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A Semiotic Analysis of Character in the Novel *Her Eyes* Based on the Theory of Philippe Hamon (From the Code of the Gaze to the Gradual Process of Character Construction)

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Abstract

The novel *Her Eyes* by Bozorg Alavi is one of the works that raises the issue of character not only at the level of the presence of fictional characters, but also in how they are recognized, reconstructed, and interpreted. The central characters of the novel are not presented to the reader as unified data; rather, they are constructed through name, image, speech, silence, action, memory, judgment of others, and the measured distribution of information throughout the narrative. From this perspective, Philip Hamon's theory (1972), which considers character as a textual sign and an unstable signifier, provides a suitable tool for analyzing the mechanism of character development in this novel. The present study, using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on close reading of the text, examines the characters of the novel along the four main axes of Hamon's theory, namely types of character, character as signifier, character as signified, and levels of character description. The findings of the study show that *Her Eyes* is based on the suspension between seeing and knowing. The findings also indicate that in this novel, character is not a present and transparent truth, but rather the result of an interpretative, relational, and historical process. Finally, the application of Hamon's theory to the novel "Her Eyes" reveals that the novel's network of characters simultaneously organizes the romantic, artistic, and political structure of the work and transforms the reader from a passive consumer of the story into a participant in the production of meaning.

Keywords: *Her Eyes*, Philippe Hamon's Theory, Types of Character, Signifier of Character, Signified of Character, Level of Description.

1. Introduction

Semiology is the study of how meaning is formed and produced on the basis of sign systems. This discipline examines the process of the production and reproduction of the flow of meaning in all forms of communication (Sajudi, 2011, p. 128). Literary semiotics is the finding of a correspondence between the image (signifier) and the concept (signified), and its aim is to discover a correspondence between what the author presents and what the reader has understood or interpreted (Ahmadi, 1996, p. 6). Character in fictional narrative is one of the most self-evident and at the same time most problematic elements of the text. While reading a novel, the reader usually speaks of characters as though confronting independent and complete human beings; they love them, judge their motives, and measure their behavior against moral or psychological criteria. Nevertheless, the fictional character, before being a "human being outside the text", is the product of a set of linguistic signs: a name that is repeated, a description that is foregrounded, an action attributed to him, a silence that acquires meaning, and the words others say about him. The theory of Philippe Hamon (1972) intervenes precisely at this point and regards character not as a pre-existing essence but as a sign whose signified takes shape, is revised, and sometimes remains unstable until the end, in the course of reading. The semiotics of character, unlike approaches that assess character mainly on the basis of psychological coherence or resemblance to a real human being, directs attention to the way the text works.

The novel *Her Eyes* is an exceptional work for such a reading, because its plot is built from the outset upon the question of the

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identity and truth of a character. Every interpretation reveals part of the truth and part of the interpreter's prejudice. For this reason, the novel becomes a narrative laboratory for observing the process of character construction. In this study, the central problem is how the novel constructs its characters through a network of variable signifiers and signifieds and organizes the hierarchy among them. The fundamental hypothesis of the study is that the novel's semantic core lies in the conflict between competing narratives seeking to identify the protagonist and the mysterious owner of the eyes.

This study answers the following five research questions:

1. How do the referential, deictic, and anaphoric types of character function in the novel?
2. How do the signifiers of character—including name, epithet, pronoun, physical description, objects, and visual signs—make Farangis and Makan recognizable to the reader?
3. By what means and through what quantitative and qualitative distribution of information is the signified of character formed?
4. What relationship do the physiognomic, psychological, social, and symbolic levels of the characters have with the political and artistic structure of the novel?
5. Why, despite the extensive accumulation of information, does the ultimate meaning of the painting *Her Eyes* and the truth of the character Farangis remain open?

2. Research Methods

The method of the present study is descriptive-analytical and based on a close reading of the text. This study is conducted on the basis of [Hamon's theory \(1972\)](#) and his fourfold formulation regarding character (types of character, signifier of character, signified of character, and levels of character description). The unit of analysis is not only descriptive sentences, but every sign that participates in the construction of character: the manner of naming, the extent and timing of presence, dialogue, silence, action, the narration of others, related objects, the spaces of presence, and oppositional relations. References to the novel are made on the basis of the text of *Her Eyes* and the page numbers of that same text.

3. Literature Review

In Persian scholarship, Hamon's theory has been applied to the analysis of characters in narrative and religious texts. Some of the works published on the basis of this theory, in order of year of publication, are as follows:

[Taslim Jahromi \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that, according to Hamon's model, the character of Imam Ali belongs to the religious and devotional referential characters. On the axis of Imam Ali as signifier, Safavid-era poetry mentions his name and lineage and the feature of his birth in the Kaaba, and on the axis of the Imam's character as signified, it deals chiefly with the Imam's moral attributes. [Salehi and Shahpasandi \(2021\)](#) coordinated and aligned the names, attributes, and epithets of the characters with their narrative function, and by describing the various dimensions of the characters, placed the reader before a full portrait of them. [Nuri Keyzaqani and Salmani Haghighi \(2022\)](#) showed that the signifying and signified character of Imam Hossein, as a sign, leads to the recognition of the good and bad traits of a society both during the lifetime of that Imam among the people and in the present time. [Hajizadeh et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that the unity of poetry and woman is beautifully manifest in Nizar Qabbani's poetry, and that the female characters in Nizar's love poems are largely figurative, consistent with the overall content of his poems. [Mohtadi \(2023\)](#) showed that on the axis of the signifier, the names and epithets used for the Prophet in this book are all consistent with the attributes and actions of this character. On the axis of the Prophet's character as signified, his attributes and characteristics—such as intercession, knowledge, justice, forgiveness and generosity, guidance and leadership, and being the cause of the creation of the world—as well as his miraculous birth, are examined. [Moqim et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasized this model's formulation that character can be studied through speech and behavioral acts, direct and indirect information, name and attributes, and the physiognomic, psychological, social, and symbolic dimensions.

Some of the published works related to the novel *Her Eyes* are presented below in chronological order according to their year of publication:

[Hassanpour Alashati and Mansour Lakvarj \(2008\)](#) analyzed themes such as aristocracy, love, modernity and fashion-oriented tendencies among aristocratic women, social struggle, political and social repression, submission and blind obedience, the failure of intellectual activists, and other related concepts. [Karimian and Zaker-hosseini \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that the position and representation of women in *Her Eyes* are portrayed by the author in a way that is entirely different from their actual social status during that period. Women play an active and dynamic role in social processes. The female character is presented as an avant-garde figure who challenges men's established values and contributes significantly to the formation of a new discourse. [Ghanbari Abdolmaleki and Firoozianpour Esfahani \(2021\)](#) showed that the main findings of the article indicate that Bozorg Alavi's lexical and syntactic choices reflect his inclination toward Marxist ideology, which, at the time of the text's production, was in opposition to the right-wing discourse of the Pahlavi government. [Adinehvand et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that the behaviors of Farangis and Master Makan are meaningful and not accidental; they revealed psychological trauma that intensifies and leads to hysterical behaviors indicative of repressed impulses.

The innovation of the present reading is that, so far Hamon's theory has not been used to analyse the novel *Her Eyes*. Also, this reading does not employ [Hamon's theory \(1972\)](#) merely as a checklist for classifying the characters' attributes, but rather links it to the central problem of the novel itself: who has the right to interpret another? The narrator, the people, "Master Makan", the police, and Farangis each construct a narrative of character. Therefore, the signifier and signified of character in *Her Eyes* are not merely instruments of external analysis, but are also objects of contention within the world of the story.

4. Theoretical Framework

Philippe Hamon, the French semiotician, redefined the element of character in the article "Pour un Statut Sémiologique du Personnage" in 1972. This article was republished in 1977. Hamon holds that character is not merely a psychological category but is, in reality, present. He regards the psychological and dramatic models of characterization as lacking a firm theoretical foundation. In Hamon's view, the structural analysis of character is possible only within semiotics, and character must be regarded as a "sign" ([Hamon, 1972, p. 94](#)). For Hamon, character is revealed through a "discontinuous signifier" (a set of signs) and refers to a "discontinuous signified"

(the meaning or value of the character). According to him, character is defined by a “set of relations” consisting of relations of similarity, opposition, hierarchy, and ordering. Hence, character, at both the level of the signifier and the level of the signified, sequentially or simultaneously, establishes relations with other characters and elements of the work (Hamon, 1972, p. 95). Hamon’s theory rests on four principles: types of character; the signifier of character; the signified of character; and the levels of character description.

The most important achievement of Hamon’s classification (1977, p. 119-123) is built upon a threefold distinction among types of sign: referential signs, deictic signs, and anaphoric (repetitive) signs. He extends this triad to three types of character: referential characters (personnages-référentiels) refer to knowledge and codes outside the text and may be historical, social, mythological, or cultural; their comprehension depends on the reader’s prior knowledge of the external world. Deictic or shifter characters (personnages-embrayeurs) represent the presence of the author, narrator, or reader within the text and organize the path by which information is received. Anaphoric and repetitive characters (personnages-anaphores) keep the memory of the text and the reader active by creating recollection, repetition, foreshadowing, and connections among scattered parts. A point to bear in mind is that these three types are not fixed categories; a single character can be “polyvalent” and partake of several types at once. Therefore, Hamon’s classification is not a list of fixed types of human beings, but a description of the semiotic functions of character in the text (1977, p. 119-123).

In his theory, Hamon also examines the literary semiotics of character in three categories: the signifier of character, the signified of character, and the levels of character description. The signifier of character is the set of signs that make his presence in the text recognizable: proper name, epithet, pronoun, physical description, manner of speaking, clothing, place, objects, and even the manner of absence. In narrative, a name is not merely a neutral label; its selection or omission can generate cultural and semantic expectations. The signified of character is constructed from what he himself says and does, as well as from the statements and judgments of others about him. This signified, contrary to the essentialist conception, always admits of revision and refutation. The description of character operates at various levels: the physiognomic or physiological level, the psychological level, the social level, and the symbolic level (1972, pp. 97-99).

Hamon (1977, p. 140) conceptualizes characters within a hierarchical semiotic system: some characters function as “dominant signs”, while others operate as “subordinate signs”; nevertheless, both categories contribute to the overall process of meaning production and participate in the signifying network of the text. According to Hamon (1977, p. 140), the significance of a character is not determined solely by the frequency of their appearances, but by the nature of their relationships with other characters, the actions they perform, and the network of signs and symbolic meanings they introduce into the text. Contrary to the traditional understanding, a secondary character should not be regarded merely as an “insignificant character”; rather, it functions as a semiotic element capable of contributing to the production and construction of meaning within the narrative structure. Certain secondary characters primarily serve as carriers of environmental, social, or ideological signs; in other words, their presence is necessary for representing a particular social class, value system, historical condition, or underlying conflict within the narrative. Hamon believes that secondary characters are generally constructed through fewer signs, limited descriptions, simpler naming patterns, and more single-functional roles, whereas the main character receives a broader range of signs, representations, and relationships within the text (1977, p. 141).

By transferring character from the purely psychological domain to the semiotic domain, Hamon in effect regards it as a textual unit in the process of being constructed. Character, like a word, is composed of a perceptible signifier and a reconstructible signified; but its signified is not fixed and given once and for all. At each stage of the narrative, the reader revises, with new information, the image previously constructed. Hence character is an “unstable signified” whose meaning is not obtained from the algebraic sum of attributes, but rather results from the relation among attributes, actions, statements, silences, and his position in the narrative network. This view is of special importance for analyzing novels built upon mystery, suspense, or indirect narration. In such works, the author does not distribute information uniformly; the main character may enter the scene late, decisive information about him may be presented by an unreliable person, or an initial image may acquire a completely different meaning at the end. The quantitative criterion in Hamon’s model relates to the volume, frequency, and sequence of information, while the qualitative criterion asks from what source and with what degree of reliability this information has been obtained. In this way, the reader is confronted not only with “what has been said”, but must also ask “who said it, when, and with what motive.”

Following Hamon’s theoretical framework, several scholars attempted to expand and develop his approach. Jouve (1992) builds upon Hamon’s semiotic perspective by emphasizing the role of the reader in the construction of character. According to Jouve (1992), the character is not merely a collection of textual information but becomes a mental and interpretive construct through the reading process. Thus, character meaning is produced through the interaction between narrative structures and the reader’s cognitive activity. Furthermore, some scholars in structural semiotics have combined Hamon’s theory with Algirdas Julien Greimas’s concept of the actant. In Greimas’s model, characters are analyzed not only through their individual characteristics but also through the roles they perform within the narrative structure (Greimas & Courtés, 1982). This approach enables the analysis of characters as relational elements, meaning that their identity and significance are shaped by their position within the network of narrative relations and oppositions. In more recent studies, Hamon’s semiotic theory of character has been extended to new areas, including media studies and transmedia narratives. Bertetti and Thibault (2022) demonstrates that characters across different media forms are recognized through a combination of stable and changing signs, and that their identities are produced and reproduced through semiotic processes. This perspective illustrates that Hamon’s theoretical framework remains applicable not only to literary analysis but also to the study of characters in cinema, television, and contemporary media forms. Accordingly, Hamon’s theory represents one of the significant foundations of semiotic character analysis because it approaches the character not as a simple reflection of a human individual, but as a meaningful structure constructed through a network of signs within the text. From this perspective, character analysis requires examining its constitutive elements, including identity markers, narrative relationships, and its position within the overall structure of the work.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. The Novel *Her Eyes*

The novel *Her Eyes* by Mojtaba Aqa Bozorg Alavi was published in 1952. The central character of the story is Makan, a painting master and a political activist opposed to Reza Shah, who dies in exile. “Master Makan” harbors an important unrevealed secret in his

life, which is evident in one of the paintings he has exhibited at the school. The narrator of the story, who is the school's supervisor (nāzem) and in charge of the exhibition of "Master Makan's" works, is intensely curious to discover the secret of these eyes. He therefore tries to find the woman in the painting and to ask about her relationship with "Master Makan." After years, the "supervisor" finds the woman in question and they converse. The woman tells him that she was a girl from a wealthy family and that, because of her beauty, she attracted the attention of many men; but they were no more than amusements to her, and only "Master Makan" paid no attention to her beauty and allure. To attract the "Master's" attention, the woman collaborates with the secret political organization under the "Master's" direction, but the "Master" neither takes her sacrifice seriously nor perceives her feelings and love. In the end, the "Master" is arrested by the police, and the woman responds positively to the marriage proposal of the chief of police—one of her old suitors—on the condition that the "Master" be saved from death. The "Master" goes into exile and never learns of the woman's sacrifice. In exile, he paints the canvas *Her Eyes*, eyes that reveal a mysterious yet capricious and dangerous woman. The woman knows that the "Master" never knew her and that these eyes are not hers.

5.2. The Narrative Architecture of the Novel and the Problem of Reading Character

The novel opens with the image of a city that is "suffocated" and in which everyone fears one another and even their own shadow (Alavi, 1952, p. 3). This opening is not merely the historical backdrop of the story; from the very beginning it determines the conditions of knowing character. In a society where speaking is dangerous, the truth of persons is hidden in silence, rumor, the dossier, the hint, and the work of art. Tyranny controls not only bodies but also confiscates and distorts signs: the newspaper makes the death of victims appear natural, the government holds a commemoration ceremony for its enemy, and the art exhibition is shut down as a "collective display of discontented people" (Alavi, 1952, pp. 5–7). Therefore, characterization is bound up from the outset with the politics of information. Makan is dead in the first pages. This narrative decision makes the reader's direct access to the character impossible and turns him into an object of reconstruction. The narrator must construct a signified for "Master Makan" from the paintings, the recollections of pupils, the words of "Aqa Rajab", letters, and rumors. In this respect, the structure of the story resembles a detective investigation, but its aim is not to discover a criminal; it is to discover the meaning of a human being and a gaze. Each sign, rather than immediately solving the puzzle, produces a new question. The focal point of the novel's architecture is a painting that shows a woman's face, with the title *Her Eyes* written upon it. People stand before the painting and "strive to discover the secret of the eyes", but opinions differ (Alavi, 1952, p. 6). This scene is a small model of the entire novel: the character stands like an image before numerous readers, and no reading definitively owns its meaning. The successive questions about the chastity or shamelessness, sincerity or guile, entreaty or indifference of the eyes show how physical description becomes a field for producing contradictory signifieds (Alavi, 1952, pp. 7–8).

5.2.1. The Painting as Meta-Character and Central Signifier

The painting *Her Eyes* can be regarded as a kind of meta-character: an object that not only refers to a character but also displays the very mechanism of character construction. In the image, the nose, mouth, cheek, and forehead have been effaced, and only the eyes leave a lasting impression (Alavi, 1952, p. 7). The removal of the other parts of the face causes the woman's entire identity to be concentrated on a single sign. Yet this very concentration does not lead to transparency; the "eyes" produce questions more than they answer. The signifier is highly foregrounded, but the signified remains unstable. The title of the painting is also decisive. The narrator and the "Master's" disciples distinguish between "Eyes" and *Her Eyes* and take the attached pronoun "-ash" (her) as a sign that the eyes belong to a particular woman (Alavi, 1952, p. 9). This argument shows how the smallest linguistic unit can become the engine of the plot. The pronoun promises the existence of an owner of the "eyes", yet omits her name. In this way, the title of the painting simultaneously performs the act of introducing and of concealing. Throughout the narrative, the painting is transferred from one meaning to another. At first, for the people it is a symbol of suffering and mystery; for the narrator it is the key to discovering the "Master's" life; for Farangis it is evidence of Makan's judgment of her; and at the end, it is something that Farangis pushes away from herself: "These eyes are not mine" (Alavi, 1952, p. 237). This final sentence neither destroys the signifier nor declares the correct signified; rather, it fixes the gap among the image, self-knowledge, and the judgment of the other. The painting is fixed, but the character and its interpretation change.

5.3. The "Supervisor" Narrator: Deictic Character, Intra-Textual Reader, and Fallible Interpreter

The narrator is not introduced by a personal name, and his position is designated by the occupational title "supervisor" (nāzem). This naming links him, on the one hand, to order, registration, and surveillance, and on the other hand conceals his individuality behind an administrative role. He arranges the register of visitors, records the names of women, preserves the paintings, and pieces together the scattered fragments of the "Master's" life. On the basis of Hamon's theory (1972), he may be regarded as the main relay and shifter character of the novel: his presence determines the manner of the reader's access to information, and his curiosity substitutes for the reader's curiosity. Nonetheless, the narrator is not a neutral intermediary. His infatuation with Makan, his contempt for the vulgarity of pretenders, and his intense desire to discover the secret of the painting shape his manner of observation. When he finds "Farangis", he has already constructed a signified for her: a mysterious woman who has probably led the "Master" to ruin. Even the bargain he arranges with Farangis in order to hear the story creates a power relation; he removes the painting from the museum and demands the truth in exchange for access to it. He is not merely an investigator of the truth, but the director of the scene of confession. The narrator, in the position of an intra-textual reader, also reveals the errors of reading. At first, he matches the face of Farangis with the image and takes her gaze as a sign of identity. Then, upon hearing the woman's long account, he repeatedly changes his judgment: at times he sees her as selfish, at times as deceitful, at times as a victim, and finally as worthy of respect and compassion. This fluctuation shows that the signified of character is constructed not in the sign itself, but in the interaction of sign and interpreter. The narrator matters because, through him, the novel warns the reader: even the most meticulous gatherer of documents may give meaning to signs within the framework of his own desire and prejudice.

5.3.1. The “Supervisor” and the Problem of Deciphering Eyes

The “supervisor” has lived for years with the “Master’s” works, knows the history of the paintings, and supposes that no one is as qualified as he is to understand Makan. He uses this same symbolic capital before Farangis as well. The temporary removal of the painting from the wall and then its transport to the woman’s house is a narrative and semiotic act: he displaces the signifier in order to compel the hidden signified to speak. In other words, the “supervisor” does not merely discover the truth; he constructs the conditions of its production. But the novel limits his authority. What he hears is the narrative of Farangis, not the voice of Makan. He can record and interpret the woman’s words, but he cannot close the gap between the image and the image’s claimed owner. At the end, when Farangis pushes the painting away, the “supervisor” is faced with a situation that his archive and inquiry cannot resolve. From this perspective, the relay character in the novel is not the author’s reliable spokesperson, but the representative of the limits of every reading.

5.4. Farangis: From “Unknown Woman” to Speaking Subject

Farangis is the complete example of character as an unstable signified. Before her name or voice is present in the narrative, her image and rumor exist. She is at first “the owner of the eyes”, “the unknown woman”, and probably the agent of Makan’s suffering. This precedence of the image over the person turns Farangis into an object of the gaze and judgment of others. People, pupils, and the “supervisor” speak about her without her having the possibility of replying. Her actual entry into the story is made possible as a result of the “supervisor’s” search and through the register of visitors, where the first name Farangis is recorded without a surname (Alavi, 1952, p. 27). The omission of the surname is an important signifier. The first name makes relative identification possible, but keeps the social and family connection hidden. Farangis both wants to be seen and to remain unknown. When she says in the museum, “My name is Farangis” (Alavi, 1952, p. 36), she takes the first step toward appropriating her own narrative, but still conceals a large part of her identity. Until the end, too, she moves between disclosure and concealment. In terms of the structure of information, Farangis is constructed twice: the first time indirectly, by way of the painting, conjecture, and the “supervisor’s” gaze; and the second time more directly, by way of her own long narrative. Even so, the second construction does not entirely eliminate the first. The words of Farangis revise some judgments, but raise new questions about responsibility, self-deception, and memory. This very coexistence of conflicting narratives produces the complexity of her character.

5.4.1. The Signifiers of Farangis: Eye, Clothing, Voice, Speech and Name

The most prominent signifier of Farangis is her eyes. In the novel, the eye is at once a bodily organ, an instrument of looking, an object of another’s gaze, and an artistic sign. Farangis is known by her eyes; the “supervisor” tests her identity by staring into her eyes; and Makan creates an image that pushes the other parts of the face to the margin. But the signification of the “eyes” is never univocal. They can simultaneously evoke desire, pride, dread, deceit, love, and a plea for forgiveness. This very polysemy causes the “eyes”, rather than summarizing the character, to compress its contradictions. The clothing and adornment of Farangis are also part of her social signifier. The narrator repeatedly attends to her elegance, her manner of sitting, her commanding behavior, and the atmosphere of her house. These signs show her attachment to the affluent class and to a world in which wealth and beauty are instruments of power. By contrast, when her personal narrative begins, voice and speech take the place of appearance. Farangis shifts from being an object of the gaze to the producer of a narrative. For the first time, she recounts her “ill-fated life story” and stipulates that until the “supervisor” knows her, he will not know Makan (Alavi, 1952, p. 77). This claim moves her role from the margin of the “Master’s” life to the center of interpretation. The name Farangis also carries a particular cultural and phonetic charge. The name is linked to beauty, aristocracy, and ancient lore, but the novel places it in a modern and crisis-ridden situation. Life in Europe (“Farang”), training in European art, and the relations of the privileged class add another layer to the name. In this way, the signifier of the name fluctuates between cultural heritage and modern experience and accords with the split nature of the character.

5.4.2. The Signified of Farangis: Speech Act, Behavioral Act, and the Instability of Judgment

The speech act of Farangis is the most extensive source of information about her. A large part of the novel is devoted to her monologue, and this volume of speech, in terms of the quantitative criterion, consolidates her central position. She recounts her family past, her journey to Europe, her acquaintance with “Khodadad” and “Mehrbanu”, her return to Iran, her relationship with Makan, and her bargain with “Colonel Aram.” Even so, in terms of the qualitative criterion, this information must be read with caution. The speaking narrator speaks years after the events, under the pressure of regret, and before a man who is interrogating her. Her narrative is at once a confession, a self-defense, and an attempt to reconstruct the meaning of her life. The behavioral acts of Farangis also reveal her duality. She at first approaches Makan out of class pride and a desire to conquer him; then, influenced by the intellectual world of the “Master” and Khodadad, she participates in political activities. On the one hand, she uses her social influence and privilege to save people; on the other hand, at the critical moment she cannot openly stand beside Makan. Her marriage to “Colonel Aram” can be seen both as betrayal and as sacrifice, because it is the means of saving Makan from death and, at the same time, a bond with his enemy. This contradiction cannot be resolved with a single attribute. Farangis is neither a pure heroine nor an absolute traitor. Her signified is constructed from the conflict between wanting and being able, love and selfishness, daring and fear. The importance of the novel lies in the fact that it does not see contradiction as a flaw of characterization; contradiction is the very substance of character. The painting by Makan records precisely this: the woman’s gaze is both entreaty and torment, both intimacy and distance.

5.4.3. The Levels of Description of Farangis

At the physiognomic level, Farangis is described with beauty, penetrating eyes, an elegant face, and a striking social presence. This beauty is at first her chief capital; those around her look at her, and she is aware of the power of others’ gaze. But beauty, in the course of the narrative, turns from a privilege into a limitation, because others see her more than as a thinking subject, as an image and an object of desire. Makan, too, although distanced from this system, ultimately fixes her in a painting. At the psychological level, Farangis

is a character caught in fluctuation: pride, jealousy, the desire to be seen, the need for love, shame, fear, and a sense of guilt are simultaneously present in her. Her transformation is not linear and complete. Her acquaintance with Khodadad and Makan transforms her view of society, but class habits and the need for approval still influence her decisions. This very persistence of the trace of the past makes her transformation believable. At the social level, Farangis is the daughter of a privileged family endowed with relations of power. She has the possibility of travel, education, and access to officials—privileges not available to Khodadad, Mehrbanu, and the other activists. The novel makes this privilege both a source of alienation and an instrument of action. At the symbolic level, Farangis can be a sign of the intellectual or artist caught between personal beauty and collective responsibility, and between the love of freedom and class comfort. Nevertheless, her symbolic value should not abolish her individuality and complexity.

5.4.4. The Final Sentence and the Resistance of Character to Interpretation

The sentence “These eyes are not mine” at the end of the novel (Alavi, 1952, p. 237) is the peak of the instability of the signified of “Farangis.” This sentence makes several simultaneous readings possible. Farangis may believe that Makan misunderstood her and attributed reproachful or treacherous eyes to her. She may refuse to accept an image that has recorded an unpleasant truth about her. She may be declaring the distance between the Farangis of the past and the woman of the present, and she may also be showing that no artistic image can contain the totality of a human being. According to Hamon’s view (1972), the importance of the sentence lies in the fact that the character resists the fixing of her own signified. The painting and the narrative of the “supervisor” attempt to define “Farangis”, but at the last moment she demands the right of non-conformity with the image. Instead of a final judgment, the novel leaves the reader alone with two incompatible claims: the gaze of Makan, which has been made enduring in the painting, and the words of “Farangis”, which deny ownership of that gaze. The character remains alive precisely in the distance between these two claims.

5.5. “Master Makan”: The Dominant Presence of the Absent Character

“Master Makan” is introduced from the first pages as a dead man, but his physical absence does not diminish his importance. On the contrary, almost all the elements of the novel refer to him: the school, the museum, the paintings, the memories, the rumors, the government dossiers, the narrative of “Farangis”, and the search of the supervisor. He is the prominent example of a character whose signifiers are distributed throughout the text and whose signified is constructed through others. The quantitative criterion of information about him is very high, but the qualitative criterion is complex, because a large part of the information is indirect and affected by the infatuation or hostility of those who speak. The epithet “Master” (ostād) is his most important nominal signifier. The text often calls him not simply Makan but “Master Makan” or “the Master.” This epithet consolidates his artistic and moral position and makes the relation of the other characters to him hierarchical. By contrast, the government authorities attempt to define him as a “troubled man” or a dangerous element. The political struggle flows at the level of naming as well: for the people and the pupils he is the “Master”; for the police apparatus he is a security problem. Makan is known by his silence. His sentences are short and do not reveal his inner secrets (Alavi, 1952, p. 8). This reticence stands opposite the long monologue of “Farangis.” If Farangis reconstructs herself through the accumulation of words, Makan is constructed through the omission of words. His silence is both a sign of self-restraint and power, and a factor that compels others to fill the empty place of his voice with their own interpretations.

5.5.1. Makan as Referential and Social Character

Makan activates the code of the intellectual artist who opposes tyranny. He does not bow before political power, refuses to paint the faces of those he does not approve of, and does not make art a means of praising the government. The anecdote of his encounter with “Kheylash”, in which, in the face of the minister’s proposal and pressure, he says that he paints the image of those he himself wishes, is a brief but highly meaningful act (Alavi, 1952, pp. 16–17). This behavior consolidates the political signified of the character more than any direct exposition. Makan’s being referential does not mean a simple correspondence with a particular historical individual; his importance lies in activating the social memory of the protesting artist. His character summons a set of cultural values: the independence of art, social commitment, resistance to bribery, and paying a price for freedom. For this reason, his death does not remain a private event. The people find their own image in his works, and the government regards even his exhibition as a political threat (Alavi, 1952, p. 6). The referential character Makan builds a bridge between the text and the historical experience of the reader.

5.5.2. Action, Silence, and Art as the Signified of Makan

The signified of Makan is derived more from action and the work of art than from speech. He speaks little, but his choices speak: whom he paints, whom he rejects, whom he shelters, and how he keeps silent under interrogation. The paintings function as substitute speech acts. Painting allows him to express in color and line what he does not say in direct language. Therefore, Makan’s works are not an external part of his character; they are the semiotic extension of his being. At the same time, the novel does not immunize Makan from criticism. Farangis repeatedly suffers from his distancing, severity, and refusal of her help. Makan, on the one hand, wants Farangis to participate in saving others, and on the other hand, at the moment of danger, pushes her away from himself. This behavior can be a sign of morality and of protecting the beloved, but it can also reveal pride and an inability to trust. Even the novel’s ideal character does not have a completely closed signified.

The painting *Her Eyes* is the most condensed utterance of Makan, yet this very pictorial utterance remains ambiguous. Is the painting a reproach of Farangis, a memorial of love, a record of a misunderstanding, or a confession of the artist’s inability to know the other? Makan cannot answer, and the work becomes independent of its author. In this way, silence after death reinforces the possibility of endless interpretations.

5.5.3. The Levels of Description of Makan

The physiognomic description of Makan, compared with that of Farangis, is more limited and is formed mainly through his bearing,

clothing, stillness, and gaze. This reduction of physical detail accords with his symbolic role, but in order to keep the character human, the text also offers signs of weariness, distress, and vulnerability. Makan is not merely a statue of resistance; he is a man upon whom political pressure, collective responsibility, and an emotional relationship weigh heavily. At the psychological level, reticence, bashfulness, will, artistic sensitivity, and mistrust are his central traits. At the social level, he is a recognized artist who is at the same time an opponent of the apparatus of power; someone whose fame is both a temporary shield and a source of danger. At the symbolic level, Makan represents the ideal form of the union of art and social responsibility, but the novel, by showing his emotional limitations, prevents his transformation into a one-dimensional symbol.

5.6. Secondary Characters and the Oppositional System of the Novel

In Hamon's theory (1972), a secondary character is not merely someone who has less presence; his importance arises from the role he plays in producing and differentiating the meaning of the other characters. The secondary characters of *Her Eyes* function like mirrors and counterpoints. They display different possibilities of action and place Farangis and Makan within a social network. Without Khodadad, the intellectual transformation of Farangis is not comprehensible; without "Colonel Aram", the contradiction of sacrifice and compromise does not take concrete form; and without "Aqa Rajab", the connection of Makan with the people and his everyday memory remains incomplete. These characters also prevent the novel from being reduced to a story of merely two persons. The love of Farangis and Makan does not occur in a vacuum; politics, class, gender, and the institution of power constantly intervene in it. Each secondary character activates part of these codes and gives direction to the signified of the main characters.

5.6.1. Khodadad and Mehrbanu: Deictics of Consciousness and the Model of Collective Action

Khodadad is among the social referential characters and at the same time a deictic. He represents the type of the young intellectual and activist, and his frank language challenges the worldview of Farangis. Farangis is at first offended by his audacity and severity, but these very words change the course of her self-knowledge. Khodadad, unlike Makan, who is reticent and out of reach, acts through direct speech and candid criticism. The difference in the manner of speaking of these two shows two different forms of moral authority. The description of Khodadad—with his tall frame, narrow chest, illness, and constant striving—links the physiognomic level to the political signified. His weak body bears a powerful will, and this contrast brings sacrifice from the level of slogan to the level of the body (Alavi, 1952, pp. 104–106). Mehrbanu, too, with her simplicity, sincerity, and companionship, offers a different model of the activist woman. Her presence beside Farangis foregrounds the difference between steadfast participation and participation mixed with hesitation, without the novel easily condemning "Farangis."

5.6.2. "Colonel Aram" and the Apparatus of Power

The name "Aram" ("calm") in the case of the "Colonel" possesses a semiotic irony. His polite appearance, measured behavior, and the name "Aram" stand in contrast to the institutional violence he represents. This contrast shows that repressive power does not necessarily enter with a harsh and overt face; it can appear refined, rational, and even amorous. The "Colonel", at the individual level, desires "Farangis", and at the social level is the executor of an apparatus that tortures and exiles Makan. He also complicates the signified of "Farangis." The woman's decision to marry the "Colonel" is not comprehensible without his dual position. The "Colonel" is both an enemy and the only usable channel for saving Makan. Therefore, his character creates a moral situation in which the right action is inseparable from a tainted instrument. "Farangis", by using the selfishness and desire of the "Colonel", persuades him to send Makan into exile instead of to death (Alavi, 1952, pp. 229–232). The result is both a rescue and a defeat, and this duality spreads throughout the entire system of characters.

5.6.3. "Aqa Rajab", the People, and Unofficial Memory

"Aqa Rajab", in comparison with the educated and high-ranking characters, comes from a subordinate position, but he has an essential role in the sign system of the novel. He is the witness to the everyday life of Makan and the link connecting the "Master" with the people. The fact that Makan repeatedly paints the image of his own servant but refuses to paint the faces of the holders of power reveals the hierarchy of values of the novel: human dignity is more important than official rank. The people, too, at the beginning of the novel are a kind of collective character. They stand before the painting, find themselves in the works of Makan, and, with their varied interpretations, preserve his social memory. The government attempts to control this memory, but this very effort shows that meaning is not entirely in the hands of power. The collective character of the people transforms Makan from a private hero into a public sign.

5.7. Oppositional Relations and the Production of Meaning

The characters in the novel do not derive meaning only from their internal attributes; their difference and opposition to others also define them. Farangis, set against Mehrbanu, shows the possibility of two kinds of feminine presence in the political arena. Makan, set against "Colonel Aram", forms the opposition of moral authority and institutional authority. Khodadad, set against the aristocrats and the dependent students, foregrounds material poverty and the richness of commitment. "Aqa Rajab", set against the ministers and holders of office, clarifies the Master's criterion of valuation. The "supervisor", set against the police, represents two kinds of information-gathering: one for understanding and commemoration, the other for control and repression. Nevertheless, the oppositions do not always remain simple and binary. The supervisor uses methods resembling interrogation and deception to discover the truth; Farangis draws close to the repressive power in order to save Makan; and Makan, by pushing Farangis away, unwittingly limits the possibility of her companionship. The novel makes the boundary between the poles tainted and complex. This very thing causes the characters to escape the mold of univocal symbols. At a more general level, several oppositions organize the entire novel: seeing/knowing, speech/silence, presence/absence, image/life, individual/collective, love/commitment, and freedom/power. Each character is the meeting point of several oppositions. Farangis is seen but not correctly known; Makan is absent but has a pervasive presence; "Colonel Aram" speaks softly but executes violence; and the painting is lifeless but has more narrative agency than many

living characters.

5.8. Anaphoric Characters, Repetition, and the Memory of the Text

An important part of the coherence of *Her Eyes* is obtained from the repetition of signs. The eye, the gaze, the painting, silence, the letter, the telephone, the door and window, and the name of the Master recur in different situations and activate the reader's memory. Each repetition does not have exactly the same meaning as before; the sign is enriched or transformed with new information. The eyes of Farangis are at first agents of enchantment and suspicion, then become, in her narrative, signs of anxiety and tears, and at the end are denied by herself. Makan, too, is an anaphoric character, because his presence is repeated through the memories of others. He is not alive in the present time of the story, but each painting and each narrative brings him back onto the scene. These returns do not produce a single image; the Makan of the people, the Makan of the supervisor, the Makan of Farangis, the Makan of Khodadad, and the Makan of the police differ. Repetition here is not merely an instrument of consolidation, but provides the possibility of comparing different versions of the character. The memory-centered structure of the novel also shows that character has a fundamental link with time. The Farangis of the present narrator judges the young Farangis and at times tries to show her distance from her. Therefore, even a single individual is divided over time into several semiotic forms. Her final sentence can be regarded as a declaration of this very distance: the eyes of the painting perhaps belong to the Farangis of the past, to Makan's conception of her, or to an unrealized possibility, not to the woman who now speaks.

5.9. The Distribution of Information and the Suspension of the Signified

One of the most important achievements of applying Hamon's theory (1972) to this novel is the disclosure of the role of information distribution. Alavi presents the essential information not at the beginning, but stage by stage. First, Makan and the painting are introduced; then the narrator's search for the unknown woman takes shape; Farangis enters late; her name is incomplete and her identity dubious; and her long narrative, too, delays the secret of Makan's exile until the final pages. This delay is not merely an instrument for creating excitement, but keeps the signified of the characters in motion. The quantitative criterion shows that Farangis and Makan have the largest share of the narrative's information, but this information is presented in an asymmetrical manner. Farangis has the most direct speech; Makan has the most indirect presence. The qualitative criterion also foregrounds the difference of sources: the self-narration of "Farangis", the observation of the "supervisor", the recollection of pupils, the judgment of the people, the police report, and the works of art. No source is absolutely neutral. The reader is obliged to compare and judge among them. This system of distribution places the reader in a position similar to the "supervisor", but at the same time provides the possibility of distancing from him. The reader can see the prejudices, the possessive desire, and the interrogation-like method of the "supervisor"—something of which he himself is not always aware. Therefore, the novel constructs two levels of interpretation: the "supervisor" reads Farangis and Makan, and the reader reads the manner of the "supervisor's" reading.

5.10. The Political Semiotics of the Characters

In *Her Eyes*, politics is not merely the theme of the dialogues or the historical background of events; it has penetrated the very manner in which the characters are constructed. The government attempts to control the signified of persons: it introduces the activist as a criminal, the victim as sick, and the official commemoration of the dissident artist as a sign of its own patronage of art. The dossier, the report, the newspaper, and the state ceremony are semiotic apparatuses that rewrite the social character of persons. Against them, art, memory, and oral narrative provide the possibility of semantic resistance. Makan is dangerous precisely because his works produce a signified beyond the control of the government. The people find "their own image" in the paintings, and the exhibition becomes a space of collective gathering and interpretation (Alavi, 1952, p. 6). "Farangis", too, becomes political when she moves beyond the position of the beautiful image and the privileged daughter and employs her social privileges in the service of saving others. Nevertheless, the politics of the novel does not produce a pure and contradiction-free morality; every action is carried out within a network of fear, privilege, desire, and compulsion. Even silence has two different political meanings. The silence of Makan under interrogation is resistance; the silence of the people at the beginning of the novel is a sign of suffocation and fear. The silence of Farangis is at times the keeping of a secret and at times an inability to act. From a semiotic perspective, the meaning of silence is determined not by the absence of a word, but by the position of the speaker and his relation to power.

5.11. Art, the Gaze, and the Ethics of Interpretation

The novel establishes a deep link between painting and narration. The painter and the narrator both attempt to represent the other; one with color and line, the other with words. Both choose what to foreground and what to efface. Makan, in the painting, fades the entire face except the eyes; the "supervisor", in the narrative, organizes the life of Makan around the woman who owns the eyes; and "Farangis", in her confession, reconstructs Makan from the angle of her own personal experience. No representation is neutral. This issue also has an ethical dimension. Is knowing the other a license to appropriate his story? The "supervisor", despite his sincere affection for the "Master", places Farangis under pressure and demands the truth at the price of the painting. Makan, too, fixes Farangis in an image that the woman does not regard as her own. "Farangis", in her turn, defines the narrative of Makan without the possibility of his reply. The novel asks the reader, alongside the eagerness to discover the secret, to also see the possible violence of interpretation. Hence "These eyes are not mine" is not merely "Farangis's" protest against a painting; it is the protest of the character against every reading that claims to possess the whole of her truth. Hamon's theory, by emphasizing the instability of the signified, provides the possibility of hearing this protest. Character is the product of signs, but no set of signs necessarily places her completely and finally at the disposal of the interpreter.

6. Research Findings

The analysis conducted shows, first, that the system of characters in the novel rests upon the displacement and overlapping of types of

character. Makan is both a social referential character and an anaphoric character; the “supervisor” is a deictic character and an intra-textual reader; and Farangis, with the beginning of her own narrative, shifts from object of inquiry to deictic of the knowledge of Makan. This flexibility carries the characters beyond rigid classifications.

Second, the central signifier of the novel is “the eyes”, but its signification is deliberately kept multiple. The title of the painting, the pronoun “-sh” (her), the description of the gaze, the repetition of the eyes, and the final sentence form a network that simultaneously preserves formal unity and semantic openness. Names and epithets also regulate the social and evaluative position of the characters; the epithet “Master”, the title “supervisor”, and the ironic name “Aram” are clear examples.

Third, the signified of the characters is the product of the differences among sources of information. Farangis has the greatest possibility of self-narration, but her speech is mixed with memory and the desire for self-defense. Makan has the least direct speech and the most indirect reconstruction. The “supervisor” organizes the information, but is a fallible interpreter. As a result, no main character is constructed from a single, definitive source.

Fourth, the physiognomic, psychological, social, and symbolic levels operate in an interwoven manner. The eyes of Farangis, the sick body of Khodadad, the silence of Makan, and the elegance of “Colonel Aram” are simultaneously individual features and social codes.

Fifth, the political structure of the novel is identical with its semiotic structure: tyranny, in order to control persons, distorts their meaning, and resistance, too, takes place through the preservation or reproduction of meaning.

Readings of *Her Eyes* have often concentrated on two axes: the failed love of Farangis and Makan, and the representation of political tyranny. Both axes are essential for understanding the novel, but if the characters are regarded merely as psychological specimens or direct representatives of classes and political forces, an important part of the narrative subtlety of the work is overlooked. Farangis is not merely a woman in love or a transformed aristocrat; she is a sign whose name is revealed late, whose face is seen in the form of a painting before her presence, and whose signified fluctuates among selfishness, sacrifice, guilt, courage, and passivity. Makan, too, is not merely a militant artist; he is a character whose presence the novel produces chiefly through absence, silence, and the works that remain of him.

Table 1. The Correspondence of the Components of Hamon’s Theory (1972) with the System of Characters in *Her Eyes*

Theoretical Component	Concise Definition	Function in the Novel
Types of character	Referential; deictic or shifter; anaphoric and repetitive	Makan: referential and anaphoric; “supervisor”: deictic; Farangis: object and then deictic of the narrative
Signifier of character	Name, epithet, pronoun, visual and auditory description, related objects	“Master”, “supervisor”, the unknown woman, the pronoun “-sh” (her) in <i>Her Eyes</i> , the painting, the gaze and silence
Signified of character	Speech, behavior, the judgment of others, the quantitative and qualitative criteria of information	The self-narration of Farangis versus the indirect reconstruction of Makan and the fallible interpretation of the supervisor
Levels of description	Physiognomic, psychological, social, and symbolic	The eyes of Farangis; the silence of Makan; the sick body of Khodadad; the elegance and concealed violence of “Colonel Aram”

7. Conclusion

A reading of *Her Eyes* based on Hamon’s theory (1972) shows that the power of characterization in the novel lies not in offering a complete and transparent account of persons, but in organizing the process of knowing them. The characters are constructed gradually, through scattered and at times contradictory signifiers. The painting, the name, the pronoun, silence, memory, political action, the social setting, and the speech of others each shape part of the signified, but none alone owns the truth. Farangis stands at the center of this process. She is at first a voiceless image and an “unknown woman”, then acquires a name, speaks, and takes the narrative of her own life into her hands. Even so, speaking, too, does not turn her into a definitive meaning. The contradiction between pride and sacrifice, fear and daring, love and selfishness, keeps her character alive. Her final sentence is her resistance to the image that another has constructed of her. Makan, too, despite his absence, has a pervasive presence through his works and memories; but his silence and death do not allow the narratives of others about him to be finally confirmed or rejected. The “supervisor”, as a relay character, makes the reader a partner in the process of inquiry and at the same time reveals the limits of this inquiry. He gathers the signs meticulously, but is not immune to prejudice and the desire to appropriate the truth. From this perspective, the novel, more than giving a final answer about the secret of a painting or the story of a love, calls into question the ethics of reading the other. Ultimately, the application of Hamon’s theory to this novel makes clear that *Her Eyes* is a novel about the distance between image and human being, sign and meaning, and seeing and knowing. Alavi’s great work, by turning character into an interpretive problem, compels the reader to reflect not only on Farangis and Makan, but on his own manner of judgment. The richness of the novel lies in this point: that after the confession ends and the story closes, the eyes still look at the reader and push away their own ultimate signified.

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