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“All I See is through His Gaze!” Female Characters through a Male Gaze in Modern Persian Fiction

By Ronak Karami¹

Abstract

Between the late 1960s and 1970s, Iran's growing contact with the West aroused many contradictions, inner conflicts, and extravagancies. People could not stand the rapid transformations in the society and particularly in women's situation that arose due to modernization. By this time, male novelists indicated all their inner tensions in the shape of a woman they created in their stories. This paper focuses on a notable modern Persian fiction, *Prince Ehtejab* by Houshang Golshiri that was first published in 1969. The author aims, at first, demonstrating how Golshiri uses the four female characters to, in effect, introduce the male narrator and second, analyzing how these four female characters are shown to the reader through the male protagonist's gaze. The male gaze refers to the sexist attitude of an image: the depiction of women regarding male or masculine preferences. Where of Houshang Golshiri created works that incorporated the literature of the world and adapted modern western literary styles of writing, this essay employs the western approach of the male gaze. It analyzes one Persian fiction, going through names, symbols, settings, comparisons, and contrasts to show the way the male narrator and the readers see the female characters. It depicts not only the torments of women but also how their torments are represented from a male gaze, which imparts a different perspective to readers.

Keywords: Male Gaze, Houshang Golshiri, Prince Ehtejab, Modern Persian Literature, Female Characters

Introduction

Houshang Golshiri and his Masterwork Prince Ehtejab

Similar to other branches of art, literature has been under the domination of male-centered ideology in Iran. During 1920-78, Persian literary masterpieces have been most of the time known to be written by male writers. Even those who have written stories about female conflicts have depicted women through a male gaze, either that of a central male character or the writer himself. The famous modern Persian writer Houshang Golshiri, who wrote many works of fiction about women's struggles, is not excluded from this fact and introduced women mostly through a male narrative description. His masterwork, *Shazdeh Ehtejab (Prince Ehtejab)*, involves four important female characters that have been demonstrated to the reader through the similarities and differences that the narrator, Khosro Ehtejab, attributes to them. This paper aims first at explaining how the writer uses the four female characters to, in effect, introduce the male narrator-Khosro

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Ehtejab-and second, analyzing how these four female characters are shown to the reader through a male gaze. Before analyzing the novella, one needs to know Houshang Golshiri's style of writing and the historical background in which the novella was written.

The period during which Prince Ehtejab was published, was a historically controversial one for Iranian people. "As Iran began to have increasing contact with the West, many sectors of the population especially intellectuals, minorities, clerics, and women became increasingly aware of their nation's problems." (Nafisi, 2003, 983). The 1906 constitutional revolution in Iran was accompanied by a cultural revolution which introduced new literary forms to the country such as drama, novel, music, and film (Nafisi, 2003, 983) and, at the same time, aroused many contradictions, inner conflicts, and extravagancies (Kar, 1992, 17). Following western culture, Iranian women started to gain their social rights during the late 1960s and 1970s. These efforts, however, were being used as an advertisement to display the monarchy's pretentious intellectuality (Kar, 1992, 14), and eventually turned to a huge concern for men: they could not stand the rapid transformations in the society and particularly in women's situation that arose due to modernization. Consequently, by this time, which was also a period of social, cultural, and political upheaval, male novelists' indicated all their inner tensions in the shape of a woman they created in their stories (Nafisi, 2003, 987-988). Golshiri's novella *Prince Ehtejab*, in both structure and content, incorporates those modern Iranian conflicts and represents "a vague hostility and mistrust towards the new reality called the Western world which colors the images of its women more than any other image." (Nafisi, 2003, 992).

Houshang Golshiri was one of the most celebrated Iranian modern fiction writers who influenced Persian prose during the 20th century (Taheri, 2004, 96) in a way that it orientated itself more towards controversial Iranian issues in the modern time such as religion, politics, and women's situation (Nafisi, 2003, 987-990). Golshiri became famous for his novella, *Shazdeh Ehtejab (Prince Ehtejab)*, "which is a tortured journey of self-realization through the remembrance of past events (Yavari, 2002, 6). If one intends to name the top five Iranian modern novels, *Prince Ehtejab* will be one of them for both structure and content (Taheri, 2004, 97). The novella was first published in 1969, adapted into a screenplay in 1974, and translated into English and French. "Golshiri's skillful exploitation of stream of consciousness narration converts this story of outer actions into a drama of the life of the mind" (Yavari, 2002, 6), in a way that time keeps no order and the reader learns about the incidents that happened at different times within a symmetric view (Hosseini, 2001, 81). He writes with a poetic diction and without a pause, just as words come to his mind, and each word may contain several meanings depending on personal experiences (Hosseini, 2001, 86-90). Moreover, Golshiri illustrates how a writer can take modern western forms and blend them with Persian culture (Taheri, 2004, 92). "His writings are distinguished by their complex structure, vivid language, and subtle manipulations of narrative time." (Yavari, 2002, 8). The reader can start reading not necessarily from the beginning, but from any part s/he desires since it enfolds neither traditional coherence nor unity (Taheri, 2004, 41).

Besides analyzing Houshang Golshiri's style of writing, critics discuss the way he displays female characters in his fictions. Ghahraman Shiri² proclaims in *The magic of killing genies* that "although some feminist critics accused Houshang Golshiri of being a misogynist, ³he was one of the writers who displayed women's real conditions in Iran." (Shiri, 2016, 179). According to the critic, despite traditional Iranian writers who were interested in depicting an ideal woman, Golshiri portrayed a realistic picture of a modern woman in his country (Shiri, 2016, 176). In other words,

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³ Mostly because he portrays female characters as subordinate and passive in his works

instead of portraying a fixed, clichéd image of women, Golshiri represented female characters in his fictions the way one might deal with them in the society (Shiri, 2016, 173). Howsoever, since the reality was male-dominated and male-centered in Iran, the writer still seemed interested in an ideal aesthetic picture of a woman, which he integrated with erotic descriptions (Shiri, 2016, 177). That is, similar to many modern Iranian writers, Golshiri seemed stuck between two realities due to Iran's growing contact with the West⁴, "one, the vanishing culture of the past with its unified and hierarchical view of women; the other, the modern Western-oriented culture of the present with its doubting, ironic view of the world and its fast-changing view of women." (Nafisi, 2003, 991). Accordingly, he seemed to demonstrate contemporary, prevailing male views about the circumstances and the modernization of women by portraying them either unreachable or subordinated and accessible (Shiri, 2016 173-179).

As far as the writing of the novella is concerned, Golshiri claimed that his work took a greater effort on the grounds that he was dealing with many lively characters who needed to be connected in a plausible way (Taheri, 2004, 35). Accordingly, Golshiri created works that incorporated the literature of the world and maintained its Iranian authenticity simultaneously (Taheri, 2004, 89-96). *Prince Ehtejab* cannot be analyzed merely within some pages since it requires a thorough knowledge of Iranian literature and history. Critics discussed that Golshiri poses questions that need profound considerations not only in its own time but also for posterities. In fact, he knew that if he answered each question, his work would not find its way to the future (Taheri, 2004, 124).

The Male Gaze

In the 1980s, feminist critics began to discuss the fact that an individual of any sex would perceive a piece of art, including literature, through a male gaze (Korsmeyer, 2017). 'The male gaze' is one of the key terms in the feminist philosophy of art, which was first developed by Laura Mulvey to analyze films, but then adopted by the critics and historians of visual arts (Eaton, 2008, 877-78). The critical term refers to the androcentric attitude of an image and its depiction of women concerning male or masculine interests or values. That is to say, it presents the female as a primarily passive object for heterosexual, male erotic gratification (Eaton, 2008, 878). The theories of the gaze reject the separation of desire from pleasure, reinstating the erotic gaze into the core of beauty (Korsmeyer, 2004, 53). Hence, "women are assigned the passive status of being-looked-at, whereas men are the active subjects who look." (Korsmeyer, 2004, 53). This influences the way people think about themselves and the world through the presentation of subject matter (Korsmeyer, 2004, 53). Accordingly, feminist critics suggest people consider the power of vision and that a masculine viewpoint should not stand as the standard of art (Korsmeyer, 2004, 54). "One can posit that structurally gender is at work in the difference between the passive object of perception and the active perceiver." (Korsmeyer, 2004, 56-57). This essay aims to analyze *Prince Ehtejab*, going through settings, names, symbols, comparisons, and contrasts in order to show the way that both the male narrator and the reader see the female characters. Moreover, it elaborates on how a writer uses four female characters to introduce the male protagonist, prince Ehtejab, to the reader.

Even though *Prince Ehtejab* is a prominent modern Persian fiction, few feminist critics have viewed the novella separately in their analytic essays since such literary works are published in Iran under a great deal of censorship. The author aims at, first, demonstrating how Golshiri uses the four female characters to, in effect, introduce the male narrator and second, analyzing how

⁴ Mainly from 1925 until 1979

these four female characters are shown to the reader through the male protagonist's gaze. Whereof Houshang Golshiri created works that incorporated the literature of the world and adapted western modern literary styles of writing (Taheri, 2004, 89-96), this essay breaks *Prince Ehtejab* down through the western approach of the male gaze. First, in order to help the reader understand the analyses and assertions later made in this essay, a study of the setting and the time order is required. Afterward, the essay introduces each female character through the male narrator's view and shows how the reader of the fiction is only provided with physical descriptions that are mostly erotic. Moreover, certain words such as breast, deer, horse, and eyes, which are repeated throughout the story and are attributed to female characters, along with the symbolic meanings of these characters' names are discussed. As a result, regarding the feminist philosophy of art and the male gaze, the reader of the paper would go beyond the surface and understand "how a work invites appreciative points of view, but that point of view is not necessarily adopted." (Korsmeyer, 2004, 54).

The Female Characters, Symbols, and Name Representations in *Prince Ehtejab* Through a Male Gaze

A Summary of Prince Ehtejab

The story of *Prince Ehtejab* begins at the time a prince named Ehtejab arrives home. The reader would find neither an organized time sequence nor a specific order of events. It contains many different symbols and ironies, even in the supposedly straightforward statements. Apparently, the story is happening within one night, but we will go through the whole life of Prince Ehtejab by his fragmentary thoughts and memories. He is sitting in a room full of his royal family's paintings, remembering every detail he had heard about his aristocratic ancestors or every incident he, himself, had experienced. Towards the end, the point of view flies from third person omniscient to first person, then to third person limited in a circle. "A collection of inherited clocks comes to life in the story and sounds the death knell for the prince as well as in the era of which he is the last bedraggled relic." (Yavari, 2002, 6). The Prince, who lives with his wife, Fakhr-o-Nesa, and a maidservant, Fakhri, is the last person in this kingly chain. His ancestors ruled with full power over people, and now it is the prince's turn to take his part. Nonetheless, his concern is not to rule over the society, but to dominate the two women in his household. His brutal behavior toward these two women is an indication of aristocratic masculine tyranny towards a society (Taheri, 2004, 99). One cannot be sure whether the women are illusionary characters in prince Ehtejab's mind or real ones in his house. They both seem to have a connection to Ehtejab's past, and through these connections, the prince tries to know himself. Then, gradually the narrator illustrates Ehtejab's whole pedigree as he describes them in his childhood. In the end, Prince Ehtejab hears about his own death from one of his former servants, henceforth comes darkness.

The Setting and the Main Characters

Arriving home in the middle of the night, prince Ehtejab goes straight to a 'dark room' filled with a 'septic smell' where he seeks refuge every time he feels that 'ancestral fever' (Golshiri, 1978, 6-7). The darkness can be a resemblance of the unconscious itself or of the male psyche with all those miscellaneous antique items (old memories) inside it. Then the reader gets to know two women he keeps in his house (or his unconscious): Fakhr-o-Nesa, a slim, pale, cold-hearted woman that is Ehtejab's cousin and wife at the same time and Fakhri, a fleshy, jolly, young maidservant with wild black eyes (Golshiri, 1978, 7). When the prince comes back by midnight, they both drift

in so that they show their attendance and affection towards him. In response, he knocks the floor with his feet and scares them away (Golshiri, 1978, 6). "Fakhri remained inside the kitchen, but then, she headed upstairs into his room since she could not help worrying. However, as the prince started to knock the floor with his feet, she ran away to her room, sitting in front of the mirror, awaiting the smallest sound from upstairs, so that maybe the prince would step down the stairs and call her name." (Golshiri, 1978, 6). In the first parts of the book, the narrator introduces these two women as two separate characters. Little by little, he describes Fakhr-o-Nesa's acts as though he is uncertain of her existence: "wearing the same white dress which was waved by wrinkles down to her breasts, Fakhr-o-Nesa was standing beside the carriage, looking through her glasses, or not!" (Golshiri, 1978, 8) Further, these two women are shown as one and the point of view shifts from line to line and character to character so much that the reader gets baffled through the dialogues. Gradually, therefore, the reader comes to realize that the two women are somehow stuck in Ehtejab's house, i.e., in his psyche.

Fakhr-o-Nesa and Prince Ehtejab's Mother

Now let us discuss the way Ehtejab characterizes his wife, Fakhr-o-Nesa, who always looks at him through her glasses and seemingly does not have the smallest affection towards anything but their forebear's diaries (Golshiri, 1978, 8-9). Fakhr-o-Nesa covers her beautiful eyes with glasses as if there is a border between her and the prince. She is noble and delicate, covered with a lacing white dress (Golshiri, 1978, 7-8). In addition, her name, which suggests glory and pride, has an aristocratic connotation. While probing the family antiques, Fakhr-o-Nesa gently strikes a crystal glass with her white, delicate fingers, which reflects the voice of their ancestors through Ehtejab's ears (Golshiri, 1978, 10). In fact, she is a bridge to prince's predecessors: she sets the family clocks, reads their diaries, and scolds the prince with a sarcastic tone for not following their ancestors (Golshiri, 1978, 8-11). There is a sense of tension between the couple as if the prince does not let himself have sexual desires for her and whenever they intend to make love it has to be in the darkness (Golshiri, 1978, 11-12). Her one single role in the prince's life is to wear makeups, have supper beside him, and wait for him in her bed at night (Golshiri, 1978, 6).

The narrator describes Fakhr-o-Nesa as "a cold-weighted object between the prince's hands" when she sarcastically tells him, "he is way behind their ancestors in pleasure-seeking" (Golshiri, 1978, 12). Moreover, when Golshiri speaks of his own view towards Fakhr-o-Nesa, he points out that prince Ehtejab is trying to know himself through this woman since she seems to have power over him (Taheri, 2004, 68). She is the ethereal woman who is not fully understood, and one might see her in Persian miniatures (Taheri, 2004, 73). The ethereal woman that is present in Persian miniatures represents the ideal female object that a male spectator wishes to own or, based on Carl Jung's⁵ analytical psychology, the Anima⁶ that is stuck in the darkness and shadow of Ehtejab's mind.

"When one gazes into the dark, one knows there might be mysteries in there, but she/he does not know of what kind and that is why there are many things going on in the dark. I always knew she was sitting behind the window into the dark the nights I came home late. Into the dark... looking at darkness... or maybe she was closing her eyes the whole time or maybe she was sleeping..." (Golshiri, 1978, 87-88).

⁵ A Swiss psychoanalyst (1875-1961)

⁶ The feminine part of a man's unconscious

Through the story, the reader finds out about Ehtejab's mother who seems passive with her diminutive existence in the prince's life. She shares some differences and similarities in appearance with Fakhr-o-Nesa according to the protagonist's descriptions. Ehtejab has no vivid memory of his mother and her role is not noteworthy in comparison to his father and grandfather during his childhood. He does not recall much about his mother, except for the fact that she was crying most of the time, unlike Fakhr-o-Nesa who smiles elegantly very often (Golshiri, 1978, 32). Both women are delicate and slim with small white hands (Golshiri, 1978, 26-27). The mother wears a long, black lace veil while the wife is always in a long, white lace dress (Golshiri, 1978, 26-27). However, the first time that the prince runs into Fakhr-o-Nesa, he finds her in a long, black dress (Golshiri, 1978, 74). Thus, it seems as if the prince has created a woman in his unconscious based on certain resemblances and dissimilarities to his mother in order to satisfy the injured feelings due to the absence of the mother. This is illustrated by how Fakhr-o-Nesa sarcastically addresses him when he meets her after the death of his mother: "so, now that your mother has passed away and you find yourself alone, you remember to stop by and meet your fiancé..." (Golshiri, 1978, 34). The reader only gets to cognize Fakhr-o-Nesa through Ehtejab's eye and he, too, describes this woman as a projection of his mother's image. The prince recalls the time he was engaged to Fakhr-o-Nesa; however, there is no remembrance of a wedding day or of marriage. In fact, we are not even sure whether she is actually his wife or just an image that he has built to solace his malaise.

Overall, the reader is dealing with a motherless, patriarchal society. In a sense that, the aristocratic society in this story does not have a mother: even the mother is a subaltern of her son. Ehtejab's grandfather shot his own mother since she wanted to marry someone (Golshiri, 1978, 16). Fakhr-o-Nesa's mother or the prince's aunt was offered to someone out of gratitude and courtesy by her brother (Ehtejab's grandfather), as a present. Thereupon, when the relationship between these two men gets intense, the grandfather fiats to have her sister back even though she is pregnant (Golshiri, 1978, 69-71). Thus, Fakhr-o-Nesa's mother obeys what she is told and leaves her infant: "The lady is not to blame. The royal highness directed the divorce and she accepted as he wished" (Golshiri, 1978, 69). Although the grandmother appears to be the head of all the women in this family, she, too, is dependent and passive as Ehtejab describes her in a picture: "Grandmother held her white wedding gown back so that it would not grasp the dust of her picture frame. When she saw her one and only dear son's inattention, she spread her gown again and turned her head towards the grandfather, who was ignorantly smoking a cigar." (Golshiri, 1978, 21). The idea of 'the absence of the mother' in the story becomes more vivid when the grandmother asks rhetorically "what is the use of a mother anyway?" (Golshiri, 1978, 70).

Fakhri and Monirah-Khatoon

Fakhri, the maidservant of the house, looks at the prince from a mirror (Golshiri, 1978, 48), and in comparison to Fakhr-o-Nesa, has much more affection towards prince Ehtejab. Her name is an incomplete form of Fakhr-o-Nesa, which, to some degree, suggests the idea of classicism (the poor servant is a malformation of the wealthy woman). Meanwhile, this explicates the reason why Ehtejab imagines Fakhri imperfect and his concern is to use her to simulate Fakhr-o-Nesa (or the hallucination of his mother). Unlike his cold feelings towards the lady of the house, the prince has a strong sexual emotion for Fakhri. The maidservant opens ways for the prince to elude his past and his family name. She pulls the curtains of the dark room so that the sunlight vitalizes the room (Golshiri, 1978, 7), she solaces and satisfies him in a way Fakhr-o-Nesa is not capable of, and she has more intimacy and devotion for her master than the elegant wife ever has. The prince, on the

other hand, unfolds his sexual acts with Fakhri when he makes her laugh aloud so that Fakhr-o-Nesa's coughing sound smothers in her sound (Golshiri, 1978, 61). In fact, he uses one woman to torture the other.

After Fakhr-o-Nesa's death due to tuberculosis (a normal family sickness) that somehow results in Ehtejab's relief, he tears Fakhri's veil up, starts to make love to her next to the corpse, and forces her to make herself up like Fakhr-o-Nesa from then on. Although Ehtejab does not own a seraglio full of virgins the way his ancestors did, he metamorphoses a woman, which makes him even more oppressive than his grandfather:

“The prince moved his hand among Fakhri's hair and wiped her tears, which were passing through the cheek powder on her face, with his thumb: from now on, this is Fakhri's job. You are the mistress of the house. Got it? She is the one who must wash the dishes and clean the rooms. She should then laugh loud and go hide in the kitchen as I tickle her.” (Golshiri, 1978, 28).

The prince, then, beats Fakhri when she does not obey in making herself up like Fakhr-o-Nesa. He finds peace and pleasure in putting his head between Fakhri's breasts and falls asleep in that position. Tracing this back to the prince's childhood, the reader realizes that he had experienced the same sexual position with one of his grandfather's wives, Monirah-Khatoon, who represents the exact image of Fakhri.

Although Monirah-Khatoon is an important character in the story, Ehtejab does not refer to her much. Like Fakhri, she is an overweight woman who owns two big, warm breasts, and a pair of big black eyes (Golshiri, 1978, 42-44). Moreover, her name, Monirah, means light and the suffix, Khatoon, bears a noble connotation. One would not figure out anything about the characteristics of this woman except through Ehtejab's descriptions, which are merely sexual and relate how she starts to undress the prince whenever she finds him alone and rubs his hands on her breasts while asking if he likes this game. Finding this out, Ehtejab's grandfather shaves Monirah-khatoon's long, black hair and hangs her by nailing hands on a wall, making her insane for good (Golshiri, 1978, 45-47). Since this catastrophe is too hard to digest, the prince might have dispatched it to the deepest section of his unconscious. Then, prince Ehtejab narrates how he goes to meet Monirah-khatoon when she lives in a cellar after being tortured. “Monirah-khatoon was standing by a laver. Her hair was as short as a little boy. Wearing a flowery dress, she was stirring the water inside the laver.” (Golshiri, 1978, 76-77). What the prince notices is how the reflection of her face on the water turns to pieces every time she stirs it, which can be a representation of her sanity or physical feminine beauty that was smashed and ruined by her husband. Apparently, she satisfies her sexual desires with a little boy as her husband owns a seraglio and does not have enough time for each woman (Taheri, 2004, 76). Based on the physical similarities, it can be observed that the prince projects the image of Monirah-Khatoon, who had paid so much attention to him during his childhood, on his servant in adulthood. His sexual feelings towards Fakhri seem to be strong since he can feel Monirah-Khatoon's warm and sweaty flesh. Altogether, the reader gets to know Fakhri only by her relationship to the male protagonist and through the way he erotically portrays her.

Repetitive Words and Symbols and their Potential Interpretations (eyes, deer, horse, breast, black and, white)

The fiction has been constructed with a variety of symbols that stand for femininity through a male gaze. For one thing, the constant presence of 'eyes' requires consideration. All those wandering deer, which Ehtejab's grandfather hunts, possess a pair of wild black eyes just like Fakhri and Monirah-khatoon, which could be a representative of the ethereal beauty that the masculine society expects from women. Moreover, 'eyes' may represent insight when the prince asks, "how far can a bird fly if one pours her eyes out?" (Golshiri, 1978, 13). It can also symbolize the gaze (either female or male), i.e., the way both women and men view females. As in the last lines of the fiction when prince Ehtejab mentions a pair of eyes in the dark cellar: "Fakhr-o-Nesa was stepping down and down from all those stairs, all those stairs that lead to the dark cellar and the bloody bedcover and to the eyes that were staring, or not!" (Golshiri, 1978, 95). Ehtejab's aunt, who is Fakhr-o-Nesa's mother as well, is described to have the same pair of spirited, black eyes while she is being referred to as a mother; however, she becomes eyeless while she is being referred to as an aunt (she is beautiful and has an insight into issues only when she is being referred to as a mother). The grandfather's eyes are covered with his eyebrows and are hardly visible, indicating that although everything passes through a male gaze, in Ehtejab's family, men do not have an insight over issues around them as much as women do or even, they appear to be incomplete without the women whom they treat as objects.

In addition, the writer uses the animal 'horse' in order to implicate women; it seems that riding 'a tamed horse' is crucial for men while the narrator remarks, "the grandfather remains a picture, sitting on his throne or a tamed horse or that shapeless smiley flesh" (Golshiri, 1978, 13). Furthermore, the reader learns that while putting Khosro Ehtejab's head between her fleshy breasts for sexual pleasure, Monirah-khatoon repetitively asks if he wants to ride 'a naked horse' (Golshiri, 1978, 44). In another scene, when the prince is praising Fakhr-o-Nesa's physical appearance, she suggests Fakhri instead and advisably says, "Some types of horse do not fully serve. A gifted one can be ridden much better." (Golshiri, 1978, 40). In brief, the significance of the horse, like that of the deer, lies in how they depict the way the masculine community looks at women. In other words, in a man's eye, an ideal woman must be tamed and obedient besides being beautiful.

Women's 'breast' is another predominant symbol; one that has been repeated through the story each time the narrator is referring to a woman. The fact that, through a male gaze, a woman's breasts are not only erotic but also a symbol of love and affection is subtly portrayed in how Ehtejab suffers from the lack of affection from both his mother and his wife, and these two, unlike Monirah-Khatoon and Fakhri, are not only physically feeble but also happen to have tiny breasts. The prince's wish is to sleep between his mistress's breasts, which might demonstrate the idea that he starves for a woman's attention, a woman with the same face and body shape as the one who abused him in his childhood—the one who paid more attention to him than any other woman back then. Besides, Ehtejab's eagerness to huge breasts might represent the male interest in exaggerated female sexual organs. 'Coughs' may symbolize the malady of this male-centered royal family since each male member (in addition to the grandmother and Fakhr-o-Nesa) of the dynasty coughs harshly. The contrast between 'white' and 'black' is present in each character. Both Monirah-Khatoon and Fakhri (to whom the prince feels strong emotions toward) own black eyes, while the aunts possess a pair of white eyes since Ehtejab drags their eyes out in the family pictures. Fakhr-o-Nesa's white dress, which Ehtejab insists on pointing out every time he mentions his wife, can signify an angel-like purity and innocence with which a man imagines his ideal woman. After all, she seems to be a projected image of the mother and of the unearthly woman that the masculine society demands.

Khosro Ehtejab's Name Interpretation and His Death

Another important point to take into account is prince Ehtejab's name interpretation. Khosro, an original Iranian royal name, means a king or an owner of the throne, a person who controls everyone and whose approval is required for everything. Nevertheless, the prince is introduced to the reader by his first name specifically at the time of his childhood. Ironically, he has always been assumed to be the holder of the family's throne while he ruins it all as he grows up. On the contrary, Ehtejab (the family name) means to hide or to cover up, which suggests how the things which pass through Khosro's approval or his eyes, are not vivid. In other words, not everything that the reader learns through the male protagonist's eyes is clear or true; they are covered, concealed, or manipulated. Another assumption would be that the Imperial family was in effect under the cover of their position: being known as great people while being all worthless and bloodthirsty. Besides, the word 'Hijab', of the same lexical root, implicates cover or veil for women and represents the ideal women's purity, dignity, inhibition, and modesty in a patriarchal ideology.

At the end of the story, one of the family servants, whom the prince had dismissed a long time ago, brings the news of Khosro Ehtejab's death, who is the last survival of Ehtejab royal family. Prince Ehtejab seems to deny his death while remembering all his life in disorderly fragments that all lead to darkness. When the servant mentions Khosro Ehtejab's departure, the prince asks, "Who is Ehtejab?" (Golshiri, 1978, 94), as if he does not recognize himself. It can be true that prince Ehtejab's main conflict was that he did not know himself and tried to define his identity through exploring his past, those four women, and his previous generations. The moment the prince hears about his own death, it is death that grants meaning to Ehtejab's life and defines his personage without any affiliation to the past or the future. As one may notice within the last paragraph of the narration, all those women that were discussed in the story together with prince Ehtejab end up in one place: the dark cellar in which Monirah-Khatoon had been tortured. "The stairs were dank and endless. So the prince knew that he could not, that the grandfather could not be fitted inside a body, that Fakhr-o-Nesa was stepping down and down from all those stairs, all those stairs that lead to the dark cellar and the bloody bedcover and to the eyes that were staring, or not!" (Golshiri, 1978, 95).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed a different aspect of male domination, i.e., the male gaze on a modern Persian novella, which has been overlooked by those who wrote critical analysis on it. In other words, the paper has focused on how even the effort to display women suffering passes through a male gaze: in the story of *Prince Ehtejab*, women do not have a voice, and even if the reader realizes how they are being tortured, it would be through the male narrator's view. This condition can be observed in most of the modern Iranian literature like the works of Houshang Golshiri, Sadegh Hedayat, and many others. These works represent a male Iranian psyche and the illusionary portrayal of women from their writer's point of view. Consequently, in modern Iranian novels, women are stuck in a male imagination and are represented through a masculine gaze.

One of the most influential concepts developed in the feminist philosophy of art is the notion of the male gaze, which was first used to discuss films, but then adopted by the critics of literature and visual arts as well. The male gaze refers to the sexist attitude of an image: the depiction of women in terms of male or masculine preferences. In this way, it presents a female as a primarily passive object for male erotic delight. The way women are assigned the role of the passive object of perception, and men are the active perceivers, influences the way people think

about themselves and the world through the presentation of subject matter. What feminist critics recommend is to exploit the power of vision and to understand that a masculine viewpoint should not be the standard for art as it is. Therefore, this paper has worked on a modern Persian novella, *Prince Ehtejab*, through this approach to offer a new, non-androcentric attitude to the reader.

As it was mentioned earlier, in order to understand how the writer uses four female characters to explain the male protagonist's conflicts, tensions, and psyche, this paper has scrutinized *Prince Ehtejab* applying the male gaze approach. To do so, it was essential first to study the setting and the time order as it would help the reader better understand the analyses and assertions later made in the paper. Afterward, certain words and symbols (such as breast, deer, horse, and eyes), which were repeated throughout the story and were attributed to female characters, along with the symbolic meanings of these characters' names were excavated. All of this would help the reader realize how the male narrator connects these women based on their appearances and physical traits, and how he, in fact, 'looks' at them. As a result, the reader of the paper would be made aware of the imposition of an androcentric attitude present in the whole story and be granted a new perspective.

Although *Prince Ehtejab* is one of the most significant modern Persian fictions, it has been the subject of few critical works so far due to the restrictions imposed on publications in Iran. This essay aims at displaying how Golshiri uses the four female characters to introduce the male protagonist. Additionally, it analyzes the way these four female characters are shown to the reader through the male narrator's gaze. Since Houshang Golshiri created works that incorporated the literature of the world and adjusted modern western literary styles of writing, this essay breaks *Prince Ehtejab* down through the western approach of the male gaze. To sum up, analyzing *Prince Ehtejab* in this paper using the male-gaze approach is something more than just an effort to show how women are underestimated: it depicts not only the torments of women but also how their torments are represented from a male gaze, which imparts a different perspective to readers.

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