

## PLOT STRUCTURE AND THE PHENOMENON OF RETROSPECTION IN MODERN UZBEK NOVELS

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the evolution of plot construction in contemporary Uzbek novel writing and analyzes the role of the phenomenon of retrospection within its poetic system. In the period of independence, the Uzbek novel has undergone significant renewal in terms of content, form, and artistic thinking, leading to the widespread use of retrospective representations associated with complex temporal layers, memory, individual psychology, and personal experience. The article provides a scholarly discussion of the historical development of plot, postmodernist elements observed in modern novels, symbolic and artistic structures, as well as the compositional and functional potential of retrospection. In addition, the works of writers such as Isajon Sulton are examined to demonstrate how retrospection functions as an artistic means of reinterpreting reality and of representing the dialectical relationship between personal and social memory.

### **Keywords**

plot construction, retrospection, narrative time, composition, postmodernism, psychologism, poetics of memory, artistic thinking, contemporary Uzbek novel, Isajon Sulton, symbolic interpretation, narrative structure, plot dynamics, artistic model.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, Uzbek novel writing has reached a new stage of development. Over the past decades, the epic genre has undergone a gradual evolution. Formal and stylistic explorations serve as a determining factor in defining the enduring nature of artistic expression. Accordingly, the scientific study of artistic laws, a subtle examination of the essence of literary problems, and the clarification of their gradual development are considered among the pressing issues of contemporary literary scholarship. Although the novels of the Independence period have

undergone a rapid process of “renewal”, the influence of Western literary traditions is, to some extent, noticeable in their nature. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the uniqueness of artistic form holds particular significance in the integrity of content and ideological vision.

During the Independence period, the artistic interpretation of themes in Uzbek novels has deepened, with special attention given to human aspirations, personal and intimate experiences, and the analysis of the psychological world. In such purpose-driven artistic explorations, the quest for self-understanding occupies a central position. Among contemporary writers striving to expand the scope of poetic thought, to seek answers to the question “what constitutes the enigma of the self?” and to comprehend the inherently fluid nature of concepts, Isajon Sulton stands out as particularly noteworthy.

#### Literature Review and Methodology

Isajon Sulton’s novel “Boqiy Darbadar” (The Eternal Wanderer) emerged as a significant artistic phenomenon in Uzbek novel writing. The work explores the possibilities of human intellect, morality, and evil through a philosophical and symbolic lens. The novel portrays the fate of characters dominated by vices such as self-interest, discontent, and desire, which have eroded human spirituality since the dawn of humanity, bringing suffering in life and catastrophe after death. In this respect, «The Eternal Wanderer» can be interpreted as an artistic warning directed at every individual and all of humanity, urging people to refrain from evil and from overestimating their own power.

“The Eternal Wanderer” truly reflects the author’s creative potential and defines his distinctive artistic direction. Scholars have evaluated the work as a new phenomenon in Uzbek novel writing. As a symbolic-philosophical novel, the author manages, in just 80 pages, to encompass global contemporary issues and the tragic fate of humanity. In conveying such a wide-ranging theme within a relatively short work, the postmodernist approach proves particularly useful for the author.

Literary scholar D.Quronov writes on this matter: “In “The Eternal Wanderer”, instead of the episodic plot characteristic of traditional epics, events unfold across different spaces and times, sometimes in reality, sometimes in imagination, without being directly linked. Although there is no central heroic figure akin to that in a didactic tale, these events are unified by the author’s reflections on the meaning of life and the fate of humanity, transforming them into a coherent whole – a novel” [1, 15]. Based on Quronov’s observation, it can be argued that the postmodernist approach has strongly influenced the novel. Indeed, the attempt to depict the world through fragmented, non-linear episodes is considered a fundamental principle of postmodernism.

Russian philosopher P.Grechko once remarked: "There is currently no widely accepted, clear, and multifaceted definition of postmodernism". In this sense, analyzing examples of Uzbek literature through the lens of postmodernist principles may inevitably lead to certain theoretical ambiguities and artificial conclusions.

In "The Eternal Wanderer", the author attempts to construct a holistic model of the world at the intersection of diverse elements: religious narratives, historical information, contemporary scientific perspectives, technological achievements, and philosophical doctrines and views. Notably, in advancing his artistic concept, the author does not merely replicate Western literary traditions; instead, he synthesizes Eastern and Western approaches. That is, he engages only with the formal features of postmodernism. The expressive forms characteristic of postmodernism are fused in the work with Eastern modes of thought, while the content and essence of the novel reject a purely Western worldview. Whereas Western postmodernism might depict the world as meaningless, in Sulton's novel, the idea emerges that, even in such an apparently senseless world, humanity must strive to avoid spiritual aimlessness. Importantly, the author does not shy away from depicting the chaotic realities of existence. The characters seek truth in their lived experiences through various paths, and the author does not conceal his inability to present a definitive judgment or an Ideal. Nevertheless, his characters persist tirelessly in the pursuit of this Ideal.

The complexity and diversity of the plot construction in Isajon Sulton's novel further enhance its artistic value. In literary works - particularly novels - authors make extensive use of various techniques that form an integral part of narrative time, guided by their ideological and aesthetic conceptions. Retrospection is one of the most effective of such creative and aesthetic techniques.

As a phenomenon of literary plot and one of its principal structural tools, retrospection serves as a broadly relevant literary device, enabling a vivid connection between past and present. In narrative development, the use of retrospection allows for a return within narrative time, functioning as a means to reveal underlying meanings in the text.

#### Conclusion and Discussion

Our research indicates that the retrospective segments within a literary work can be categorized, based on their structure, into simple (small, single) and complex (two or more intertwined) retrospections. In "The Eternal Wanderer", Isajon Sulton employs nearly twenty instances of retrospection, which can be divided into different types according to their structure, content, and form. Specifically, the

novel contains approximately ten simple (small) retrospections (pp. 150, 159, ...198) and ten complex (large, extended) retrospections (pp. 153, 161, ...221).

For example, at the beginning of the novel, the character of Etikdo'z (The Cobbler) is introduced, immediately capturing the reader's interest. To enhance dramatic effect and further engage the reader, the author emphasizes that The Cobbler, at thirty-three years old, rents out an old mill inherited from his father to raise funds and engages in money-lending, yet he is neither rich nor poor – occupying a middle social status. In the subsequent section, the narrative presents The Cobbler recalling the prophecy of Hazrat (the Blessed One), thereby initiating a retrospective sequence:

“The Cobbler had met the Blessed One thirty-three years earlier. The Blessed One walking alone along the path, approached steadily, while a boy sat nearby on the hillside crafting a flute from reeds, and not far away, his sheep grazed on the grass. The Blessed One noticed black sparrows gathered among the branches of the surrounding trees” [2, 149-150].

The fact that this retrospective segment hints at the character's future and tragic fate allows us to classify it into various forms: formally, as a retroactive-prophetic retrospection; in terms of content, as a tragic retrospection; and, depending on who performs the narration, as a narrator- or character-based retrospection. The Blessed One's tragic description of The Cobbler's destiny “binds” the reader to the work, arousing interest in the subsequent development of events and enhancing dramatic tension. The following sentence, “...- Through the eyes of ordinary people, you are seemingly destined to such a fate due to a single prayer. Yet throughout your life, you will witness countless people who, having rejected the divine revelation, have embraced aimlessness,” encourages the reader to engage in profound philosophical reflection.

At first glance, everything appears to begin from a seemingly trivial act, one performed without contemplation of its consequences:

“The condemned man leaned against The Cobbler's wall for a brief moment to catch his breath.

-Already leaning against my wall, are you? Don't mutter!” The Cobbler shouted, and with sudden force, he pushed him away with both hands. The Blessed Man fell to the ground, but without a word, two executioners from Death's approaching army helped him back onto his feet” [2].

This novel, rich in symbolism and using a single character, The Cobbler, to represent all of humanity, serves as a work that encourages the purification of the human spirit and the strengthening of faith and belief. The character of The Cobbler corresponds to a legendary figure widely known in world literature under the

name Agasfer. His raising a hand against the Blessed One, Jesus Christ, and, in return, living an eternal life, constitutes a planetary-scale plot within the narrative.

In the second part, the events shift to a Boeing 787 Dreamliner flying over the Atlantic Ocean. The narrative describes that the aircraft was switched to autopilot four hours earlier and that the crew is taking a rest, while simultaneously, a storm begins raging over the ocean:

“In fact, three hours earlier, the world’s largest meteorological observation stations had issued warnings about a storm developing over the Atlantic Ocean. According to projections, this storm would differ from seasonal storms. Normally, in the “meteorological records,” bursts occurred at night, coinciding with the Moon’s gravitational effect on rising water levels; however, this particular storm was beginning in broad daylight. The rapid upward movement of hot air masses stalled over China and Mongolia, combined with the convergence of cold air over the ocean surface near Japan and Australia, suggested that the storm’s path would be unusually long, and it was expected to generate high-velocity winds”[2, 166].

The retrospective segment presented above demonstrates that it can also be applied in another form – retrospective reference. Retrospective reference primarily consists of citations from scientific, literary, historical, or even oral sources that confirm or refute the accuracy of specific historical events, and in essence, it pertains to the past. Naturally, such references can take various forms and are categorized as scientific, historical, or literary.

In the narrative, the character of Professor Ziyu, traveling to an international conference, is introduced. The development of events is immediately oriented toward this international conference.

“At one of the major aerospace centers in North America, in a magnificent three-storey palace situated along the bank of a tranquil river, the latest results of research aimed at creating the human of the future were being presented. Although the conference was attended by the world’s most renowned scholars in the fields of human genetics and psychology, the speeches and reports proceeded rather sluggishly. In the cool hall, the academic audience, seated comfortably in spacious armchairs, listened with evident weariness to lengthy presentations on the effects of radiation and new technologies on the human genome and embryo”[2, 172].

In the current process of globalization, it is no longer surprising that extensive research is being conducted on human beings and their genetics, that enormous financial resources are invested in fields such as computer and nanotechnologies, genetic engineering, and robotics, or that various innovations – including artificial intelligence – are being developed. What is truly evident, however, is that in the

pursuit of innovation, humanity is increasingly at risk of forgetting its own essence, the meaning of its creation, and the fundamental purpose of life.

While reading the novel, it is somewhat difficult to determine precisely the spatial and temporal settings in which the events unfold. The narratives concerning The Cobbler, the Bedouins, the caravan of gypsies, and the saint dwelling in a cave in the Tian Shan Mountains belong to historical time, whereas the Human Development Center, the transformations aboard the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, and the events of the storm reflect contemporary reality. Nevertheless, in both spatial and temporal dimensions, recurring and intrinsically interconnected ideas enhance the novel's coherence and readability.

It is noteworthy that the retrospective segments incorporate the forms of retrospective reference and retrospective memory discussed above, while simultaneously shifting abruptly from one temporal layer to another and presenting externally independent narrative fragments.

Complex retrospection consists of two or more retrospective segments. In such cases, one retrospective segment functions as the framing or framed element in relation to another. In some scholarly sources, this phenomenon is also referred to as retrospection within retrospection[5].

The "Bedouins" section of the novel begins precisely with such a complex retrospective structure:

"There are accounts in history of people claiming to have seen a man wandering across the Arab deserts shortly before the onset of a samum. According to legend, the so-called "man of the samum" is in fact none other than the cobbler - cursed by a prayer and condemned to witness, until the Day of Judgment, the endless procession of humanity coming into and departing from this world, while himself longing to depart as well" [2, 153-156].

In fact, the complex retrospective segment - composed of four parts ("In history, there are accounts of someone wandering the Arab deserts before a samum..." "It is said that one day the man of the samum among the desert Bedouins..." "Everywhere he went, he encountered the same persecution..." "It is said that he lived for several more centuries by the will of Almighty God...") - can be identified, in formal terms, as a combination of retrospective reference + retrospective legend + biographical retrospection + retrospective legend. In terms of content, it represents dramatic and tragic retrospection, while from the perspective of narration it incorporates authorial retrospection and retrospective dialogue. The use of various religious legends and references serves to reinforce the credibility of the The Cobbler character, to foreshadow his future fate, and to

interpret the depicted events, thereby intensifying the dramatic effect of the narrative.

### Summary

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that contemporary Uzbek novel writing has undergone a profound transformation, marked by reflective engagement with the relationship between the world and the human being. Although the narrative may appear formally diverse, the events it portrays are extraordinarily relevant in substance. These events are unified into a coherent system through compositional mastery, while the versatile use of retrospective techniques in plot construction demonstrates how such narrative segments effectively serve the author's central artistic and ideological vision.

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