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THE POETICS OF PORTRAITURE, GAZE, AND MEMORY IN BOZORG ALAVI'S NOVEL HER EYES

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Abstract: This article examines the system of artistic imagery and the poetics of psychological representation in Bozorg Alavi's novel Chashmhāyaš (Her Eyes) from the perspective of literary theory, with particular attention to portraiture, gaze, and memory. It considers how portrait, gaze, recollection, setting, and descriptions of the surrounding environment contribute to the revelation of character. By analyzing passages from the Persian original and its Uzbek translation, the article identifies the artistic functions of imagery, sensory details, and emotional tension. The analysis draws on the concepts of literary image, poetic detail, retrospective narration, and indirect psychological characterization.

Keywords: Bozorg Alavi, Chashmhāyaš, Her Eyes, literary theory, literary image, psychological representation, portraiture, gaze, poetic detail, retrospective narration, novel poetics.

Introduction

The novel as a genre makes it possible to reveal human character gradually—not only through external description, but also through memory, relationships, perception, and the evaluation of events. In this respect, artistic representation is a constituent element of novelistic poetics: it advances the plot, presents the character's inner conflicts, and guides the reader's perception.

The main focus of this article is not to evaluate translation practice, but to identify the novel's artistic structure and mechanisms of psychological representation. A comparison of Persian and Uzbek sentences is used as a supplementary textual observation showing how an image is constructed through language.

The object of the study is Bozorg Alavi's novel Chashmhāyaš (Her Eyes), together with the Persian and Uzbek textual excerpts provided for this article. The subject is the system of artistic images in the novel, the portrait and gaze motifs, psychological representation, character construction through memory, and the poetic function of setting and environment.

The aim is to reveal the novel's system of images and poetics of psychological representation according to the principles of literary theory. The objectives are to explain the theoretical features of literary image and poetic detail; identify the compositional and aesthetic functions of portraiture and gaze; determine the role of retrospective narration in character construction; and analyze the selected descriptive passages in terms of imagery and emotional effect.

Methodological Framework

The article employs descriptive-analytical, narratological, and comparative-textual approaches. Narratological analysis focuses on the narrating subject, temporal layers, and the order in which events are presented. Poetic analysis considers the functional relationships among detail, image, motif, and

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setting within the work. Gérard Genette provides a theoretical framework for the systematic study of narrative time, order, and relations of narration[1].

In studying literary poetics, it is important to analyze the system of images, compositional structure, and methods of representing the characters' psychology in relation to one another. D. Quronov identifies the study of literary imagery, the structure of the literary work, and principles of analysis as among the main concerns of literary theory. This approach serves as a methodological basis for identifying the features of imagery and psychological representation in Her Eyes.

One important feature of a literary image is its ability to create generalization through concrete and individual characteristics. Quronov relates the concreteness of a literary image to the representation of individual traits. Accordingly, Farangis should be studied not through isolated features—her appearance, gaze, actions, and relationships with other characters—but as elements contributing to the construction of a unified character.

This perspective makes it possible to analyze Farangis and Makan in relation to one another and to identify their roles in the development of events and the formation of the novel's semantic layers.

The concept of artistic detail is also important in determining the poetic function of portraiture and gaze. Quronov includes portrait and landscape among the forms of artistic detail. A portrait can therefore be studied not merely as a description of a character's appearance, but as an element that shapes the fictional world and helps reveal character. The scholar describes interior monologue as one of the principal forms of literary psychologism[2]. This theoretical position is relevant to the analysis of characters' inner experiences, memories, and psychological conflicts. Psychological representation, however, cannot be limited to interior monologue: in Her Eyes, the indirect expression of mental states through portrait, gaze, silence, and setting also requires examination. This approach makes it possible to analyze the relationship between present events and memories of the past, as well as the gradual construction of character through the delayed disclosure of information.

Results and Discussion

In Her Eyes, the portrait of a woman is interpreted as an artistic device that sets the narrative in motion. The portrait does not merely record external appearance: it raises questions in the narrator, prompts a search for the story behind the image, and opens a path into past events. In this sense, the portrait functions as a compositional detail that activates the retrospective direction of the plot[3].

The gaze motif forms the inner semantic centre of the portrait. The eyes are not only a feature of the character's appearance but also express the complex relationship between the observer and the observed. The gaze's ability to attract, conceal a secret, or arouse anxiety prevents the image from being interpreted in a single, definitive way. As a result, the character's inner world emerges not through a ready-made explanation, but through the reader's observation and inference.

The compositional role of portrait and gaze, together with the significance of retrospective narration, has been considered above. These poetic devices also play a leading role in the construction of Farangis. Her character is revealed not only through the description of her appearance, but through

[1] Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

[2] D. Quronov, Adabiyot nazariyasi asoslari (Tashkent: Noshir, 2019), p. 176.

[3] Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, "ČAŠMHĀYAŠ," Encyclopaedia Iranica, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/casmhayas/.

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the narrator's gaze, her relationships with other characters, and the gradual disclosure of past events. Understanding her therefore requires connecting individual details; the image's inner complexity emerges through indirect characterization.

This indirect characterization also makes Farangis's psychological portrait multilayered. Her actions and communication reveal inner experiences from different angles, while the distance between the narrator's perception and the character's inner world prevents immediate, unambiguous understanding. The reader reconstructs her psychological state from the relationships, recollections, and silences in the text rather than from an explicit explanation. This connects the discussion of retrospective narration with the analysis of character.

Makan's image is directly linked to the motifs of portrait and gaze. His status as a painter makes the creation of images and the act of seeing a significant layer of the novel's poetics. For Makan, portraiture is not limited to recording external appearance; it becomes an artistic means of perceiving a person and preserving that person in memory. Farangis and Makan are revealed in relation to one another, bringing together the novel's semantic strands of love, memory, and the reappraisal of the past. Their connection is expressed not only through explicit dialogue, but also through observation, recollection, silence, and unspoken meanings. Thus, the emotional bond between the characters is shaped through portraiture, gaze, and retrospective narration.

The movement from present observation to past events is important to the novel's composition. The narrator who encounters the portrait initially possesses incomplete information; subsequent narration reconstructs the chain of events through memory and recollection. The plot therefore does not provide information all at once, but delays and gradually discloses it. The preservation of narrative mystery sustains the reader's interest.

Here, memory is not simply a record of the past, but a subjective mechanism that rearranges events. The narrator reconstructs the past from the standpoint of present understanding; consequently, the remembered image embodies not only the event itself but also the rememberer's emotional attitude. This gives rise to layers of trust, doubt, and uncertainty in the representation of the characters.

The return to the past serves not merely to provide information, but to make the character's inner complexity understood belatedly.

Literary setting is not a neutral background against which characters move. It often becomes an external expression of psychological state: a confined, stuffy, or visibility-limiting environment may correspond to inner pressure, uncertainty, or anxiety. In analyzing such correspondences, the environment should not simply be equated with the character's psyche; rather, the analysis should identify the aesthetic impression produced in the reader and the function performed within the composition.

«هوا سنگین و خفه‌کننده بود و آسمان رنگ غریبی داشت»[4]

Translation: "The air was heavy and suffocating, and the sky had a strange colour."

In this sentence, the condition of the air and the unusual colour of the sky combine to create an uncomfortable and alienating atmosphere. The meanings of "heavy" and "suffocating" intensify the physical sensation, while the sky's "strange" colour adds uncertainty to the image. The Uzbek translation preserves this pressure through the expression "dim va bo‘g‘uvchi" ("stuffy and

[4] Bozorg Alavi, Cheshmhoyash (Tehran, 1952), p. 121.

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suffocating"), while "the sky had a strange colour" conveys the unclear visual impression concisely. The sentence does not directly name a psychological state; instead, it allows the reader to sense it through the environment.

«باد سردی از میان درختان خشک عبور میکرد»

Translation: "A cold wind was passing through the dry trees."

The cold wind and dry trees create a semantic contrast: the wind suggests movement, whereas the dry trees suggest a static and weakened state of nature. The verb «عبور میکرد» expresses an ongoing movement through space. The Uzbek form "esib o'tar edi" ("was blowing through") renders the wind's movement naturally and preserves its duration.

The poetic significance lies in the fact that the sentence does not explicitly explain the mood. Coldness, dryness, and continuing movement together determine the emotional colouring of the landscape. The scenery functions not as independent ornament, but as a detail that shapes the overall artistic atmosphere.

«مه غلیظی همهجا را پوشانده بود و دید را محدود میکرد»[5]

Translation: "A thick fog had covered everything and restricted visibility."

In this sentence, the fog covers the space and limits the ability to see. The two parts of the description form a cause-and-effect relationship: the covered space narrows the field of vision. Artistically, such a description can suggest limited perception, the incomplete visibility of reality, or uncertainty about a situation.

The Uzbek translation conveys the cause-and-effect relationship clearly. The phrase "the ability to see" is more explanatory and makes the sentence accessible; at the same time, it expands the concise Persian expression «دید» ("sight/field of vision"). From the perspective of literary theory, this difference is better understood as a stylistic distinction between concision and explicitness than simply labelled an error.

«بوی خاک نمخورده فضا را پر کرده بود»

Translation: "The smell of damp soil had filled the space."

In the next sentence, the sense of smell is presented as a detail that encompasses the entire space. "Damp soil" indicates a material quality, while the Persian phrase «فضا را پر کرده بود» emphasizes that the smell has filled the space. Thus, the sensory detail animates the scene in the reader's imagination not only visually, but also through smell.

The Uzbek rendering preserves the spreading of the smell, although the breadth and density of "filling the space" are somewhat reduced. This change highlights the intensity of poetic detail. The image of damp soil may also evoke associations such as an environment after rain; however, such meanings should be treated as interpretations dependent on the reader's experience, distinct from the sentence's direct lexical meaning.

The examples considered show that an image cannot be reduced to an isolated word. Artistic effect often emerges when several elements—the object's quality, action, sensation, and syntactic relation—work together. In the description of the air, physical pressure and visual strangeness interact; in the wind, movement and dryness; in the fog, coverage and restricted perception; and in the smell of soil, sensation and the filling of space.

[5] Bozorg Alavi, Cheshmhoyash (Tehran, 1952), p. 122.

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On this basis, the following criteria are proposed for literary-text analysis: the main referential content of the image; the compositional function of the detail; the atmosphere created through sensation or movement; its possible relation to the character's psychology; and the sentence's overall rhythm and concision. These criteria may also encompass translation, but the article's central concern is not to judge a translation as "right" or "wrong"; it is to identify how artistic representation is constructed.

"While the Persian textual examples analyzed above help illuminate Makan's inner experiences and worldview, the following sentence more clearly reveals his loyalty and devotion to his teacher."

"To put it bluntly, I was a man who had staked my life for my teacher."[6]

In this sentence, the character's loyalty and devotion to his teacher are revealed through figurative expression. The phrase "staked my life" indicates that the character has linked his fate to a particular person or goal and was prepared, if necessary, to put his life at risk. The form "was" strengthens the retrospective quality of the narration, showing that the character recalls his former self from the present perspective. Thus, the sentence not only characterizes him, but also expresses his inner world, standards of loyalty, and attitude toward the past.

Conclusion

Studying Bozorg Alavi's Her Eyes from the perspective of literary theory requires particular attention to the relationships among literary image, portrait, gaze, and memory. The portrait functions as a compositional detail that propels the narrative, while the gaze motif prevents the character's inner world from being reduced to a single explanation. Retrospective narration gradually discloses the past and turns memory into an active mechanism of character construction.

The examples presented demonstrate the potential of setting, movement, and sensory details to shape artistic atmosphere. In the description of the air, pressure and alienation; in the wind, continuous movement; in the fog, limits of vision; and in the smell of damp soil, the reach of the sensory field emerge as key poetic factors. However, because the position of these sentences within the novel has not been verified against a specific edition, they have been used as analytical material rather than as direct evidence concerning the novel's plot.

Comparison of the Persian text and Uzbek translation shows that not only the meaning of an artistic detail but also its form of expression contributes to poetic effect. In descriptions involving space, movement, and sensation, particular verbs, adjectives, and syntactic structures may determine the density, duration, or intensity of the atmosphere. Even when the main meaning is preserved in translation, the emotional tone and descriptive force of an image may change because of lexical and syntactic choices. Translation analysis should therefore examine not only word-for-word correspondence but also the extent to which the artistic function is preserved.

In general, when studying a novel's poetics, it is appropriate to analyze artistic detail not as an isolated lexical unit, but as an aesthetic phenomenon connected with image, composition, psychological representation, and readerly perception. This approach makes it possible to demonstrate the interaction of portrait, gaze, memory, and sensory description, and to explain how character is constructed within the text. The observations presented in this article provide an initial theoretical basis for further research. To strengthen some of the conclusions, however, the precise bibliographic

[6] Bozorg Alavi, Her Eyes, trans. Ahmadjon Quronbekov, 2nd ed. (Tashkent: Nasim Kutub, 2026), p. 55.

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details and pages of the Persian original, the relevant passages in the Uzbek translation, and a systematic comparison with the Turkish text should be checked and expanded.

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