

# **A study of contemporary Iranian fiction based on Robert j. Sternberg duplex theory of love**

**By: Mehrneh Kouch Peydeh**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation offers a rigorous and nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics of love in interpersonal relationships, with a specific focus on emotional bonds as depicted in contemporary Persian fiction. The primary objective of this study is to present a comprehensive psychological analysis of how love is portrayed and experienced in Persian novels. Utilizing a qualitative content analysis approach, the research examines the multifaceted components of love and emotional intimacy across a curated selection of twenty modern Iranian novels—equally authored by ten women and ten men—spanning various decades of the 14th century SH (1927-2019 CE) and encompassing both popular and elite literary styles.

The analytical framework is firmly grounded in Robert J. Sternberg's psychological theories, particularly his Triangular Theory of Love and Love as a Story Theory.

The findings reveal several key insights. Notably, the component of intimacy consistently emerges as a significant factor in the formation of romantic relationships, appearing in nearly all satisfying emotional bonds. Affectionate love—predominantly characterized by intimacy—was identified as the most prevalent form of emotional connection in the selected novels. Furthermore, the “recovery story” was a recurrent theme, underscoring the role of narrative symmetry between partners in shaping idealized love.

**Keywords:** contemporary Persian fiction, psychological criticism, Robert J. Sternberg, triangular theory of love, love as a story theory.

## **Introduction**

The disciplines of literature and psychology share a common interest in the human psyche and inner emotional world. Psychological literary criticism, in particular, seeks to elucidate the internal states and social contexts of fictional characters. Sternberg's models offer a robust interdisciplinary framework for analyzing love dynamics in fiction. Conceiving each literary work as a psychological case study, this approach positions literary texts as rich materials for psychological inquiry.

Sternberg, a prominent figure in cognitive and love psychology, introduced two groundbreaking theories: the Triangular Theory of Love (1986) and Love as a Story Theory (1996–1998). These frameworks elucidate patterns of attraction, longevity, and relational structures influenced by gender, culture, and society. The present study applies these models to Persian novels to explore the culturally embedded portrayals of love, thereby addressing a notable gap in Persian literary criticism.

A review of existing literature confirms the originality of this research. While some Iranian studies have referenced Sternberg's theories, they tend to focus either on classical literature or employ a single theoretical model. This monograph is the first to simultaneously apply both theories to a diverse range of contemporary Persian fiction authored by both genders. This inclusive approach contributes not only to Persian literary criticism but also to cross-cultural psychology by testing Western-based theories within a non-Western context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Triangular Theory of Love**

Sternberg conceptualizes love as a triangle consisting of three core components: intimacy, passion, and decision-commitment. The way these three sides are combined creates eight forms of love:

- Non-Love
- Liking Love
- Infatuated Love
- Empty Love

- Romantic Love
- Companionate Love
- Fatuous Love
- Consummate Love

### **Love as a Story Theory**

Complementing the triangular model, this theory posits that individuals develop personal "love stories" shaped by their life experiences and expectations. Partners are attracted to those whose stories align or complement their own. Sternberg identifies 26 distinct love stories *include*:

- Student-Teacher Stories
- Sacrifice Stories
- Government Stories
- Police Stories
- Pornography Stories
- Horror Stories
- Science Fiction Stories
- Collection story
- Art story
- House and Home story
- Recovery story
- Religion story
- Game story
- Travel story
- Sewing story
- Gardening story
- Business story
- Addiction story

- Fantasy story
- History story
- Science story
- Cookbook story
- War story
- Theater story
- Humor story
- Mystery story

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

The research aims to identify manifestations of Sternberg's theoretical models in Persian fiction, highlighting narrative strategies used by authors to depict romantic relationships. This exploration reveals implicit storytelling techniques and enhances understanding of creative processes in fiction writing.

Two central research questions guide this study:

1. Which of Sternberg's models—Triangular Theory or Love as a Story—resonates more with the emotional and narrative patterns in contemporary Persian fiction?
2. How can the application of Love as a Story Theory deepen our understanding of plot structure and narrative subtleties?

### **Methodology and Scope**

The research adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, with each novel serving as a unit of analysis. Data is primarily gathered through extensive library and online research. The study includes twenty novels—ten authored by women and ten by men—from different time periods and literary genres (popular and elite).

This gender-balanced sampling allows for a critical examination of how gender influences the representation of love, offering insights into how social roles and cultural expectations are portrayed in literary works. This also enriches feminist literary criticism and gender studies.

### **Innovative Contribution**

This study represents the first comprehensive application of both of Sternberg's theories to a broad corpus of Persian contemporary fiction. It provides a more integrated and robust analytical framework than previous fragmented approaches, uncovering deep, culturally nuanced links between individual psychology and collective narrative traditions. The deliberate inclusion of male and female authors supports a comparative gender-based analysis, a feature rarely addressed in previous research. Additionally, the study explores how narrative techniques align with psychological patterns of love, offering a cross-disciplinary perspective that advances literary and psychological studies in the Iranian context.

### **Conclusion**

What emerged from this study was the high congruence of the writers' mental designs in the stories with emotional bonds of affection and love. The high frequency of this form of connection and its closeness in the works of both male and female writers is remarkable. The analysis reveals that affectionate love—dominated by intimacy—appears most frequently in both male and female-authored works. However, these relationships often deteriorate over time due to weak levels of passion or commitment. Only a few instances of consummate love (involving all three components) were found, and most of them ended in the death of one partner, suggesting the fragility of such ideal relationships.

In terms of love stories, the recovery story dominated across both genders, reflecting a society wounded by trauma and seeking emotional healing. Also The sacrifice story was more prevalent in male-authored works, A story that grows and propagates in society under the title of pro-social behavior. Voluntary behaviors in the direction of benefiting others, which are generally under the role of powerful men in society, are one of the disadvantages of patriarchal societies against men. A gender that must always appear strong, not feel weak, be a supporter and shelterer, and use its supernatural ability to manage situations. A requirement whose implementation will sometimes cause satisfaction and arrogant self-confidence in the male gender. Meanwhile, the fantasy story appeared more frequently in female-authored narratives in traditional society that it has given them a subordinate role. A society that sees men as heroes, saviors, and princes on horseback who will come at the

right time and provide shelter to suffering and helpless women highlighting the socio-cultural constraints placed on women and their internalized desire for salvation.

This dual-theory approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how emotional bonds are portrayed in Persian fiction. Although, according to the first hypothesis (the love triangle hypothesis), the presence of all three components is predicted to form a satisfying bond, the role of the intimacy component as the common core in forming romantic relationships is very significant. It demonstrates that satisfaction in romantic relationships depends on the psychological interplay between partners, as explained by both models.

### **Future Research Directions**

This study opens promising avenues for further research on evolving concepts of love in the postmodern era, including phenomena like “liquid love” and the role of uncertainty in contemporary relationships. Such investigations could bridge the gap between psychological theory, cultural studies, and literary narrative.

### **Research Interests**

My research interests lie at the intersection of narrative literature, romantic fiction, contemporary critical theory, psychoanalytic and sociological literary criticism, and gender studies—especially women’s literature and feminist perspectives