

THE CONCEPT OF THEME IN LITERARY STUDIES AND ITS EXPRESSION IN THE WORKS OF AHMAD A'ZAM

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical foundations of the concept of theme in fiction and analyzes its expression in contemporary Uzbek prose, particularly in the works of Ahmad A'zam, is known for his psychologically rich storytelling, deep exploration of the human inner world, and skillful use of national color and expressive language. The study investigates the interrelation of theme with idea and problematics, and systematically explores the symbolic, psychological, and social layers that shape thematic structure in the author's narratives. Employing theoretical and comparative methodologies, the research analyzes how the theme is constructed through imagery, conflict, and symbolic details in Ahmad A'zam's works such as "The Halo of the Moon" (*Oyning gardishi*), "The Year of Repression" (*Qatag'on yili*), "The Man Who Lost His Shadow" (*Soyasini yo'qotgan odam*), and "Toward Asqartog'" (*Asqartog' tomonlarda*). The findings demonstrate that the thematic category in the writer's oeuvre manifests on two interconnected levels—social-realistic and psychological-symbolic—and expands through the dynamics of time and space.

Keywords: theme; fiction; Ahmad A'zam; Uzbek prose; symbolism; social realism

Introduction

In literary studies, the concept of theme is regarded as one of the fundamental components of a fictional work. Etymologically derived from the Arabic notion of something “set forth” or “arranged,” the term is used to denote the artistic dimension of meaning that encompasses the social-philosophical, ethical and other conceptual issues represented through selected life material. Literary dictionaries similarly describe theme as the component of artistic content that comprises the life material chosen and depicted for the artistic perception of the social, philosophical and moral problems posed in the work (Quronov, Mamajonov & Sheraliyeva 2010). Literary theory likewise defines theme as the central idea, concern, or organizing principle of a narrative (Abrams 2015; Culler 2011). Within contemporary scholarship, the concept generally carries two interrelated meanings: first, the sphere of life material depicted in the work, and second, the complex of social, ethical, philosophical or psychological problems that the author interprets artistically (Frye 2000; Booth 1983).

Some scholars treat theme and problematics as closely aligned or even interchangeable, arguing that a writer’s thematic vision is inseparable from the existential and socio-moral tensions that motivate creative expression (Brooks & Warren 1979). This view corresponds to the interpretation offered by Uzbek literary scholar Izzat Sulton, who defines theme as both the life material residing in the writer’s consciousness and the social-moral problem that demands artistic embodiment (Sulton 1986). Other theorists distinguish these concepts more clearly, regarding theme as the depicted reality and problem as the interpretative dimension—the set of issues the author strives to comprehend through artistic means (Chatman 1978; Genette 1980). This distinction also aligns with the explanation of D. Quronov, who views theme simultaneously as the life material portrayed in the work and as the set of social, ethical and philosophical problems posed for artistic

interpretation (Quronov 2018).

Ultimately, every writer is influenced by the concerns and contradictions of their socio-historical environment, and the impulse to understand such tensions generates an internal creative necessity. The writer's reflective engagement with the world of their time emerges in the literary text as problematic content, while theme designates the life material and events selected for artistic representation.

In this regard, various viewpoints also exist within Russian literary scholarship. The prominent literary critic G. Abramovich writes: "Some understand the theme as the life material depicted. Others consider the social problem raised in the work to be the theme" (Abramovich 1970). In this sense, he unites the terms *theme* and *problem* under a single general concept. M. Gorky likewise argues that "the theme is an idea born from the author's experience and suggested by life" (Gorky 1963). Another Russian literary scholar, A. Yesin, drawing on Gorky's ideas, writes: "Sometimes the theme is also equated with the idea of the work" (Yesin 2000). Thus, in Russian literary criticism, the concept of "theme–subject" generally reflects these two meanings. In Uzbek literary scholarship, however, the concepts of theme and problem are differentiated from one another.

In general, the concept of theme represents the artistic generalization of the life events chosen by the writer and the major problems illuminated in the work. The idea and purpose that serve as the foundation of a literary text form the core of its thematic structure. Building on this understanding, the present study aims to examine the theoretical dimensions of theme within fiction and to explore how this category is embodied in contemporary Uzbek prose through the works of Ahmad A'zam. His narratives often focus on individuals searching for self-understanding, reflecting broader social and existential questions within modern Uzbek literature. In this regard, A'zam's prose demonstrates how the theme evolves beyond a simple narrative focus and becomes a deeper philosophical inquiry into human identity, inner conflict, and social consciousness. By analyzing the author's approach to character psychology, narrative construction, and the use of symbolic details, the

study highlights the unique ways in which his works contribute to the development of thematic richness in modern Uzbek fiction. The research specifically investigates the relationship of theme with idea and problematics, and analyzes the symbolic, psychological, and social layers that contribute to thematic formation in the author's narratives. By employing theoretical and comparative methodologies, the study seeks to reveal how imagery, conflict, and symbolic details shape the theme in A'zam's works such as *The Halo of the Moon (Oyning gardishi)*, *The Year of Repression (Qatag'on yili)*, *The Man Who Lost His Shadow (Soyasini yo'qotgan odam)*, and *Toward Asqartog (Asqartog' tomonlarda)*. Ultimately, the objective of this article is to demonstrate that the thematic category in Ahmad A'zam's prose emerges through a two-layered structure—social-realistic and psychological-symbolic—and expands through time-space dynamics, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the artistic complexity of his oeuvre.

Materials and Methods

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the understanding that theme is not a fixed or uniform category in literary studies. Different authors interpret the same theme in diverse ways depending on their worldview, creative abilities, and emotional perception. Theme is treated as artistic raw material shaped by narrative perspective, stylistic choices, and discourse structure (Booth 1983; Chatman 1978; Genette 1980). Mario Vargas Llosa's view that no subject is inherently "good" or "bad," and that its artistic value depends entirely on the writer's talent and expressive choices, further supports this conceptual approach (Llosa 2012).

Analytical Approach

To clarify the theoretical content of the concepts of theme, problem, and idea, the research employs literary-theoretical and comparative analysis based on both Uzbek and international scholarship. These theoretical insights guide the examination of thematic formation and variation within the chosen corpus.

Selected Works

The analysis focuses on four major works by Ahmad A'zam:

- *The Halo of the Moon (Oyning gardishi)*,
- *The Year of Repression (Qatag'on yili)*,
- *Toward Asqartog (Asqartog' tomonlarda)*,
- *The Man Who Lost His Shadow (Soyasini yo'qotgan odam)*.

These texts are also compared with other examples of contemporary Uzbek prose to illustrate the individuality of A'zam's thematic structures.

Analytical Methods

Several methodological tools are used:

- **Structural Analysis.** Examines image systems, symbolic details, and plot situations to reveal the dual-layered (social and psychological) nature of the theme.
- **Psychological Analysis.** Studies characters' inner monologues, emotional experiences, and processes of self-examination.
- **Symbolic-Poetic Analysis.** Interprets symbolic motifs—such as the moon and halo in *The Halo of the Moon* and Bahri Muhit in *Toward Asqartog*—to identify the semantic expansion of the theme.
- **Contextual Analysis.** Links historical and social motifs in the works to the cultural and societal realities of the author's era.

Results and discussions

Ahmad A'zam's prose occupies a distinctive position in modern Uzbek literature due to the individuality of his artistic intention, the originality of his expressive style, and the psychological depth characteristic of his narratives. His works display a level of introspection and symbolic density comparable to the artistic achievements found in world literature. Each theme in his writing is approached from a unique creative

angle, shaped by the author's personal worldview and his sensitivity to both the social environment and the inner life of the individual. As a result, the theme in A'zam's prose emerges as a complex artistic layer that simultaneously encompasses socio-historical reality and the psychological states of the human spirit.

A thematic reading of *The Halo of the Moon (Oyning gardishi)* demonstrates how the narrative is constructed around questions of personal freedom, the conflict between traditional values and modern consciousness, and the protagonist's journey toward spiritual awakening. The symbolic images of the moon, the halo, and the white sheep expand the psychological and symbolic dimensions of the theme. Through symbolic mediation, the narrative transforms concrete everyday events into a broader metaphysical reflection on identity and human aspiration. The theme thus transcends realistic description and acquires a generalized spiritual meaning.

A similar dual-layer structure is evident in *The Year of Repression (Qatag'on yili)*, where the theme centers on the social pressures produced by the cotton policy, the burdens of collective obligations, and the erosion of human dignity in the face of systemic constraints. The conversations between major and minor characters reveal emotional states such as fear, apathy, alienation, and moral fatigue—psychological experiences that add depth to the thematic fabric of the work. The theme evolves into a study of how social mechanisms shape inner life and how individuals negotiate the boundaries of agency and conformity.

In *Toward Asqartog (Asqartog' tomonlarda)*, the theme acquires an even more complex psychological structure. The protagonist Mahdi Ashrapov's internal monologues, processes of self-examination, and emotional oscillations are articulated through the symbolic presence of Bahri Muhit, who embodies his aspirations, anxieties, and spiritual transformations. The theme here extends beyond the depiction of external reality and transforms into a philosophical exploration of the human struggle with the self. The convergence of dream, memory, and introspection creates a multi-layered narrative space in which psychological reality becomes inseparable from the thematic essence of the work.

Across A'zam's oeuvre, this two-tiered thematic structure—external (social reality) and internal (psychological experiences)—emerges as a defining feature of his poetics. The interaction between these levels establishes a dynamic thematic system that evolves within the narrative rather than remaining static. This dual structure reflects the author's interest not only in the representation of societal conditions but also in the nuanced portrayal of the human psyche as it responds to those conditions. From a methodological standpoint, the study identifies the theoretical foundations of theme and examines its artistic interpretation using multiple scholarly approaches. The theoretical content of the concepts of theme, problem, and idea is clarified through literary-theoretical and comparative methods, drawing on perspectives from Uzbek and international literary scholarship. A'zam's works—*The Halo of the Moon*, *The Year of Repression*, *Toward Asqartog*, and *The Man Who Lost His Shadow* (*Soyasini yo 'gotgan odam*)—are compared with other texts in contemporary Uzbek prose to highlight the individuality and distinctiveness of his thematic constructions.

Structural analysis of symbolic details, plot situations, and imagery reveals the coherent system through which the dual nature of the theme is articulated. Psychological analysis of characters' inner monologues, emotional states, and self-reflective processes further demonstrates how personal consciousness interacts with external circumstances to produce a layered thematic design. Symbolic-poetic analysis of key motifs—such as the moon and halo in *The Halo of the Moon* and the figure of Bahri Muhit in *Toward Asqartog*—shows how symbolism expands the semantic field of the theme. Finally, contextual analysis links the historical and social motifs in A'zam's works to the political and cultural realities of their time, illuminating the ways in which narrative themes emerge from lived historical experience.

Through this combined analytical framework, the study demonstrates that Ahmad A'zam's prose constructs theme as a dynamic, multilayered category that interweaves social, psychological, and symbolic elements. This synthesis of external

reality and internal consciousness is a hallmark of the writer's artistic world and represents one of the key contributions of his prose to modern Uzbek literature.

Conclusions

The analyses presented in this article demonstrate that in Ahmad A'zam's prose the theme is constructed through a nuanced interplay of artistic meaning and symbolism, forming a distinctive structure shaped by the interaction of theme, problem, and idea. The study shows that a symbolic–thematic model underlies the writer's work, as seen in motifs such as the moon, halo, and road in *The Halo of the Moon* (*Oyning gardishi*) and *The Man Who Lost His Shadow* (*Soyasini yo 'qotgan odam*), which deepen the thematic content. The theme also reveals a strong psychological orientation, enriched through characters' inner experiences, symbolic imagery, and internal monologues. Furthermore, the theme displays a dynamic time–space structure, functioning as a shifting literary unit rather than a static element, which clarifies its evolution across the narratives. The findings confirm that theme in A'zam's prose consists of a two-layer structure—external social reality and internal psychological depth—resulting in a complex thematic composition. Through this combination, Ahmad A'zam's prose secures a distinctive place in contemporary Uzbek literature for its thematic diversity, relevance, and refined use of psychologism.

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