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THE MULTILAYERED SEMANTICS OF LIGHT AND SHADOW IN UZBEK POETIC DISCOURSE: A CONTEXTUAL-SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This article examines how images associated with light, shadow, shade, and darkness acquire multiple, sometimes competing meanings in Uzbek poetry. Rather than assigning a fixed positive value to light and a fixed negative value to shadow, the study tests the interpretative consequences of a five-layer analytical model: denotative, affective, axiological, temporal-existential, and compositional. Eight texts by Alisher Navoiy, Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon, Usmon Nosir, Hamid Olimjon, and Usmon Azim were selected for qualitative close reading. The article provides a transparent coding matrix and demonstrates how linguistic evidence can distinguish defensible polysemy from speculative symbolism. The study makes a methodological contribution to Uzbek literary semiotics.

Keywords: Uzbek poetry; light-shadow imagery; semantic layers; denotation; connotation; polysemy; cultural semiotics; conceptual metaphor; poetic composition; contextual interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

Poetic images become significant because they combine perceptible features of the world with interpretative possibilities that extend beyond ordinary description. Light illuminates an object, a wall casts a shadow, night changes what the eye can distinguish, and shade offers protection from the sun. These facts remain recognizable when natural phenomena enter poetry; however, no physical property alone determines what an image will mean to a lyrical speaker or reader. The same shadow that in one text restricts movement may in another remain close to the speaker as an emblem of loyalty. This divergence is not an inconsistency: it illustrates the context-sensitive nature of literary signification.

The lexical field itself requires clarification. Uzbek nur refers to light or radiance; yorug‘lik denotes illumination or brightness; soya can indicate either a cast shadow or a shaded, sheltered place; qorong‘ulik designates darkness; tun is night; tong is dawn; and quyosh denotes the sun. These words participate in related visual contrasts but are not interchangeable. A discussion that silently substitutes “shadow” for every image of “night” or “darkness” can distort the poem's precise representational structure. The present article therefore refers to a light-shadow semantic field, within which lexical distinctions are explicitly retained.

The theoretical problem is equally important. Barthes's analysis of denotation and connotation helps distinguish an image's literal reference from socially and textually activated secondary meaning [1]. Eco's theory of semiotics situates such signification within the relationship between codes and interpretative practices [2]. Lotman's account of culture as a semiotic environment directs attention to the ways individual texts both inherit and transform culturally legible imagery [3]. Conceptual metaphor theory explains why an immediately familiar bodily or visual experience can structure an abstract domain, such as emotional proximity or hope [4]. Finally, Ricoeur's treatment of metaphorical innovation and Jakobson's discussion of poetic patterning clarify why literary meaning cannot be identified solely with the dictionary meaning of an isolated term [5; 6].

These theories provide resources for analysis, not a license to read every instance of light as goodness or each instance of night as despair. A defensible interpretation must be anchored in the

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actual words and organization of the poem. The research therefore distinguishes five potentially coexisting semantic layers and asks what textual signals activate each. Its core questions are: (1) Which lexical and grammatical cues move a visual expression beyond denotation? (2) When do affective meaning and evaluative meaning diverge? (3) How do speaker perspective, repetition, comparison, and temporal progression reshape symbolic interpretation? (4) Which cases challenge a simplified light/good versus shadow/bad opposition?

The article's contribution is an operational account of these questions, demonstrated through a small set of primary texts. Whereas the philosophical question concerns how light and darkness become cultural signs, the present investigation concentrates on the internal layering of meaning in actual poetic passages. This narrower focus allows closer attention to semantic evidence and to the difference between a possible symbolic association and one explicitly warranted by the poetic context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Corpus selection and source control

The purposive sample contains eight poetic texts: Alisher Navoiy's ghazal Oshiq o‘ldum… [7]; Cho‘lpon's Go‘zal (1919) [8]; Usmon Nosir's Gulzor — chaman… (1934) [9]; Hamid Olimjon's Holbuki, tun… [10]; and four works by Usmon Azim—Javzo, Kechalari yurak sanchadi…, Qaro tunda — Boysun tog‘ida…, and Boysun qirlarida bir o‘zim kezdim… [11-14]. Selection was based on the contextual significance of a relevant image, not on the popularity of the author or the frequency of any single word. The corpus intentionally includes cases in which the same visual vocabulary appears to invite contradictory evaluations.

Short quotations were checked against the accessible Uzbek-language electronic texts identified in the references. These pages have no stable print pagination. Accordingly, this article supplies poem titles and electronic source addresses, without inventing pages from unexamined printed editions. The short English glosses are the researcher's analytical renderings rather than published literary translations.

The corpus is neither random nor historically balanced: four of the eight poems are by Usmon Azim. This asymmetry is stated rather than concealed. Azim's poems were retained because they offer especially clear contrasts between shade as shelter, the sun as inward renewal, firelight as social intimacy, and darkness as grief. No inference about the frequency of such functions in all Uzbek poetry follows from this selection.

2.2. Five semantic layers and decision criteria

The study treats “layer” as an analytical dimension rather than a historical stage or mandatory sequence. An image need not pass through all five layers, and a single passage may simultaneously realize more than one. A layer is assigned only when a detectable textual cue can be named.

Table 1. Operational definitions used to annotate light-shadow imagery

Layer Question asked of the passage Minimum textual evidence Interpretative boundary

L1. Denotative / sensory What is physically represented? Naming of light, shade, star, sun, moon, night or a comparable visible circumstance Do not equate distinct Uzbek lexemes without qualification

L2. Affective / psychological What feeling is linked to the image? Emotion word, first-person viewpoint, pursuit, relief, fear or other local affective cue Do not infer an emotion from brightness alone

L3. Axiological / evaluative What positive or negative value is assigned? Explicit praise, desire, rejection, ethical judgment or evaluative contrast Separate moral assessment from bodily comfort

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L4. Temporal / existential How does the image organize subjective time or life experience? Night/day progression, duration, return, memory, future expectation or mortality imagery Avoid claims about historical time without textual support

L5. Compositional / metapoetic How does arrangement produce or revise meaning? Repetition, parallelism, sequencing, reversal, final-position image, reference to creative work Explain the device, not merely label it "symbolism"

Source: author's analytical model developed for the selected material using the frameworks in [1-6].

2.3. Close-reading and comparison procedure

The first pass isolated explicitly present visual lexemes and noted whether an expression denoted a light source, light itself, shade, shadow, darkness, or time of day. The second pass examined the immediate grammatical environment: verbs of seeing and movement, possessive relations, adjectives, parallel constructions, the speaking "I," and addresses to another person. The third pass identified the layers supported by this co-text. The fourth compared poems containing potentially opposing values—for example, shadow as restriction versus shadow as companionship. Finally, a negative-case check asked whether an attractive but familiar interpretation was actually unsupported by the poem.

Table entries are qualitative judgments, not measurements. The evidence base includes neither interviews nor a computational corpus. To keep analytical observations distinct from conjecture, the discussion labels stronger conclusions as text-supported and treats wider historical or spiritual implications as possible directions for future research.

RESULTS

3.1. Navoiy: displacement from cast shadow to spatial exclusion

In Navoiy's Oshiq o‘ldum…, a couplet linking the beloved's neighbourhood, a wall, a shadow and a "flood of grief" gives soya an unusually complex function. Its second line states: "Seli g‘amdin emdi soya o‘rnig‘a devor emish" [7]. The key interpretative clue is not the isolated noun soya but the substitution soya o‘rnig‘a devor—a wall in the place of a shadow. The preceding line places this relation near the beloved's wall and the wounded lover, anchoring the image spatially.

At L1, the couplet invokes a wall and its shadow; at L2, g‘am explicitly identifies sorrow. At L3, the wall's replacement of shade suggests restriction and the lover's lack of relief, but does not make every shade inherently negative. L5 is especially prominent: the shift from an ephemeral shadow to a solid wall intensifies emotional distance. The figurative logic resembles a materialization of an obstruction: separation becomes tangible. The poem demonstrates how meaning is produced through a relationship among concrete objects rather than through a fixed dictionary equivalent for "shadow."

3.2. Cho‘lpon: luminous comparison within nocturnal longing

Cho‘lpon opens Go‘zal with a visual and emotional setting: "Qorong‘u kechada ko‘kka ko‘z tikib" [8]. The ensuing search turns to a bright star, then to the moon, the dawn breeze and the sun. Bright celestial objects are not terminal symbols of goodness but successive interlocutors in a comparison that repeatedly fails to match the beloved's beauty. The contrast between night and a bright star first heightens visibility, while the sequence of comparisons gradually elevates the absent beloved beyond natural benchmarks.

The sensory layer L1 is evident in night, star, moon and sun. L2 arises from the speaker's insistent questioning and longing. L3 is activated by explicit comparative praise, rather than by the word "light" as such. L5 appears in the serial architecture of the poem: one comparison yields to the next, and the recurring pattern amplifies the beloved's aesthetic exceptionality. Darkness therefore does not negate beauty. It supplies the scene in which one manifestation of light becomes noticeable.

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This is an example of complementary activation, where contrast generates meaning without distributing all positive qualities to one side of a binary.

3.3. Usmon Nosir: two dark-related senses with distinct evaluations

In Gulzor — chaman…, Nosir attributes contrasting visual qualities to the beloved's eyes: “Kunday yorug‘, tunday qora” [9]. In its immediate context, brightness and darkness are simultaneously features of attraction, not an ethical opposition. The grammatical parallelism itself offers the evidence: both comparisons characterize the same admired eyes. A reading that treats the dark half as moral deficiency would contradict the surrounding address of affection.

The poem also describes the beloved-friend as someone who walks beside the speaker “Soyamday yurar” [9]. Physical adjacency provides the starting point for a relational analogy. The shadow's habitual following becomes an image of closeness and loyalty. At L1 the comparison depends on an everyday visual fact; at L2 the interpersonal address produces warmth; at L3 the positive evaluation is supported by the surrounding statements about friendship and increasing joy. L5 emerges from the movement from the physical comparison to a claim of companionship. The contrast between night-dark eyes and faithful shadow shows that two items from a shared visual field can serve different but nonnegative functions within one poem.

3.4. Hamid Olimjon: illumination as perceptual and creative activation

Hamid Olimjon's Holbuki, tun… includes the image “Nur yog‘ildi qorong‘i jarga” [10]. The light falling into a dark ravine does not simply abolish the landscape's darkness; it introduces a change in what can be seen and imagined. Elsewhere a long shadow follows the lyrical speaker and seems potentially capable of telling a story. The wording admits a moment of uncertainty: the following shape is both physically plausible and psychologically suggestive.

A decisive interpretative cue comes later, when the poem turns to paper, pen and the speaker's creative excitement. The sensory scene becomes part of a developing poetics of attention. L1 denotes moonlight, landscape and shadow; L2 includes restlessness and curiosity; L5 is activated by the relation between nocturnal observation and writing. Claims that the entire poem simply opposes good light to evil night would overlook the creative productivity of the nocturnal setting. Darkness and illumination participate together in the speaker's heightened perception and artistic activity.

3.5. Usmon Azim's *Javzo*: the practical value of shade

The opening of Javzo places living creatures under an intense seasonal sun; the dogs seek shade: “Itlar oldi o‘zin soyaga” [11]. Here soya denotes a sheltered location rather than a threatening cast figure. The phrase supports a straightforward physical reading: shade relieves the discomfort associated with strong heat. Interpreting the line as spiritual exile would add a significance for which the immediate wording provides no necessity.

Later, the speaker welcomes “Yorug‘ kunlar, nur kunlar” [11]. This is a different use of the light field: the expression refers to a hoped-for or experienced favorable period, not simply measured illumination. Its positive evaluation derives from the poem's celebratory language and appeal to the beloved. L1 is prominent in the shade image, while L3 and L4 become prominent in the “bright days” passage. Because both a protective shade and bright days are desirable within the same text, the poem supplies a clear counterexample to the rule that light must be positive and shadow negative.

3.6. Inward sunlight and prolonged night in *Kechalari yurak sanchadi…*

In Azim's Kechalari yurak sanchadi…, the speaker juxtaposes extremely brief days and seemingly endless nights. The parallelism “Tunim — uzun. Uzun. Beadad” [12] intensifies duration through repetition and fragmentary syntax. Night here is more than a period of darkness: it becomes a measure of subjective suffering. Its length is emotional, not a claim about astronomical time.

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The poem eventually develops a figurative solar birth inside the speaker's spirit. That image should not be conflated with the literal appearance of the sun outside a window. Rather, it marks the possibility of inward resistance or renewal emerging through a difficult experience. L2 and L4 dominate the description of suffering and duration, while the later solar image establishes an L5 transformation at the compositional level. Crucially, the hopeful meaning depends on the poem's preceding pressure; detached from that sequence, the image would become an overly generic emblem of optimism.

3.7. Firelight, exclusion and perspective in *Qaro tunda — Boysun tog‘ida…*

In Qaro tunda — Boysun tog‘ida…, three friends gather around a campfire in the mountains. The poem notes the flicker of light and night in the surrounding trees: “Lipillaydi goh nur, goh kecha” [13]. The fire visually establishes a circle of shared presence. Yet the lyrical speaker imagines the friends without himself and registers their failure to remember him. The emotional value of the illuminated gathering therefore changes according to the person from whose perspective it is viewed.

The fire can be read as warmth and temporary companionship for the friends, while its imagined remoteness sharpens the speaker's solitude. Neither positive nor negative value belongs to firelight in isolation. The meaning emerges from the spatial distinction between those inside the scene and the one who describes it from outside. L1 concerns flame and surrounding darkness; L2 concerns longing and exclusion; L3 remains perspectival rather than absolute; and L5 is produced by the compositional shift from outward observation to the speaker's emotional position. This case makes viewpoint a decisive mediator of a symbol's evaluation.

3.8. Night as a companion to mourning in *Boysun qirlarida bir o‘zim kezdim…*

A further poem by Azim introduces bereavement through the report that a friend's “lamp” has gone out, a familiar expression for death or the loss of life [14]. Later, the night is personified as gently placing a hand upon the speaker's shoulder: “Yelkamga ohista kaftin qo‘ydi tun” [14]. The juxtaposition is striking. The extinguished light marks absence, while night assumes a near-human gesture that can be read as pressure, companionship, or a silent acknowledgment of grief.

An exclusively negative reading of night would miss the tenderness encoded by ohista (“gently”) and the bodily familiarity of a hand placed on a shoulder. Yet it would also be excessive to call the gesture unequivocal consolation: the poem continues to emphasize solitude and the burden of singing for a lost friend. L2 includes mourning and attachment; L4 is indicated by memory and the movement from present grief toward uncertain future time; L5 emerges from personification and the shift from an extinguished lamp to the proximity of night. This example is intentionally retained as an ambivalent case rather than forcing a single positive or negative label.

3.9. Cross-text results and the limits of a single symbolic code

The eight readings identify variation at two levels. Within a given poem, visual images can operate differently as the composition develops. Across poems, the same lexical item may carry distinct values because it enters different relationships with speaker position, emotion and action. The strongest finding is therefore not the number of positive or negative images, but the demonstrable connection between locally observable features and semantic activation.

Table 2. Comparison of contextually activated semantic layers

Primary text Dominant visual item Strongest layers Textual trigger Main interpretation

Navoiy, Oshiq o‘ldum… Shadow / wall L1, L2, L5 Shadow replaced by wall amid grief Separation materialized as obstruction

Cho‘lpon, Go‘zal Night / stars / sun L1, L3, L5 Sequential comparisons and repeated praise Natural radiance becomes insufficient for idealized beauty

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Nosir, Gulzor — chaman… Bright / dark / shadow L1, L2, L3 Admired eyes and shadow-like companion Dark imagery participates in beauty and loyalty

Olimjon, Holbuki, tun… Moonlight / long shadow L1, L2, L5 Perception followed by writing Night scene becomes a condition of creative attention

Azim, Javzo Shade / bright days L1, L3, L4 Relief from heat; later celebration Protective shade and hopeful light coexist

Azim, Kechalari yurak sanchadi… Night / inward sun L2, L4, L5 Repeated duration; later solar birth Suffering reorganized toward inner renewal

Azim, Qaro tunda — Boysun tog‘ida… Firelight / night L1, L2, L5 Friends inside scene; absent lyric “I” Illuminated intimacy experienced as distance

Azim, Boysun qirlarida bir o‘zim kezdim… Extinguished lamp / night L2, L4, L5 Bereavement and personified night Loss and ambiguous companionship

Source: author's qualitative coding of passages in [7-14]. “Strongest layers” indicates the most directly evidenced dimensions; omitted layers are not asserted to be absent.

A second comparison shows that a layer may be activated by different poetic devices and need not correlate with a particular image. Emotional valence comes from explicit grief in Navoiy, affectionate address in Nosir, or the separation of viewpoints in Azim. Temporal meaning comes from repeated “long night,” welcomed bright days, or the imagined future after mourning. Compositional meaning may be generated by serial comparison, substitution, personification or the positioning of an image near the end of a text.

Table 3. Evidence rules, counter-readings and interpretative safeguards

Analytical case Easily assumed reading Text-supported reading Safeguard against overinterpretation

Shade in Javzo “Shadow signifies spiritual darkness” A physical refuge from heat Preserve the sense “shade” and the local weather setting

Dark eyes in Nosir “Darkness makes the beloved negative” Darkness participates in affectionate visual praise Read both halves of the grammatical parallel

Fire in Qaro tunda… “Firelight unconditionally signifies happiness” Friends' intimacy is also the speaker's exclusion Identify whose emotional perspective is being evaluated

Night in Boysun qirlarida… “Night is an enemy” or “night is a savior” Gesture of night remains tender but ambivalent amid grief Retain competing cues: “gently” and continued loneliness

Inner sun in Kechalari… “The text describes the sunrise” A metaphor of inward resistance and renewal Distinguish inner location from physical weather

Source: interpretative cross-check of the selected passages [9; 11-14].

DISCUSSION

4.1. Why denotation remains indispensable

Denotative analysis is sometimes treated as a preliminary step to be discarded once symbolic meaning is identified. The material here demonstrates why this would be an error. Without distinguishing shade from a pursuing shadow, a reader cannot explain why soya becomes protective in Javzo yet psychologically suggestive in Holbuki, tun…. Likewise, tun cannot be converted into “shadow” merely because both participate in the broader darkness field. Lexical reference constrains the range of metaphoric inference and helps prevent broad, unsupported allegory.

Barthes's distinction between denotation and connotation [1] offers a starting point, but the five-layer model further differentiates types of connotation. A poem may be emotionally dark without proposing a moral judgment, or physically bright without expressing hope. The distinction is

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especially important for Gulzor — chaman…: the adjective “dark” is part of a compliment, while the shadow simile makes companionship intelligible through bodily proximity. In both cases the symbol's value depends on its phrase-level context.

4.2. Relational semantics and embodied motivation

A recurring principle is that meanings are motivated but not mechanically predetermined. The shadow accompanies its bearer; this physical relation can be extended to loyalty. Shade reduces the impact of strong sun; it can therefore be evaluated positively without any unexpected metaphysical claim. A bright point stands out more clearly against night; such contrast makes celestial imagery productive in a poem of longing. These transfers are compatible with the embodied account of conceptual metaphor advanced by Lakoff and Johnson [4]. Yet the theory does not authorize the critic to invent a transfer where the poetic environment supplies no cue.

Ricoeur's emphasis on metaphorical innovation [5] is also pertinent: figurative force emerges through the new relationship established within a particular expression. Navoiy's wall replacing a shadow is powerful not because the word “wall” always symbolizes separation, but because the local configuration binds it to the lover's grief. In the same way, Azim's night placing a hand on a shoulder combines darkness with an intimate bodily gesture, producing ambivalence that exceeds a simple opposition.

4.3. Axiological value, speaker position and irony of distance

The most revealing difference concerns evaluation. Light may be pleasant for one figure and painful to another, or shelter may be desirable because excessive brightness becomes uncomfortable. In Qaro tunda — Boysun tog‘ida…, the same campfire gathering can be interpreted as warmth from within the group and as emotional distance from the absent speaker's perspective. A symbol's value is thus not an intrinsic property of its referent. Instead, it may be indexed to a participant's position and desire.

For a disciplined analysis, it is necessary to specify (a) who perceives the image, (b) who benefits from or suffers because of it, and (c) how the speaker's relation to the scene changes. Such questions reduce the risk of attributing one global emotional label to a poem containing different experiential centers. Eco's understanding of codes and signification [2] and Lotman's emphasis on the productivity of cultural texts [3] are compatible with this account of meaning as context-dependent and relational.

4.4. Temporal and compositional layers as meaning-generating mechanisms

Not all visual symbols function primarily as objects. In the repeated declaration of a long night, duration itself becomes figurative: night organizes the subjective measurement of suffering. By contrast, Azim's “bright days” denote a favorable temporal phase. The poem's movement therefore transforms a concrete physical attribute—brightness—into a qualitative property of lived time.

Compositional arrangement is equally significant. The alternating comparisons of celestial objects in Go‘zal, the shift from observation to writing in Holbuki, tun…, and the contrast between extinguished light and personified night in Boysun qirlarida… demonstrate that an image's meaning can emerge from its position in a sequence. This observation corresponds to Jakobson's focus on the organization of language in poetic expression [6], but it should be demonstrated case by case rather than assumed whenever a poem contains repetition.

4.5. Scope, alternative readings and future verification

The corpus establishes analytical possibilities rather than distributional tendencies. The model's five layers are proposed categories, not preexisting universal laws or statistically validated dimensions. A researcher working with the same poems might reasonably debate whether the night touching the speaker's shoulder is primarily comforting or burdensome. Such disagreement does not invalidate the

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analysis if each reading identifies its local evidence and acknowledges the other. In an ambiguous instance, the most responsible result may be to preserve the ambiguity.

A further study should work with reliably identified printed editions, a larger balanced corpus of classical and contemporary poems, and independent annotation by multiple specialists. Annotators could mark lexical items, speaker position, evaluative cues, temporal indicators, and compositional devices, then compare decisions. That design could test the reproducibility of the proposed distinctions and reveal whether differences emerge systematically across periods or genres. The present article offers an explicit protocol on which such work could build; it does not claim to have performed those later tests.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of eight Uzbek poetic texts supports the conclusion that light-shadow imagery is semantically layered rather than governed by one stable moral code. The denotative layer preserves the material distinction between light, shadow, shade and night. The affective and evaluative layers depend on the emotions, desires and judgments expressed in the local context. The temporal-existential layer organizes subjective duration, remembrance and anticipated renewal. The compositional layer explains how substitution, repetition, comparison, perspective and personification produce new meanings as a poem unfolds.

Three findings are especially significant. First, the same image can receive different evaluations: shadow becomes a spatial impediment in Navoiy, a figure of loyal proximity in Nosir, and relief from heat in Azim. Second, darkness is not always simply negated by illumination; in Cho‘lpon and Olimjon it supplies a setting essential to perception, longing or creativity. Third, symbolic value may depend less on an image itself than on the speaker's location in relation to it, as the mountain campfire poem illustrates. The bereavement poem further shows that a responsible interpretation may remain ambivalent rather than forcing a positive-negative choice.

The article's primary methodological contribution is a five-layer framework tied to observable textual indicators and interpretative safeguards. It offers a practical means of describing semantic polysemy in Uzbek poetic discourse while avoiding unsupported claims about universal meanings or the whole national tradition. Broader, independently annotated research remains necessary to determine how far these patterns extend beyond the selected texts.

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