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THE RETROSPECTIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE PLOT SYSTEM OF THE  
NOVELLA “SARVIQOMAT DILBARIM”

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**Anotation:** This article provides in-depth theoretical information on the method of retrospect, its interpretation, purpose and objectives and the role and significance of this method in the plot system of Chingiz Aytmatov’s “Sarviwomat dilbarim”.

**Key words:** retrospect, flashback, analeps, analepsis, prospectus, flashpoward, proleps.

**Аннотация:** В данной статье представлена глубокая теоретическая информация о методе ретроспективы, его интерпретации, цели и задачи, а также о роли и значении этого метода в сюжетной системе “Сарвикомат дилбарим” Чингиз Айтматова.

**Ключевые слова:** ретроспектива, флэшбэк, аналепс, аналепсис, проспект, флэшповард, пролапс.

### Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, the concept of “gaze into the past” is known in three primary senses: retrospection (retrospect), flashback, analepsis. Each term has its antonymic counterpart denoting a “gaze into the future”: retrospection – propection, flashforward, analepsis – prolepsis.[1]

Propection develops the plot forward, while retrospection unfolds it backward.[2]

The theory of artistic retrospection is complex and diverse in composition, content, and form, constituting a rich creative-aesthetic phenomenon. Alongside its role as a plot device, retrospection primarily serves as one of the fundamental principles of plot construction, enabling a vivid connection between past and present; it is a widely employed literary technique.[3] More precisely in scholarly terms, retrospection is “a consistently distinctive method of planning the chronology of events, a compositional device that creates opportunities to expand prior history and clarify circumstances.”[4]

Retrospection (from Latin *retro*- ‘backward’ and *specto* ‘I look’) refers to a turn to the past, the mental reconstruction and contemplation of events that occurred over a specific period. As a literary term, retrospection is used in two main senses: 1) a scene (episode) drawn from the past; 2) a narrative style.

In a literary work, retrospection is applied at the compositional level, in the author’s position, in character portrayal, and in expressive-descriptive means. At the compositional level, it ensures the illumination of a particular element in the work (when it becomes necessary to recall an important event related to the plot). The author’s use of retrospection in the work prompts readers not only to focus on events but also on characters. In character portrayal, retrospection encompasses their dreams, thoughts, and memories.



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The primary functions of retrospection include revealing a character's past life and background, facilitating understanding and evaluation of their personality, influencing the character's present life based on past events, and thereby intensifying plot development.

The technique of retrospection holds significant importance in the plot system of a literary work. In particular, world literature contains works whose plots are constructed entirely on retrospection. This is vividly illustrated in the novella *Sarviqomat dilbarim* by the great Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov. The author describes the work as "a novella consisting of two stories." This is because the plot is built upon the "Driver's Story" and the "Passenger Master's Story." Furthermore, in the section "In Lieu of a Preface," the author elaborates on the real-life incident that gave rise to the novella's plot.

The novella *Sarviqomat dilbarim* is written entirely based on the retrospective technique. Its plot is constructed from the past events of the author (in the preface), the driver (Ilyos), and the passenger master (Boytemir). In the preface, the author explains how, in the course of his journalistic profession, he became acquainted with the driver Ilyos, one of the novella's protagonists. Throughout the writing process, the author effectively employs retrospection to poignantly depict the fates of Ilyos and Boytemir, as well as other characters, and their past experiences.

The plot is grounded in real-life events, as evidenced by the following excerpt from the novella:

"... after much deliberation, I arrived at the conclusion that I should write the novella exactly as I heard it in life. I heard this story from two people, which is why the novella consists of two stories. They are the experiences of those two individuals. I am writing only what I heard. It would be best if the characters themselves narrated it."

By presenting these thoughts in the preface, the author further demonstrates that the novella's plot emerges from retrospection—namely, the characters' recounting of their pasts and the events they endured. The main plot events begin with Ilyos, one of the protagonists, narrating his past experiences. The following excerpt from the novella confirms this:

"... All of this happened unexpectedly. At that time, I was serving in a motorized unit and had just returned from the army. Before enlisting, I had completed ten years of schooling and worked as a driver. I was raised in an orphanage. My friend Alibek Jonturin had been discharged a year earlier and was working at the auto base in Ribache. After my service, I went straight to that auto base."[5]

The retrospective technique helps readers gain deeper insight into the characters. Through the excerpt above, we become closely acquainted with Ilyos, one of the central figures—his identity, profession, and living conditions. The role of retrospection here is invaluable.

The plot of *Sarviqomat dilbarim* also incorporates numerous internal retrospections ("story within a story"). That is, as characters narrate their pasts, they recount additional events. For instance, Ilyos recalls the pivotal incident in his fate as follows:



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“One day, I was transporting slate to the collective farm for a new barn. The village was located at the foot of the mountains, and the road ran along the steppe beside the slope. The truck was moving smoothly; the road was clear. But just as I was nearing the village, the truck suddenly got stuck in a ditch... I had to crawl under the vehicle. Covered in mud, sweating profusely, and cursing the road with every word that came to mind, I heard footsteps approaching... My anger flared. What was there to watch—like a circus?!

‘Keep moving, old woman!’ I said to her...

But she replied:

‘I am not an old woman!’

‘Then who are you?’ I snapped.

‘I am a girl.’

‘A girl?..’

‘Are you beautiful?’ I asked.”

This event marks Ilyos’s first encounter with Asal (his future wife). Each retrospection in the novella serves a specific purpose and function, enabling readers to intimately understand the characters’ personalities, appearances, inner worlds, and the events that altered their destinies. In particular, the following descriptions help readers visualize the characters:

“I looked, and indeed, there stood a slender girl with seriously furrowed brows, large eyes—likely her father’s—and a red-beaded vest thrown over her shoulders.”

“Her jet-black, fine, and soft hair fell in ringlets to her neck. The vest had slipped from her shoulders, and she held it with her elbow... Though her gaze was serious, her overall appearance radiated kindness and sincerity. Her face was like the moon, her complexion clear.”

These portraits, conveyed through Ilyos’s perspective, describe Asal and bring the character to life in the reader’s imagination. Similar retrospective descriptions of characters abound in the novella; another example follows: “He was still young, around thirty, slightly stooped but tall. His sturdy, calloused hands gripping the steering wheel, his melancholic, pensive eyes, and his drooping eyelids from fatigue and weariness remained etched in my memory.”

Through this retrospective portrayal, the author vividly sketches Ilyos’s appearance for the reader. Such descriptions greatly assist readers in visualizing the character and embodying their image. When readers can see a character’s external appearance and imagine it, they accompany that character throughout the work—not only perceiving their outer form but also sharing their inner world and emotional turmoil. They laugh when the character laughs and weep when the character weeps. A work achieves true artistic stature only when it evokes such profound impact on every reader.

Another example of a retrospective description of a character’s appearance:

“He was two years older than me. He was a sturdy fellow with a large head; though young, he was thoughtful, serious, and steady—an excellent driver.”



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In this passage, Ilyos describes not only the physical appearance of his close friend Alibek Jonturin but also his character traits. Retrospective expressions further enable readers to gain intimate knowledge of a character's disposition and personality. In the following excerpt, Ilyos recalls his colleague Jontoy: "I did not like him. He was an extremely stingy, cunning, and envious fellow. Unlike others, he did not live in the dormitory. He rented a room from some woman. Rumor had it he had promised to marry her—so he would at least have a home."

Upon reading this, the reader forms a clear image of Jontoy's inner character and recognizes him as a negative figure. Ilyos's thoughts about Jontoy sharply delineate his selfish, duplicitous nature.

Such retrospective portrayals are abundant in the work and aid readers in deeply understanding the characters. Further confirmation appears in the following excerpt: "Xadicha knew her own worth and sensed others' admiring glances. She knew how to conduct herself and did not easily allow just anyone to approach her. Even now, she stood nonchalantly, as if challenging someone to try dousing her and see if she would yield. Stretching her booted legs, biting her heels, and smiling, she pinned her hair. Fine, silver-like water droplets fell over her head. The young men laughed uproariously, teasing the fellow on the cabin roof.

'Douse Xadicha!'

'Give it a good one!'

'He can't do it!'

'Run, Xadicha!'

The young man lacked the courage; he merely played with the gushing stream, raising and lowering it. If I had been in his place, I would have drenched her from head to toe—and she would have said nothing to me, just laughed it off. I am not saying this out of boastfulness. I always sensed that Xadicha treated me differently from others. When speaking with me, she was gentler, almost shy. She even enjoyed it when I teased her lightly or stroked her head. I loved how she would argue and quarrel with me, only to surrender immediately—even when I was wrong. I would barge straight into the dispatcher's room to see her, while others addressed her only through the window."

In this passage, Ilyos expresses his thoughts about Xadicha, another character. The function of this retrospective expression is to inform the reader about Xadicha's personality, behavior, and attitude toward Ilyos. Had the author omitted this retrospective episode, the reader would never comprehend Xadicha's purpose in the work or her inner world.

**Conclusion.** In summary, the role and significance of the retrospective technique in the plot system of Chingiz Aitmatov's novella *Sarvqomat dilbarim* are immeasurable. Every retrospective event in the work helps readers grasp the essence and purpose of the novella more clearly and empathize deeply with each character's plight.



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