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A Discourse Analysis of Muhammad Al-Salim's *Habibati Bakma* Based on Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

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Abstract

Love is one of the concepts that writers pay attention to when creating their works. It can be addressed from diverse theories and perspectives. Robert Sternberg's psychological theory, i.e., a triangular theory of love - intimacy, commitment, and passion, is the romantic relationship that creates the stability or lack of love. Sternberg believes that this triangle influences every person, depending on their gender, culture, and society. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the current research aims to analyze the discourse of *Habibati Bakma*, a novel by Muhammad Badr al-Salim, based on Sternberg's theory. The study's findings indicate that in various situations, the emotional relationship and sense of empathy of the novel's main characters, Hatan and Hanin, which are shaped by intimacy in a romantic love, are characterized by a bold structure, leading their loyalty and commitment to reach their peak. This reveals that self-sacrifice has a crucial role in attaining such love. In some cases, to bring the lovers closer and convey their feelings and emotions, they use words that indicate passion and lust. Hence, Sternberg's triangle of love leads to self-belief, acceptance, and finally, ideal love and marriage.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Sternberg's theory, *Habibati Bakma*, Muhammad Badr al-Salim

1. Introduction

Habibati Bakma is a romantic novel written by Muhammad al-Salim (2013) in 135 pages. This story narrates a distinct and special romance, which can be examined from the perspective of Sternberg's love

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triangle. In his theory, Sternberg believes that every person affected by gender, cultural, and social factors learns patterns of personal romantic behavior, which are called love stories, and based on them, the direction of emotional tendencies and the reason for the durability or instability of romantic relationships can be explained (Sternberg, 2016).

Love is the quality of existence. The power of love is eternal and undeniable, a wonderful and endless might, which, in the case of a downward course and a desire for the infinite, is capable of pushing man to the level of animals, or in the case of an upward course, to the divine perfection (Ramtin, 2018). Sternberg's theory consists of the elements of intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). Based on Sternberg's position on the effect of literary texts on learning patterns of love, it becomes necessary to study novels from this point of view. Among Arabic novels, *Habibati Bakma*, which uses an effective element called love at an ideal level to advance the story, the Sternbergian love triangle of intimacy, passion, and commitment is used as the characters' discourse, which doubles the importance of addressing this issue.

2. Review of Literature

Several researchers have examined the components of Sternberg's love triangle theory. Using the descriptive-analytical method, Majd and Majd (2011) examined the components of love theory in Saadi's beliefs. They concluded that Saadi did not believe in blind love consisting of just lust, without any other component, even though the relationship could be maintained only with this component.

Based on Sternberg's psychological perspective, Asghari Ghajari and Abbaspoor Esfandan (2019) examined the dimensions of love in the collection of the grammar of love by Aminpour. They argued that Aminpour's view on the category of love has a downward trend, accompanied by pessimism and negativity, and the element of intimacy, superficial and limited, reflects that the end of this love affair leads to despair and unpleasantness.

In another study, Rasouli and Kiumarsi (2019) dealt with the concept of love based on a descriptive-analytical method and found that the components of love in the story were the love of God that emanates from the love of the earthly lover. Moreover, Ghasemian et al. (2020) investigated different

types of love using a descriptive-analytical method and suggested that the love considered by Momin Arshi is the mystical, idealistic and perfect love.

In another investigation, Mahmoudi (2020) examined romantic relationships in two Persian literary works using analytical and descriptive methods, finding that these novels offer insights into the stability of love, the actions and behaviors of characters, patterns of attachment, and identification. Zaheri and Karimi (2020) examined the categories of love using a corpus of 700 verses in Bilal's poems in Bakhtiari culture and concluded that the lover and the beloved provided emotional support to each other on an ideal level, which gave meaning to their lives.

Based on Sternberg's triangular theory of love, Rashidi Zafar et al. (2020) investigated the components of love in *Savushun*. The researchers analyzed the components of love using a descriptive-analytical method and found that Simin Daneshvar attached great importance to the maintenance of romantic relationships within the framework of the family, and Yusuf and Zari, the main characters of *Savushun*, experience transcendental love.

Bahar Chetni and Karimpasandi (2020) reviewed Farrokhzad's love poems based on Sternberg's triangular theory of love. The authors investigated the components of love in her poems using a descriptive-analytical method and highlighted that Farrokhzad was not able to establish a balance between the three elements of passion, intimacy, and commitment to love due to different life situations.

The above review of the related literature shows that so far, there has been no research on the discourse analysis of Muhammad al-Salim's novel, *Habibati Bakma*, based on Sternberg's triangular theory of love. This adds to the innovative aspect of the research and highlights the significance of conducting this study. In the current study, the following questions were raised:

What are the components of Sternberg's love triangle and their reflection in Habibati Bakma?

What has a special role in the discourse analysis of love in Habibati Bakma?

3. Method

This article is based on the descriptive-analytical method. Using discourse analysis to study a novel is like removing the outer layers of language to expose the deeper social, psychological, and ideological

forces at play. It goes beyond just what is said—it examines how it is said, who says it, and why it matters in a wider context. It tries to answer questions like how language was used to achieve a goal, focusing on how meaning is constructed through texts, conversations, and cultural narratives. Hence, to answer the research questions, the discourse of Muhammad al-Salim's novel *Habibati Bakma* was analyzed and examined from the perspective of Sternberg's triangle of love - intimacy, commitment, and passion.

4. Theoretical Framework

This section serves as the backbone for the entire analysis of the paper. It outlines the psychological theory, its major concepts, and the theorist who guided the interpretation of the literary work. Thus, the section is followed by a summary of the story, and finally, the components of Sternberg's theory are discussed.

4.1. Sternberg's Psychological Theory

Robert J. Sternberg is a distinguished American scholar. He is one of the most prominent theorists and researchers in the field of psychology who has paid great attention to the topic of love. Sternberg believes that a person without a deep romantic relationship will be like a broken boat that is always subjected to the raging waves of the sea, with no stability or will in life. He presented the three-faceted theory of love, which methodically explains the components of love. According to this theory, love is known within the framework of three components of intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 2016). He explains these components as follows.

Intimacy: This element includes the feeling of closeness and connection. In other words, within its domain, it creates feelings that are basically like a warm and close friendly relationship (Armstrong, 2013).

Passion: It refers to the exciting and passionate components in a romantic relationship. They include physical and sexual attraction, and the romantic feelings in a relationship. This component leads to the experience of passion in the relationship (Alaie & Karami, 2008).

Commitment: It is a word that refers to the duration and number of a relationship. In other words, it means deciding to continue the relationship in the long term and stick with it. In fact, this loyalty makes the love between two people survive. Commitment in the relationship can also lead the two parties to get to know each other, so each person gains a detailed knowledge of their characteristics (Baron & Branscombe, 2011).

4.2. A Summary of *Habibati Bakma*

Muhammad Badr al-Salim was born in Saudi Arabia in 1990. He is a contemporary Arabic novelist best known for his emotional work *Habibati Bakma* (حبيبتى بكما in Arabic), which translates to “My Mute Beloved.” Published in 2013 by the Arab Scientific Publishers, this novel explores themes of love, loss, and the emotional struggles of Arab women in modern society. The following is a summary of the story:

“One day, Hatan’s father comes home and happily announces that his job status has been promoted, so they have to travel to Riyadh. There, Hatan meets his uncle’s mute daughter, Hanin. From that day on, Hatan falls in love with Hanin and lives with the dream of his love, so he nurtures romantic descriptions in his thoughts. Some time passes, and Hatan plans to talk to his mother about marriage, and his mother warmly welcomes him. Before Hatan mentions the proposed option, his mother says that his friend Rashid’s daughter has a beautiful face and character, but Hatan tells his mother that he does not want her. “I will get married to my cousin.” The mother worriedly tells the names of each of his uncle’s daughters until she reaches Hanin, and Hatan says, “That's it”, when the mother strongly disagrees with confusion and says, “Are you crazy? Marry this sick and dumb girl? I will not allow it.”

In short, Hatan lives in his romantic dream for a few years until one night he gets a call from the hospital, which gives him the sad news that his father had had an accident on the street and died. So, the living expenses fall on Hatan’s shoulders; that is why he leaves his university studies and goes to work to earn a living. At the same time, a text message is sent from Hanin to his cell phone, in which she consoles him. Hatan recalls his romantic fantasy. This time, he intends to get married and start a life seriously, so they exchange romantic text messages for several months until he falls in love with the mediation of his grandmother (Al-Salim, 2013).”

4.3. The Components of Sternberg's Love in *Habibati Bakma*

Carefully, in *Habibati Bakma*, we can find traces of love in its place. In this novel, love sometimes has an earthly and material expression, and sometimes it breaks the boundaries of the earth and finds excellence. With the power of his beautiful expression, Muhammad al-Salim has drawn pure and original images of love, a true and real love that leads the lover not to consider his existence but to try to reach his beloved. The following is a discussion of the components of Sternberg's triangular theory of love.

4.3.1. Intimacy

The feeling of love and its expression, as well as the expression of interest, empathy, sadness, care, and responsibility towards the beloved, can be found in *Habibati Bakma*, which shows the most beautiful and innermost romantic and emotional emotions of the central character towards his beloved:

«أحن إليك كثيراً يا حبيبي، أحن لكل تفصليك الصغيرة غير المسموعة ولكل الكلمات التي كنت تجاهدني نفسك على نطقها لتسعد قلبي بسماعها حينما سرت أنا صوتك .. وأفتقد إشاراتك لقلبك حب أقول لك أحبك فلا تجدني طريقة لتقولني أنا أيضا يا حبيبي» (27)

“I miss you so much, my dear. I miss every little detail of yours that is not heard, and all the words that you struggled to say to make my heart happy by hearing them when I hear your voice. And I miss your signals to your heart, love, I tell you I love you, but you don't find a way to say me too, my love.” (p. 27)

Since love is formed based on special attention to the loved one, the kind of look that Hatan has on Hanin is a kind of romantic relationship. Despite being unavailable, Hatan knows how to express love from the heart, a sign of secret love that longs, and it reveals strong dependence.

«فأصبحت الصديق الذي أحب حديثه ويتهيج القلب بقربه...» (29)

“You became the friend whose talk I love and whose closeness makes my heart rejoice ...” (p. 29)

Loving happens when a person experiences the element of intimacy in love in the absence of other elements, and emotional relationships are established (Jaberi et al., 2016). He can share his issues, Despite the weakness of Haneen's blindness, Hatan needed her help. «manipulative strategies exercised by a less powerful individual on the more powerful one who rather than being a passive victim, resists

being manipulated by having gained counter-information to counterbalance the manipulator's arguments»(Ghanbari and Hanif,2023).Hatan liked to talk to Hanin and convey them to her and the two of them had a feeling of belonging to each other. This intimacy is a necessary condition for being in love and providing a bond between them, which creates mutual trust so they can find a solution to their problems.

«هكذا أصبحت أنت، فرحي وسعادتي وبهجتي وكل الأمور الجميلة في حياتي. أصبحت ابتسامتي الحلوة، وفرحتي الكبيرة، وكل ما يتعلق بك يسعدني مهما كبر أو صغر.

قهوتي لم تعد بحاجة لقطع من السكر فقط القليل من الغرق في ذكريك كان كافياً ليوهم عقلي بأن كل شيء ذو مذاق سكري...» (31)

“This is how you became my joy, my happiness, my delight, and all the beautiful things in my life. You became my sweet smile, my great joy, and everything related to you makes me happy, no matter how big or small. My coffee no longer needs sugar cubes, just a little drowning in your memory was enough to make my mind believe that everything has a sugary taste...” (p. 31)

Every person in the depths of his psyche needs someone to love him from the bottom of his heart. Hanin needs happiness due to her special physical conditions; she even expresses it and provides emotional support, and this feeling of empathy is felt in the structure of the story. The kind of look and feeling that Hatan and Hanin have in their romantic relationship, and the special way they talk to each other, is the essence of their relationship. Hatan always tries to make Hanin happy, and this shows that they always think about each other's wishes and intend to make each other happy.

«صدقي أو لا تصدقي، منذ أن أحببتك وأنت كل أفراحي و أجمل ابتساماتي..كنت الوحيدة القادرة على إضحائي بلاصوت و بلا كلمات.. فربك كان مصدر السعادة

لأيامي، و رسائلك كانت أجمل رسائل الحب..» (58)

“Believe it or not, since I loved you, you have been my joy and my most beautiful smile. You were the only one who could make me laugh without a voice or words. Your closeness was the source of happiness for my days, and your letters were the most beautiful love letters.” (p. 58)

In different situations, emotional support can be seen between Hatan and Hanin, which shows their intimacy. Hatan gives special dignity to Hanin and appreciates her attention very much. Hatan's heartwarming friend is approved in every way, unlike the love affairs where the beloved's silence hurts and disturbs the lover's heart, but in this type, that is, Hanin's silence, Hatan still hopes for the continuation of this relationship.

«أحبك هكذا أرسلت أول طيور حبي على شكل رسالة قصيرة هبطت على عش قلبك النائم. رسالة قصيرة حملت معها أمنياتي الطويل المختصرة في أصدق كلمات الحب وأقصر كتابات العشق» (111)

“I love you, so I sent my first love bird in a short message that landed on the nest of your sleeping heart. A short message that carried with it my long wishes, summarized in the most sincere words of love and the shortest writings of passion.” (p.111)

“Suggestive of specific values for words within a speech community, the concept of register is so significant from a practical point of view” (Zandian,2020). In the novel, Hattan, in the form of a verbal context, uses words, In words, Hatan expresses his feelings and emotions towards Hanin, which shows a deep understanding, appreciation, and mutual support between the two of them, and what they say verbally or non-verbally adds depth to their intimacy and the level of trust between them. They create a successful relationship, a romantic one that was formed between Hatan and Hanin in text messages, which indicates a kind of non-present experience of love.

4.3.2. Commitment

This component is important in continuing relationships; because the desire for common connection is the basis of the strongest human effort. It is the force that keeps the human race, tribes, families, and society together for a long time.

«وإني أعاهدُ الله، وأُعاهدُكَ على أن تبقي نخلةً شامخةً في واحتي لا شريك لك فيها، ولا شريك لك في مائتها.. إني أعاهدُكَ حبيبي أن هذا القلب لن يعرف مجنوناً غيرك، ولن ينبض مجنوناً لغيرك». (64)

“I promise God, and I promise you, that you will remain a tall palm tree in my oasis, with no partner in it, and no partner in its water. I promise you, my beloved, that this heart will not know a madman other than you, and will not beat madly for anyone other than you.” (p. 64)

The loyalty between Hatan and Hanin is felt throughout the novel. The two are bound to each other, and their loyalty is at its peak. The continued presence of the lover next to the beloved is one of the most important desires of Hatan.

«تعاهدنا على الحب وعلى الاخلاص، وأشهدنا الله على صدق حُبنا ثم بدأنا ننسج رداءً مُستقبلنا معاً، ونرسمُ محياهُ بأيدينا، وندعو الله بأن يخبينا إلى أن نتشارك غطاءً واحداً». (91)

“We pledged love and loyalty, and we called God to witness the sincerity of our love. Then we began to weave the cloak of our future together, and draw its features with our hands, and we prayed to God to keep us alive until we share one cover.” (p. 91)

A human being is a worldly person who has reached the end of his life, and he is alone, and he wants to find a way to please himself, both materially and morally (Solomon, 1988/2016). A covenant with a longing for love, a kind of covenant that is made with a double meaning, such that it is indestructible, and in a constraint and clause, where it is fulfilled. It is a covenant that is at the height of the development of such a journey with it. This is a big deal. This is a world where you cannot find anything to do with your partner.

«أشهدتُ الله على حيي لك، و أشهدتُك على أن أبقى أسيراً في سجن صدرك» (73)

“I call God to witness my love for you, and I call you to witness that I will remain a prisoner in the prison of your chest.” (p. 73)

This is a deep, profound feeling in the presence of a longing in the heart. This decision is attributed to a lasting love that is committed to you, and this is the last word in the bondage and condition of a continued love.

«رضيتُ بكِ حُباً، و رضيتُ بعينيكِ ترفاً، و أشهدتُ الله بأني لن أنسك يوماً، و بأني سأحملُك معي، في حضورك أو في غيابك، سأحملُك كما تحملُ أضلوعي قلبي» (103).

“I accepted you as love, and I accepted your eyes as luxury, and I call God to witness that I will never forget you, and that I will carry you with me, in your presence or your absence, I will carry you as my ribs carry my heart.” (p. 103)

Despite Hanin's physical problems, Hatan has accepted her completely, although Hatan's mother strictly forbade him because of her problems, but he was committed to his love. He was loyal to her.

«تلكِ المسؤولية الكبيرة جعلتني أنسى ما كنتُ أبنيه لنفسي وما كنتُ أطمح لتحيقته» (120).

“This huge responsibility made me forget what I was building for myself and what I was aspiring to achieve.” (p. 120)

Hatan’s loyalty towards Hanin reached the point where he was selfless and forgot himself, and remained in a romantic relationship until it ended in marriage.

«أنا ذلك الرجل الذي أقسم أن لا يُبكي عينيها أبداً» (117).

“I am that man who swore never to make her cry.” p. 117

Hatan is committed to living with Hanin and swears not to harm her and never cause any quarrels, and always make her happy.

«أكسرُ حاجز الرفض هذا الذي وضعته أمي بيني و بينك» (112).

“I will break this barrier of rejection that my mother put between me and you.” (p. 112)

Because of the commitment he had to love, Hatan stayed in a romantic relationship during the difficulties; his mother’s opposition did not prevent him from his love for Hanin. Despite the ups and downs and the hardships of life, he stays with Hanin. His emotional attachment is a powerful motivation to spend difficult times safely.

4.3.3. *Lust or Passion*

The lover’s emotional arousal by the beloved, attractive notions of the lover and his ideality, preferring to be with the beloved over another person, and the lover’s happiness about this, are among the criteria that exist in any emotional relationship, indicating that the aspect of passion and lust is prominent in that relationship (Fisher, 2016). Lust and passion expose a friendship to spectacle, which leads to the experience of passion within the relationship (Azari & Nabiyan, 2011).

«أنا من كان العادل بالحب بين عينيك وخديك. أترأه ملّ صمتي؟ أم أن كما توقعتها مسبقاً نزوة وستزول بعد أن يتذوقني؟» (34).

“I was the one who was fair with love between your eyes and cheeks. Is he tired of my silence? Or is it, as I previously expected, a whim that will go away after he tastes me?” (p. 34)

One vertex of Sternberg's triangle of love is love and lust, which is the basic motivation for happiness and vitality (Franken, 2014). Hatan, paying attention to Hanin's emotional and physical needs, uses words that strengthen and nurture each other's love. By observing Hanin's eyes, he goes blind. He wants to ignore Hanin's weak point, so he likes it and thinks it is beautiful, and this strengthens Hanin's self-confidence and self-belief.

«ولأول مرة أشتهي تقبيلك حين تضحكين!» (89).

“For the first time, I want to kiss you when you laugh!” (p. 89)

One of the most effective tools for conveying many feelings and emotions is touching and kissing (Fromm, 2017), for which Hatan has a feeling of longing, and this indicates the small distance between the lover and the beloved.

«انتظرت خروجها وكأني أنتظر خروج عروستي من حفل زفافنا لأختلي بشفتيها و أستنشق رائحة عطر رقبته» (98).

“I waited for her to come out as if I was waiting for my bride to come out of our wedding so I could be alone with her lips and inhale the scent of her neck.” (p. 98)

In his love affair with Hanin, Hatan speaks in a language that the heart understands and pours out the deepest feelings into words that are a bridge between two souls, boosting happy hormones and encouraging feelings of love and connection.

«ما ردعني عن إتمام ثلاثة الحب إلا عناق اقتحمت به صدري وشددت يديك حول ظهري وكأنك تريد أن تحتبني بين ضلوعي، وتطوقيني بأفي حنان. كنت أعتقد أن الإناث ذوات سواعدٍ ضعيفة هشة، إلا أن العناق يجعلهن ذوات زودٍ عاصرة! تمنيت أن لا ينتهي ذلك العناق، تمنيت أن يتوقف الزمان بي وأنت في أحضاني، أو أن نتحول لتمثالين متعانقين يرانا كل المحبين في ميدان العشق» (112).

“What prevented me from completing the third love was the embrace with which you stormed my chest and tightened your hands around my back as if you wanted to hide between my ribs and embrace me with the utmost tenderness. I used to think that women had weak, fragile arms, but an embrace turns them into squeezing forearms! I wished that embrace would never end. I wished that time would stop with me and you in my arms, or that we would turn into two statues embracing each other so that all lovers could see us in the field of love.” (p. 112)

The imagination of passion and lust and its expression by Hatan affects the stress management of oneself and Hanin, and it calms both, stabilizes the mood of both, leads to health and happiness, and helps in evaluating the life partner slowly. In fact, Hatan establishes a very strong non-verbal communication with Hanin by expressing hugs, through which he conveys deep concepts and helps the durability of the romantic relationship.

«أنظرُ إليك أنظرُ لشفتيك لعينيك، لذلك المفرق الناعم بين تلال صدركِ!» (130).

“I look at you, I look at your lips, at your eyes, at that smooth separation between the hills of your chest.”
(p. 130)

Looking at someone affects the type and quality of communication. Hatan’s look at his beloved shows his interest in her, and it is difficult to control the feeling of love and the behaviors resulting from it because it is a motivation to attract the beloved.

5. Conclusion

Habibati Bakma is a realistic novel in which Muhammad Badr al-Salim was able to portray the behavior of two main characters, Hatan and Hanin, who were in love, and express their emotional relationships. The type of love reflected in this novel, with Sternberg’s components of love, which include intimacy, commitment, passion and lust, is consistent. The author has been able to be effective with his ability and skill in the believability and attractiveness of the work. The essential role in a healthy and emotional relationship in Sternberg’s triangular love is the component of intimacy, which requires deep emotional relationships, and in this novel is accompanied by intense longing and dependence. Hatan and Hanin had a sense of belonging to each other, and their love was romantic but wise. In an idealistic way, Hanin supports her lover, and due to Hanin’s special physical condition, which requires emotional support, Hatan sacrifices himself in this regard. Hatan, considering the existence of limitations and physical problems of Hanin, as well as the opposition of the family, especially His mother, adheres to Hanin’s love and makes a promise to her love that this sense of empathy is felt in the structure of the story, which is a sign of intimacy with commitment. In this novel, the story is about selflessness and sacrifice in love, which is the reason for the satisfaction of the life of the lover and the beloved, and since the love of Hatan and Hanin leads to confidence and acceptance and leads to marriage despite the obstacles, it is a proof of

commitment in love relationships. The component of passion and lust in the relationship between Hatan and Hanin is the boiling of the feeling of closeness and privacy, which weaves their existence together and their flaws and mistakes are ignored. Finally, their love is at an ideal and perfect level, and the intimacy is accompanied by commitment and lust, which is the essence of love and life; it has a special role in the story.

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