuge in the wilderness. In the desert, there is no one to advise, condemn, or judge him. His departure from the civilization into the desolate desert turns into a journey of transformation. He befriends wild beasts, takes shelter in the caves, grows increasingly lonely, and recites poems. Nizami's description says:

No place on earth was more desolate than this, yet Majnun called it paradise, for he lived in peace with all his friends. Among the animals there was perfect harmony; the lion lay with the lamb, the wolf chased not the hare; the gazelle went undisturbed before the fox (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 87).

Upon seeing this, his father insists on his return to civilization. Despite all his father's efforts, Majnun does not return home. His father says: "Are you a ghoul, a demon? Or are you a man? If you are a man, then you must live like one" (p. 89). However, Majnun prefers a life of deprivations in the desert and sends his father back. The sorrows and misfortunes for the sake of love gradually consume and weaken their bodies. While Romeo's friends are dancing and having fun at the Capulet's ball, Romeo has no strength to move: "With nimble soles, I have a soul of lead, So, stakes me to the ground I cannot move" (Shakespeare 2005, p. 23). Anguished and helpless, Majnun wishes his body to weaken so that the wind will be able to blow it away and reach its lover: "East wind, go quickly and you will find her there" (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 17). As a result of suppressed desires, when they finally meet in the desert, Layla encourages Majnun for the consummation of their love. She says: "take the trophy of the happiness of uniting with me. If you are sick, I am your doctor; If you are in love, I am your lover! let's be together!" (p. 95). However, Majnun has no physical or spiritual strength to be with Layla. Besides he is enthralled by the perfect image he constructed that even her imagination is enough to burn him, let alone the real one. Majnun says: "My soul is free of lust, my longing is free of all that is base and unseemly, my mind is free of all that is shameful. I have unraveled the knot of desire that once filled my heart" (p. 140). While experiencing a great disappointment, she appreciates the level of maturity reached by her lover and takes her leave.

From the moment they enter each other's field of attraction, Romeo and Juliet experience the joy of love with all its benefits. They touch, kiss, and spend a night together. Having kissed Juliet's hand at the beginning, Romeo later kisses her on the lips. Though Juliet wants to hold back, she, like Romeo, is under the spell of

love:” Then have my lips the sin that they have took” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 32). With the help of Friar Lawrence and nurse, Romeo spends the last night before exile with Juliet. They are unable to depart from each other at the end of this blissful night: “Farewell, farewell. One kiss and I’ll descend” (p. 90). Yet, there is no explicit depiction of an intercourse. In *Layla and Majnun*, the sexual intercourse does not take place. Majnun rejects Layla’s offer on the basis that he is spiritually purified and got rid of his carnal desires. A similar approach is presented by Friar Lawrence, who argues if a person does not overcome his carnal desires, evil will pervade his entire being and corrupt him: “Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied, and vice sometime by action dignified” he says (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 46). When compared to Majnun, Romeo is very straightforward and sexually active. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the sexual dimension of love has a more liberal appearance, but still there is no direct talk of sexuality. In *Layla and Majnun*, the spiritual aspect of love is more prominent.

## **SIMILARITIES IN THE STORYLINE**

Both love stories have strong similarities in their storylines. For instance, Romeo falls for Rosaline because she is the most beautiful women he has ever seen. When Rosaline dismisses Romeo, he falls in love with Juliet. Again, beauty is the major attraction. Friar Lawrence is astonished over Romeo’s change of heart and says: “So soon forsaken? Young men’s love then lies, not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes” (p. 48). Majnun’s appreciation of beauty started upon seeing Layla and declares his love “Layla, I have fallen. I have fallen and I do not know what to do” (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 27). Majnun wishes his lover’s beauty to increase more and more so that his love will increase. As the lover’s beauty increases, his feelings will also increase. Likewise, Romeo constantly emphasizes Juliet’s beauty. He compares Juliet to a white dove among crows: “So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows, as yonder lady o’er her fellows shows” (p. 55). This girl fascinates Romeo with her beauty and charm: “Did my hearth love till now? Forswear it, sight, For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (p. 55). While depicting beauty, both texts focus on faces and eyes. Eyebrows and eyelashes increase the effect of eyes. Glances, accompanied by eyelashes, aim directly at the lover’s heart. For this reason, the lover’s eyes are likened to bows and arrows. The image of the arrow piercing the heart in the cult of Eros is a manifestation of this depiction (Pala, 2016, p. 46). When releasing a trapped gazelle free, Majnun says: “I see her eyes in yours, darker than night; Yet mere likeness cannot restore her to my sight” (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 67). Juliet is very worried about Romeo, who risked her life to see her, because he is sure that if any

of his family sees him there, they will kill him. But for Romeo, much greater risks lie at Juliet's eyes. If she looks at him indifferently, it will hurt him more severely than the twenty swords of the enemies: "Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye, Than twenty of their swords. Look thou but sweet" (p.75). Mercutio also believes Romeo was stabbed with the eyes of his lover: "Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead, stabbed with a white wench's black eye" (p. 100). Juliet's and Layla's faces and eyes become the objects of admiration and love.

Majnun and Romeo use elements of light to describe Layla and Juliet's beauties. Romeo describes Juliet as having more brightness than the sun. Majnun likens Layla to a moon: "Dearest heart, you are the new moon, and I am a star that has fallen to earth out of longing for you" (p. 29). On another occasion, he refers to Layla as the sun: "You are the sun while I am the star of night" (p. 85). Juliet gives such brightness to the night with its radiance that Romeo is dazzled: "O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art as glorious to this night, being o'ermy head" (p. 71). With her brilliance, Juliet is as if hung on the cheek of the night like a diamond in the ear of a black Ethiopian: "It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night, As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (Shakespeare, 2005, p.53). Romeo is almost dazzled when he sees Juliet coming out to the window in the dark of night. The window is East while Juliet is the sun that rises. When Juliet shines like a sun with the radiance of her beauty, the Goddess of the sky, the Moon, is jealous of Juliet, who dazzles with her radiance: "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief" (p. 69). If Juliet's eyes were to shine in the sky instead of the stars, the birds would start chirping, assuming that the sun had risen: "would through the airy region stream so bright, that birds would sing and think it were not night" (p. 71). While elements of light are described to describe Layla's and Juliet's beauty, lovers find peace and solace during the night.

Those who will condemn, judge, or pity will disappear only at night. Romeo suffers from his platonic love for Rosaline. When the sun rises, Romeo escapes from the light. He goes home, draws the curtains, and locks the door. In fact, he creates an artificial night for himself: "shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, and makes himself an artificial night" (p. 17-18). Layla, burned with love and longing, likens herself to a candle: "O invisible candle of my soul, do not torture me as I encircle you!" (p. 18). Since she can feel love and passion freely only at night, she likens her feelings to a star that is imprisoned during the day and shines brightly at night. When the sun comes up, she hides behind a curtain and creates an artificial night just like Romeo. Juliet also speaks highly of darkness of night: "Ere one can say, "It lightens." Sweet, good night" (p. 77). To describe Layla's beau-

ty, Majnun says: “but even darker than her eyes was her raven hair; her hair was more lustrous than the sky at midnight, and indeed she was called Layla, or Night” (Ganjavi, 1997, p. 12). Lovers experience the joy and sorrow of love best at night. That’s why they don’t want the night to end. Having lived their first and last night together, Romeo and Juliet must leave before the sunrise. Juliet does not want to leave her lover when they hear the bird singing in the morning. She wants to believe that the sound belongs to the nightingale singing in the garden every night. It is not the nightingale’s sweet tune that makes such shrill and discordant sounds, but the lark’s voice, the harbinger of the morning: “It was the nightingale, and not the lark, that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear” (p. 77). The lovers have experienced the joy of love in their first and last night together. The joy of union leaves its place to the sorrow of separation in the morning.

As the products of distinct cultures, both works show traces of two major monotheistic religions. Majnun’s father tries to heal him with the help of most skilled doctors. When he cannot find a remedy, he decides to go to religious and spiritual authorities. He consults imams and sheiks, casts spell, writes amulets, and make offerings but nothing helps. As a last resort, he takes his son to the Mecca hoping that his prayers will be answered: “Here is the House of One who can cure all ills, even those ills that have no cure” (p. 31). Majnun falls into a great enthusiasm here, but he prays for his love to increase and become as solid as the foundations of Kaaba: “I pray to You, let me not be cured of love, but let my passion grow!” (p. 31). Religious aspect of *Romeo and Juliet* fleshes out in Friar Lawrence who is characterized as a virtuous and wise person. Apart from the Friar, holy persons such as Saint Pierre and Saint Francis are sworn on. Juliet occasionally goes out to the church for confession. When she goes to church to secretly marry Romeo, she left the house under the pretext of confession. Guessing how hopeless Juliet would be after Romeo committed suicide at Juliet’s grave, Friar Lawrence suggests Juliet settle in a convent and live among the holy nuns: “Come I’ll dispose of thee among a sisterhood of holy nuns” (p. 231). In both works, the union of men and women was approved by the society only by marriage on a religious basis. Layla’s father marries his daughter off to Ibn Salam. Juliet secretly marries the man she loves. During the ceremony, Romeo is excited to have Juliet along with the friar’s nuptials: “We met, we wooed, and made exchange of vow” (p. 87). Layla, for whom the wedding preparations are made, involuntarily takes her place at the wedding because she is afraid of people’s condemnation. During the pompous wedding, Layla squirms in pain in the litter where she sits during all this fanfare, away from the enthusiasm and joy taking place around her: “Icy daggers of lone-

liness and desperation were piercing her very soul” (p.78). Since Layla’s father and husband-to-be are wealthy and noble people, the wedding is spectacular in terms of both hospitality and entertainment: “the guests were sitting together, admiring the bride’s presents, throwing showers of gold and silver into the air” (p. 78).

Romeo is resilient in the face of difficulties and insurmountable obstacles because he believes that these are his fate. Majnun believes that it is his destiny to suffer. Just like Romeo, Majnun believed his fate is sealed and cannot be altered. He says: “If I am a slave to love, then it is the decree of Fate that I be such” (p. 38). As a result, he lacks any motivation to fight for things that go wrong. He believes that his father’s and Nowfal’s efforts are futile, so he displays a passive attitude in the face of fate and tries to persuade them to stop trying. Romeo senses the tragic death that he will live with in despair and thinks that this death is hanging on the stars and therefore cannot be changed: “Some consequence yet hanging in the stars, shall bitterly begin his fearful date” (p. 366). Majnun accepts defeat in the face of fate: “I lost everything because I lost you. If this is not the work of Fate, then whose work, is it?” (p. 19). Friar Lawrence thinks there must be a reason for such a sensitive and good-hearted person to experience these tribulations: “Affliction is enamored of thy parts, and thou art wedded to calamity (p. 140). Fate approaches Majnun and says that he tortured especially qualified people. He made him despised and worthless among people because he was a majestic person. If he were ignorant, he would always give him happiness. Similarly, if Layla is shameless and ruthless, fate would not have tormented her. However, since she was a virtuous person, fate always deemed her worthy of sorrow and grief. Deprived of both her happiness, Layla blames her fate: “Fate has decreed that we remain apart, and so remain apart we must. Am I to blame for the workings of Fate?” (p.115). On the day of her marriage, Juliet blames her fate: O Fortune, Fortune, all men call thee fickle/If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him (p. 161).

Romeo and Majnun try to endure the separation from their lovers and are consoled by the dream that maybe one day they will be able to meet their lovers. However, fate intensifies its cruelty towards them. Romeo states: “Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs; Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes” (p. 23). The tears of Majnun, who broke up with his lover, accumulate so much that it resembles an endless sea: “I am burning in love’s fire; I am drowning in the tears of my sorrow” (p. 18). Because of his forced separation, Majnun cries so much that his tears are like rivers flowing into the dry desert from all sides. He says: “all that I hear is the solemn drumbeat of separation” (p. 27). Romeo also cries so much for his love that if he were to be unfaithful to his love, he wishes that his eyes would

burn in the fire of hell: "Being purged, a fire sparkling in lover's eyes" (p. 23). The idea of exile and separation hurts Romeo so much that he cannot imagine a greater pain:" They are free men, but I am banished. And sayest thou yet that exile is not death" (p. 143). Romeo's exile from Verona to the neighboring city of Mantua assures that he will not receive Juliet's letter that explains her feigned death. When all her hope is lost, Juliet overcomes her fear and stabs herself with Romeo's phallic "happy dagger". She enacts a much more violent masculine death than Romeo's bloodless death by poison (Moisan, p. 124). She raises her voice against stifling patriarchy and articulates her devotion to Romeo.

Death and wedding events are tied together and establish the notion of a blissful union. After Juliet dies on the morning of the wedding, all the preparations for the wedding are adapted to the funeral. The hymns turn to mourning laments. Bridal decorations are used to decorate her remains. Lord Capulet says: "All things that we ordained festival/Turn from their office to black funeral" (p. 204). Likewise, Layla wants her mother to dress her as a bride: "When I am dead, dress me in a bridal gown; I shall wear no shroud or winding sheet. Dress me like a bride and make me beautiful" (p. 146). Between the six deaths in both tales, there is no death that occurred peacefully and naturally. Ibn Salam, Majnun, Majnun's father, and Layla die of grief. They all become so weak and debilitated that they cannot get out of bed and die shortly. Mercutio, Tybalt, and Paris are murdered while Juliet and Romeo commit suicide.

The reunion of young lovers is depicted in heaven. Romeo has a dream while in his exile in Mantua. Juliet is sitting on a throne. A spirit comes and takes Romeo to the sky with joyful dreams. His lover finds her dead body and kisses him on the lips, giving him such a breath of life that Romeo is resurrected and becomes an emperor: "And breathed such life with kisses in my lips, that I revived and was an emperor" (p.212). In this quotation, Romeo talks about the dream he had the night before. Kissing dead Romeo and resurrecting him from death, Juliet then joins him in the afterlife. This dream foreshadows the final scene in which Juliet wakes up from her potion-induced slumber only to find Romeo dead beside her. Although she kisses Romeo, the kiss will not bring him back to life. Similarly, Layla, who has lost all her hope of uniting with Majnun loses her will to live. She decides to end her life. Just before embracing death, she delivers a message to Majnun through her mother: "Her dying words concerned you and you alone; in death, as in life, she was faithful to no one but you. She has shared your grief in this world and now she has taken it with her as sustenance for her journey" (p.146). Layla dies out of anguish and distress. Majnun, who received the news of

Layla's death, says, "Since my lover is no longer alive, O my life, you too will come to an end, because the world is now a dungeon for me" (p. 155). He wishes to end his sufferings and begs to God: "O Lord, Creator of all beings! I implore You in Your own Name: relieve me of the burden of life!" (p. 150). He weeps and grows weak and asks God to release him from his earthly form and bring him to Layla's side. Layla and Majnun are buried side by side and the headstone says:

Two lovers lie sleeping in this tomb, United at last in death's dark womb.  
Faithful in separation, true in love: One heart, one soul in heaven above (p. 151).

An important institution to reinforce patriarchal norms, marriage is "historically and socially determined" (Kristeva, 2001, p. 69). Marriage contributes sustenance of ruling ideology and that is why happy marriages do not take place in both works. The only option is death and that is why the reunion of lovers is depicted in heaven. Michal Hasson (2018) states that:

In Sufism, man seeks to unite with God, and the relationship between man and God is one of great love and yearning. Even the greatest mystics, who grow especially close to God over the course of their lives, can only fully unite with Him at death. Majnun, who spent his entire life searching and longing for his love, but would only unite with her in death, is the ultimate depiction of love and desire for God – and Layla, the reflection of the beloved divine one (p. 88).

Consistent with Hasson's observation, while divine love allows to transcend the limits of the transient world, longings of the lover are directed towards an immaterial beloved. To Majnun love is eternal not a transient and fleeting emotion: "love, if not true, is but a plaything of the sense, fading like youth" (p. 40). Despite his efforts, Majnun was unable to marry Layla. He lost his mind and abandoned everything. Living in solitude and aimlessly wandering in the desert, he realizes that everything including Layla is transient and will abandon him eventually because "everything is destined to perish and nothing made to last" (p. 92). His love for transient objects will increase his pain and suffering. He comes to realize the love of God, because he is the source of grace, perfection, and beauty. He thus directs his love towards God and no longer feels the pain and agony of abandonment. His prayer is finally answered, and he dies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The unrequited love as depicted in both *Layla and Majnun* and *Romeo and Juliet* has become sources of inspiration for generations that have crossed the boundaries of regions, cultures, and languages. Although they belong to different cultures and



geographies, they have several common features in terms of plot, the universality of unrequited love, the agony of separation, and raptures of union. This study analyzed the thematic similarities between the two narratives. In both works, characters deviate from their expected roles. Men are expected to be masculine and carry themselves with valor, defiance, and vigor while females are expected to be subservient to men. However, the protagonists deviate from gender roles expected by the society. When the heroines show their passion and love, they defy rules and oppose the norms in contrast to the expectations of society. Similarly, the male protagonists are far from the image of brave, valiant, and quarrelsome men. Both men are melancholic, sensitive, and passionate. With the agony of separation and weight of love, they cry and whine, conditions unbecoming to men. Artificial values such as honor, bravery, and obedience are replaced with humane feelings of love, affection, and longing. The young lovers try to resist against norms rather than being ordinary but unhappy members of society. Layla and Juliet find themselves in an impossible situation. Married against their will, they have to be faithful to their husbands, but they also remain faithful to their lovers. The heroines are emblematic of incarcerated woman in a patriarchal society. The same is true for both Romeo and Majnun as they represent soft and sensitive males. They are repeatedly berated for lacking the will to fight, make flowery declarations of love, and expressing their emotions. Their feminine attitude and passivism are questioned by other characters who welcome verbal and physical confrontation. However, Romeo and Majnun defy authority and traditional gender roles. While prioritizing love over conventions, their transgressive behavior challenges, and resists patriarchy. In conclusion, protagonists deviate from expected gender roles by defying social norms for love and die as a result of their transgression.

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