THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ALPOMISH AND THE LORD OF THE RINGS: A COMPARATIVE NARRATOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract: This article examines the role of narrative construction in the representation and preservation of cultural identity in the Uzbek heroic epic *Alpomish* and J.R.R.Tolkien's fantasy novel *The Lord of the Rings*. The study approaches comparative literature as a framework for examining how culturally specific literary traditions construct comparable concepts through different narrative forms. Taking into aacount the theories of epic aand fantsy and Gerard Genette's narratological framework, the research focuses on selected categories of narrative discourse, particularly order and focalization. The analysis illustrates that narrative form contributes to cultural representation by organizing historical memory, cultural knowledge and individual perception. At this point, the examination of analepsis shows how references to the past connect present events with collective history and transform previous experiences into resources for understanding contemporary threats. On the other hand, the analysis of internal focalization further demonstrates how different characters' knowledge and experience influence their perception of the narrative world. Besides their distinct generic and historical origins, *Alpomish* and *The Lord of the Rings* use narrative mechanisms through which cultural memory, collective values, and communal continuity are articulated. Consequently, the study argues that cultural identity functions not only as a thematic element of epic and fantasy but also as a structural effect of narrative organization.

The continuing importance and renewed interest in comparative literature is closely related to the growing recognition that comparison is not merely a method to identify similarities and differences, but also enables scholars to examine how cultural identities are constructed, represented and negotiated across literary traditions. Through placing national epics alongside canonical Western works, comparative literature challenges Eurocentric hierarchies while presenting that different literary traditions construct universal concepts through culturally specific narratives.

Since the end of 19th century comparative literature has been the subject of continuous debate among literary theorists and scholars. The interdisciplinary nature and absence of clear methodology have led the researchers to question whether comparative literature should be considered as an academic discipline or a field of study.[1]

The term of "Comparative Literature" was initially acknowledged as a means of methodological approach from science, where contrasting and comparing was the way to confirm a hypothesis. The term was firstly emerged in a series of French Anthologies named "cours de littérature compare" in 1816. German version is found in a book by Moriz Carriére in 1854 and referred as "vergleichende Literaturgeschichte". Matthew Arnold used plural version of this term "comparative literatures" in 1848.[2]

The emergence of comparative literature coincided with the period of European imperial expansion and colonial domination which marginalized many indigenious literary

[1] S. Bassnett "Comparative Literature"
[2] Matthew Arnold, letter to his sister, May 1848, cited in Siegbert Prawer, Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction, London, Duckworth, 1973.

traditions. European literary standards also dominated the literary canon, thereby encouraging cultural resistance among colonized societies. During the second half of the twentieth century, following the emergence of postcolonial theory, the works of Eastern and African writers and scholars challenged these hierarchical assumptions. As a result, comparative literature broadened its scope by defining the equal value of diverse literary traditions.

The comparison presented in this study is not based on the idea that epic and fantasy constitute identical or historically continuous genres. On the contrary, it emphasizes their affinities: the construction of culturally meaningful worlds, the use of mythopoetic elements, the representation of collective values and the connection of individual agency with broader forms of communal survival. An epic is a long narrative poem, on a grand scale incorporating myth, legend, folk tale and history.[3] Fantasy, in turn, is a fictional work that is not primarily devoted to realistic representation of the world.[4] Despite these historical and generic differences, both forms can construct narrative structures with in which cultural values are articulated, represent threat to community and resistance, and potentially contributing to preservation of social order and cultural identity. Such an approach entails the analysis of different literary traditions while constructing comparable cultural concepts through distinct narrative forms.

Careful stylistic and thematic analysis of such works has raised questions and stimulated certain conjectures, as to the form and function of heroic poetry. Recorded songs provide both a solid basis for comparative studies and a new comprehension of oral technique. (The Singer of Tales, Albert B. Lord)

An epic and fantasy can be compared through examining narrative construction, that builds up the cultural worlds of both genres. Despite their significant generic differences, both forms may use recurring narrative motifs including father-son relationships, the restoration of social order after conflict, heroic achievement, and the search of identity. For instance, these motifs can be found in classical epic works such as Homer's Illiad and Odyssey as well as in modern fantasy works such as C.S.Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia and J.R.R.Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. The presence of similar motifs, however, does not imply that epic and fantasy define the same literary genre. On the contrary, these similarities examine how different narrative forms give culturally specific meanings to comparable human experiences.

According to the Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H.Abrams and G.G.Harpham, epic, also referred as heroic poem, is a work that meets the following features:

- The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance;
- The worldwide and ample scale of the setting;
- The action involves extraordinary deeds in battle or a long and dangerous journey intrepidly accomplished;
- The intervention of gods and other supernatural beings in the active part;
- A ceremonial performance which requires formal diction, elaborate stylized syntax and allusions (which is referred as Milton's grand style).[5]

Epic conventions or formulas exemplified through Milton's Paradise Lost follow three different narrative patterns:

1) the narrator's argument or epic theme in the beginning while invoking a muse or guiding spirit to inspire him in his great undertaking

2) the narrative start in the middle of things or in "medias res" which demonstrates the critical point in the action.

[3] Cuddon J.A. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory – Penguin, London, 1976. P. 284

[4] Baldick Chris, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, - Oxford University Press, NewYork, 2008. Pp 125-126.

[5] M.H.Abrams, G.G.Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms, - Cengage learning. Pp.108-109.

3) Formal and detailed introduction of some principal characters.

In *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien distinguishes fantasy from imagination through tracing their historical and conceptual relationship.[6] His description of imagination as the mental faculty of image-making and fantasy as an artistic capacity that give "inner consistency of reality to imagined creations subsequently shapes a theory of fantasy literature:

- Imagination functions as a mental process of image-making;
- Vivid mental perception of the author is essential to artistically express the created image into Art;
- Artistic expression in Tolkien's works involves creation of alternative reality and Secondary World with its own internal structures and laws followed by "inner consistency of reality" which is reflected to the concept of Secondary Belief.

At this point, fantasy constructs a coherent secondary world in which cultural values, social relations, histories, myths, and concepts of identity can function according to the internal logic of that world. Likewise, epic constructs culturally meaningful narrative worlds, although its world-building emerges from different historical, oral, mythopoetic, and generic traditions.

In the present study, the term "narrative construction" is related to the ways in which a literary narrative organizes, presents, and connects events, characters, temporal relations, perspectives, and narrative voices to produce a meaningful fictional world.[7] Therefore, narrative construction is comprehended nor merely as the arrangement of plot events, but as the formal organization through which cultural values, social relations, historical memory and concepts of identity become represented within the narrative.

At the level of narrative discourse, the organization and presentation of a story can be analysed through different narratological categories. Gerard Genette systematizes this analysis in *Narrative Discourse* and develops related concepts in *Figures of Literary Discourse*.[8]

Originally, the structuralist approach to narrative discourse was preceded by attempts to distinguish different dimensions of narrative organization. For instance, Tzvetan Todorov proposed the categories of tense, aspect and mood for examining narrative discourse. While tense concerns the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the discourse, aspect and mood, in turn, address the manner in which the narrated events are presented and perceived.[9]

Later, Genette reorganizes these categories into three major dimensions of time, mood and voice. The narrative discourse of time in Genette's theory encompasses order, duration and frequency; mood concerns distance and focalization; and voice in narrative discourse addresses the narrating instance, involving the narrator, the temporal position and the narrative level.

The present study implies Genette's narratological framework to examine how narrative construction contributes to the representation of culturally meaningful worlds both in Alpamys and J.R.R.Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. Particularly, narratological features that represent cultural memory, collective values, resistance and cultural continuity are taken into account.

Alpamys is a traditional Uzbek heroic epic that belongs to the broader Central Asian epic tradition. Its narrative accents on the hero Alpomish and incorporates themes of family, loyalty, honour, conflict, separation, return and communal continuity. At this point, the

[6] J.R.R.Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories – Harper Collins Publishers, London, 2014. Pp. 110-111
[7] M.H.Abrams, G.G.Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms, - Cengage learning. P.233
[8] G.Genette, Narrative Discourse – Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NewYork, 1980

[9] T. Todorov, "Les Categories du récit littérature", Communications, 1966

epic's oral and performative origins are particularly significant for the present study since cultural values and historical memory are transmitted through narrative, song, and the representation of ancestral traditions.

From the perspective of Genette's approach, Alpamys demonstrates a predominantly linear chronological progression, with events generally presented in the order in which they occur. Occasionally, this chronological organization is interrupted by references to the communal past, through which the origins and history of the characters and their community are recalled:

"I remember the land I have grown,
Both day and night went on the ground.
...
How has the land I grew up developed?
These settlements for long I haven't seen,
All had passed before me as a dream."[10]

Such interruptions from the primary chronological sequence can be understood through Genette's concept of analepsis, as the narrative temporarily returns to events preceding the current point of the story. The function of this temporal return extends beyond providing background information. Through incorporating the history of the community into the present narrative, the epic connects individual experience with collective ancestry and thereby reinforces the continuity of communal identity.

Analepsis as the reconstruction of the past can function in these narratives not merely to transmit historical information but also to preserve the cultural values, memories, and experiences through which collective identities are constructed. A significant example of analepsis occurs during the Council of Elrond, when Elrond recounts the history of Isildur and his failure in destroying the One Ring. While the primary narrative is situated in the present of the Council, Elrond's account temporarily returns to events preceding the current narrative moment:

"I beheld the last combat on the slopes of Orodruin, where Gil-Galad died, and Elendil fell, and Narsil broke beneath him; but Sauron himself was overthrown, and Isildur cut the Ring from his hand with the hilt-shard of his father's sword, and took it for his own."[11]

This temporal return does not merely provide the background of the Ring; it preserves the memory of a previous failure and connects the present threat to the historical experience of earlier generations. Within the scope of the fictional world, though, analepsis functions as a mechanism of collective cultural memory. The recollection of Isildur's mistake transforms the past into a warning for the present, while demonstrating how remembering previous failures can contribute to the community's resistance against a renewed threat.

At this point, although the two narratives employ analepsis in different contexts, both use the return to the past to establish a connection between individual experience and collective memory. In Alpamys, recollection reinforces the hero's connection to his homeland and ancestral community, whereas in The Lord of the Rings, in turn, Elrond's retrospective account shapes the memory of Isildur's failure into a warning for the present generation. Therefore, in both cases, the past becomes an interpretive resource through which the present threat is understood and cultural continuity is maintained.

On the other hand, Genette's category of mood allows attention to shift from *when* an event is presented to *how* it is perceived and communicated. Particularly, the concept of focalization is relevant to the present study since the representation of events through

[10] K.Mamurov, Alpomish, Uzbek Heroic Epos – University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy, Tashkent, 2018. P.236
[11] J.R.R.Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings – Guild Publishing, London, 1987. P.260

different characters' perspectives can reveal how cultural knowledge and experience shape their interpretation of the narrative world.

In addition, among the forms of focalization identified by Genette, the presentation of narrative information to the perspective of a character is restricted by internal focalization. The change of focalizing character during the course of the narrative is referred by Genette as variable internal focalization. Such shifts are significant to represent the cultural difference, as different characters may perceive the same narrative world according to their distinct social, historical and cultural experiences.

Variable internal focalization functions in Alpamys as the representation of different communities and their ways of life through shifting perspectives:

"Seeing this kind of service the Biys who had enjoyed great respect, said: "We are both the rich and the shah of the sixteen of Qunghirat land; when we used to come you would hold our horses, showed courtesy to us, laid clothes under our feet, but this time what bad we have done that you are treating us impolite?"[12]

The scene provides access to the Biys' perception of the social situation. Their attention is directed toward established practices of hospitality, including receiving their horses, showing courtesy and laying clothes under their feet. Therefore, their reaction reflects the cultural expectations associated with their social position within the Qunghirat community.

A shift in focalization appears in the following parts when the narrative provides direct access to the thoughts of Qorajon character, during the horse race:

"*Here's a misfortune! – thought Qorajon.*
Excellent steed, though! – thought Qorajon.
Overtook many! – thought Qorajon.
Legs a bit skinny! – thought Qorajon.
Maybe ifs ailing! – thought Qorajon.
Maybe ifs failing! – thought Qorajon.
Sunlight evading! – thought Qorajon.
May you soon die, and your cunning old Khan! – thought Qorajon."[13]

Compared to the earlier passage, in which the Biys interpret their treatment according to their expectations of hospitality and social respect, this episode temporarily places the reader within Qorajon's consciousness. The character's observations and judgements of the horse and its performance represent the narrative's movement to a different focalizing character. At this point, the change from the Biys' perspective to Qorajon's perspective illustrates Genette's variable internal focalization – the narrative world is presented successively through the consciousness of characters belonging to different social and cultural communities.

Another revealing example of this relationship between focalization and cultural knowledge occurs in the Council of Elrond in The Lord of the Rings. The discussion of the One Ring brings together characters whose perceptions are shaped by relatively different historical and cultural experiences. Despite the fact that the Ring is a single narrative object, it does not possess and identical meaning for all participants in the Council. In addition, Elrond approaches it through his extensive knowledge of the history of the Second Age and the earlier conflict with Sauron, whereas Boromir interprets it primarily in relation to the present danger facing Gondor:

[12] K.Mamurov, Alpomish, Uzbek Heroic Epos – University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy, Tashkent, 2018. P.20
[13] K.Mamurov, Alpomish, Uzbek Heroic Epos – University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy, Tashkent, 2018. P.68

"*Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need?"*[14]

Tolkien does not present the significance of the Ring as culturally neutral or universally accessible – rather, its meaning is mediated by the knowledge and experience available to each character. Consequently, The Council demonstrates how focalized narrative information can share the cultural and historical positions from which characters perceive the same element of the narrative world.

Eventually, the comparative eanalysis of Alpamys and J.R.R.Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings demonstrates that narrative construction contributes significantly to the representation of culturally meaningful worlds. Although they have different generic and historical contexts, both narratives employ narratological structures through which cultural memory, collective values, and identity are articulated. Notably, the analysis of analepsis has shown that the return to the past connects individual experience with collective history. In Alpamys, recollections of homeland and ancestry reinforce the hero's connection with his community, while in The Lord of the Rings, Elrond's recollection of Isildur's failure shapes historical memory into a warning for the present. Therefore, the past functions not only as background information but as an important resource for maintaining cultural memory and continuity.

Conclusion. On the other hand, the analysis of variable internal focalization demonstrates that the ways characters perceive and interpret the narrative world reflect cultural identity: in Alpamys, shifts between characters' perspectives reveal different social and cultural positions and the Council of Elrond in The Lord of the Rings, in turn, illustrates how characters' historical knowledge and communal experience influence their understanding of the One Ring.

These findings suggest that narrative form itself can function as a mechanism of cultural representation: while analepsis preserves and activates collective memory, focalization reveals how culturally formed knowledge shapes perception. Both Alpamys and The Lord of the Rings, therefore, demonstrate that cultural identity is build not only through themes and motifs but also through the narrative mechanisms by which memory, knowledge and perception are organized.

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