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THE ARTISTIC POSSIBILITIES OF RETROSPECTIVE NARRATION IN THE NOVELLAS OF O‘TKIR HOSHIMOV

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Abstract.:This article examines retrospective narration as a defining feature of the prose of the Uzbek People’s Writer O‘tkir Hoshimov (1941–2013). Drawing on his novellas of the 1960s–1980s—most notably the memoir-novella “The Affairs of the World” (“Dunyoning ishlari”)—the study argues that the writer’s habit of organising a narrative around remembered rather than lineally unfolding time is not a mere compositional device but a generative artistic principle. Retrospection allows Hoshimov to fuse the perspective of the experiencing child with that of the reflecting adult, to layer historical eras upon one another, and to convert private memory into ethical and philosophical statement. The paper analyses how these effects are produced and what they contribute to the lyrical and humanistic texture of his work.

Keywords: O‘tkir Hoshimov, novella, retrospective narration, memory, narrative time, lyrical prose, Uzbek literature, the narrating “I”.

1. Introduction

Among the prose writers who shaped Uzbek literature in the second half of the twentieth century, O‘tkir Hoshimov occupies a distinctive place. His novellas—“The Wind Keeps Blowing” (1968), “Spring Does Not Return” (1970), “Listen to Your Heart” (1973), “The Affairs of the World” (1982) and the satirical “Twice Two Is Five” (1987)[1]—placed the moral and spiritual condition of the ordinary person at the centre of artistic attention. Critics have repeatedly noted that the strength of these works lies less in eventful plotting than in the writer’s capacity to illuminate inner life through the recollection of what has already passed.

This recollective impulse is what the present article terms retrospective narration: a mode in which the narrative present is governed by a consciousness turned toward the past, so that events reach the reader already filtered through memory. Such narration is rarely a neutral ordering of chronology. In Hoshimov’s hands it becomes an instrument of meaning—a way of weighing experience, of measuring the distance between who the narrator was and who he has become, and of converting personal history into a broader reflection on time, loss and human dignity. The aim of this study is to describe the principal artistic possibilities that this mode opens up, and to show, through close attention to the novellas, how form and feeling are bound together in them.

2. Retrospection as a Structural Principle

The most visible consequence of Hoshimov’s recollective stance is structural. “The Affairs of the World” is built not as a continuous story but as a sequence of self-contained chapters—“Woollen Socks”, “Bright Moonlit Nights”, “The Dream”, “Lullaby”, “The Golden Earring” and others—each complete in itself yet joined to the rest by a single unifying image: the figure of the

[1] Hoshimov’s principal novellas and their years of publication: “Shamol esaveradi” (1968), “Bahor qaytmaydi” (1970), “Qalbingga quloq sol” (1973), “Dunyoning ishlari” (1982) and “Ikki karra ikki-besh” (1987).

mother.[2] What holds these fragments together is therefore not a causal chain of events but the logic of memory, which gathers scattered moments according to their emotional rather than their temporal proximity. The reader moves through the book the way one moves through one's own recollections, by association and return rather than by steady advance.

This mosaic construction frees the writer from the obligations of linear plot. A remembered episode can be expanded for its inner weight and another compressed to a single sentence; an incident from early childhood may stand beside a much later one without any sense of rupture, because both are equidistant from the remembering present. The fragmentary surface, in other words, is not a sign of looseness but the formal trace of how memory actually works. By allowing recollection to dictate sequence, Hoshimov turns the architecture of the novella itself into an argument about the value of the small, ordinary moments that a chronologically driven narrative would be tempted to pass over.

3. The Narrating "I" and the Lyrical-Autobiographical Voice

A second possibility opened by retrospection is the splitting of the narrating subject into two coexisting perspectives. In the memoir-novella the events are seen by a child, but they are told by an adult who already knows their consequences. This doubling produces a characteristic emotional richness: the immediacy of childhood perception—its wonder, its small fears, its trust—is preserved in the telling, while the mature voice surrounds it with an understanding the child could not have possessed. The reader thus experiences each scene twice over, once as it was lived and once as it is now understood, and the quiet tension between the two readings is the source of much of the work's pathos.

This is also what gives Hoshimov's prose its strongly lyrical, almost confessional quality. Because the past is recounted by someone who has loved and lost the people in it, the narration is saturated with feeling that the bare facts would not by themselves carry. The mother's ordinary acts—knitting, singing a lullaby, parting with a treasured earring[3]—acquire their luminous significance precisely because they are recalled across the distance of years and, often, across the finality of death. Retrospection here is not nostalgia for its own sake; it is the mechanism by which the writer transforms autobiographical material into art, lending the private remembrance a resonance that any reader can recognise as his or her own.

4. Temporal Layering and the Dialogue Between Past and Present

Retrospective narration also enables Hoshimov to set several historical layers in conversation with one another. The remembered world of his novellas is the Soviet-era Uzbek village, with its modest households and its hardships; yet this world is always observed from a later vantage point, so that the text holds at least two epochs simultaneously—the time of the event and the time of the telling. The friction between them carries an implicit commentary. What the child accepted as simply given, the adult narrator can now name, question or mourn, and the reader is invited to measure the change that has occurred in the interval.

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[2] "Dunyoning ishlari" was written in 1981 and dedicated to mothers; it was awarded the Oybek State Prize in 1982. The first complete English translation, "The Affairs of the World" by Mark Reese, appeared in 2024.

[3] These acts correspond to individual chapters of the novella, among them "Gilam paypoq" (Woollen Socks), "Alla" (Lullaby) and "Oltin baldoq" (The Golden Earring).

In the writer's larger canvases this layering becomes openly polyphonic. "Between Two Doors", his most ambitious work in the recollective vein[4], distributes the act of remembering among several narrators who each recount the years of the Second World War and its aftermath from a different position. Because no single memory is allowed to dominate, the past emerges as a contested, many-sided reality rather than a settled record, and the truth of the period accumulates only through the overlapping testimonies. Although that book is conventionally classed as a novel, its technique grows directly out of the retrospective method perfected in the novellas, and it demonstrates how far the device can be extended: from the intimate recall of a single life to the collective memory of a whole generation.

5. The Ethical and Psychological Possibilities of Looking Back

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, retrospection gives Hoshimov's prose its ethical and philosophical depth. To look back is inevitably to evaluate: the remembering narrator does not merely report the past, he judges it, repents of it, or gives thanks for it. Memory in these novellas functions as a form of moral reckoning, in which belated understanding—of a mother's sacrifice, of a kindness not returned, of words left unsaid—becomes the occasion for conscience. The reader is drawn into the same act of self-examination, so that the private recollection acquires a quietly didactic force without ever lapsing into open moralising.

Bound up with this ethical charge is a pervasive awareness of irreversibility. The very title "Spring Does Not Return" announces the theme that runs beneath much of the writer's work: time moves in one direction only, and what retrospection recovers it also confirms as lost.[5] This is the source of the characteristic Hoshimov tone, in which tenderness and sorrow are inseparable. Yet the recovery is not futile. By preserving in language what time has carried away, retrospective narration performs a consoling and affirming function: it insists that the ordinary lives and small acts of love it remembers were, and remain, worthy of being held. In this fusion of loss and affirmation lies the deepest artistic possibility of the mode.

6. Conclusion

Retrospective narration in O'tkir Hoshimov's novellas is far more than a way of arranging events; it is the very ground on which his art stands. By letting memory rather than chronology govern structure, he frees the novella to follow the inner logic of recollection. By splitting the narrating self into experiencing child and reflecting adult, he charges his prose with a double vision that is at once immediate and wise. By layering historical epochs, he turns private memory into a record of a generation; and by making the act of looking back an act of moral and emotional reckoning, he gives the everyday a lasting significance. These intertwined possibilities explain why his deceptively simple, deeply humane novellas continue to speak to readers, and why retrospection deserves to be regarded as the central artistic principle of his prose.

References

[4] "Ikki eshik orasi" (Between Two Doors), 1986, was awarded the Hamza State Prize; its action centres on the Second World War and is related through several alternating narrators.
[5] "Bahor qaytmaydi" (Spring Does Not Return), 1970 — a novella whose very title encapsulates the motif of the irreversibility of time.

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