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The influence of Stefan Zweig on Bozorg Alavi, based on a comparison between Stefan Zweig's *The Royal Game* and *Her Eyes* from Bozorg Alavi

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Abstract

The translation of litrary works will naturally influence the literature and culture of other nations. The literature and culture of Iran has been no exception. The translation of scientific and literary works from other languages into Persian has a long tradition, that doesn't fit into this article. The gradual return of the students during the rule of Reza Shah, who were sent abroad, was the origin of significant developments on a deep acquaintance between the literature and culture of Iran and that of the West. Among this educated class, Bozorg Alavi was one of the people, who has played a significant role in familiarizing us with the western Literature and culture by translating the works of german authors. One of these german authors is the Austrian Stefan Zweig, the influence of whose translated works on the prose literature of Iran is very evident. Bozorg Alavi was the first one to introduce Stefan Zweigs works to the Persian-speaking readers. The following article aims to illuminate the influence of Stefan Zweig on Bozorg Alavi by examining *The Royal Game*, a novella from Stefan Zweig and the Roman *Her Eyes* written by Bozorg Alavi and also by explaining the similarities and differences between these two works.

Keywords: translation, freudism, narrative style, realism, conflict of personalities

1-Introduction

Bozorg Alavi, the iranian author and literate, got during the years of his stay in Germany aquainted with the literary works of European authors and poets and thus came under the influence of Europe's Literature. According to an article, which Hushang Ettehad under the title of „Bozorg Alavi, The Popular Figure of Iranian Contemporary Literature" wrote, could be realized that also in using Realism Alavi has been influenced by well known authors of this school including Stefan Zweig. Alavi himself acknowledges this influence and states that it was due to the influence of the world's great writers that he

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chose this writing style. He used to read their works intensively and with great interest. He adds that Dostoevsky has made a great impact on him and that Stefan Zweig, Arthur Schnitzler and Romain Rolland have taught him a lot (cited in Ettehad, 2005).

He also declares in another place that he devoured eagerly the poetic works from Pushkin, Shakespeare and Moliere to Gerhard Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Zola, Stefan Zweig, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky and dozens of others who had gained reputation in Europe from 1920s to 1930s (Alavi, 2005).

In Iran the presence of Stefan Zweig (1260-1320 came up through the translations of his works. The very many translations done from his works into Persian bear witness to his great popularity among the Persian-speaking readers from the past till to present. Bozorg Alavi is the first to introduce Stefan Zweig to the community of Iranian readers. He published the first translation of Stefan Zweig's works in 1312 under the name of *White Autumnal Flowers* with the nickname „Fereydun Nakhoda" in Donya magazine (Momeni, 2005).

1-1 Problem Statement

Zweigs special look at man and his attempt at showing different aspects of the human spirit are the features, which make his works more attractive. Describing all the events with a psychological analysis and expressing the details from different angles could be accounted as the charachteristics of Zweig's prose, which influence the readers to a great extent. *The Royal Game* is a good example of this style of Zweig's writing, which owns a great fame among all his other works. He wrote this novella in his later years. He, who occasionally attended the lectures of Sigmund Freud, was in this case deeply influenced by his contemporary psychologist. Such a narrative approach can also be seen in Alavi's precious novel, *Her Eyes*, which was written in 1357. He was as well as Zweig influenced by Freud. One can definitely state that Bozorg Alavi was the first one to talk about freudism and defend it in iran. It was he, who introduced Freud and his theories by publishing an article in the Donya magazine and so provoked the debate about this subject in Iran (Khameie, 2005).

1-2 Research Background

According to the searches performed by the writer of this study, there has been no researches carried out into studying and comparing the works of these two authors. However many articles and books have been published about Bozorg Alavi's prose works and their criticism in Iran, among which a collection of articles titled as „In Memory of Bozorg Alavi" is to be mentioned, which has been gathered by Ali Dehbashi; and also the books *Selected Works of Bozorg Alavi* written by Mohammad Baharlu, and *Criticism of Bozorg Alavi's Works* from Abdolali Dastgheib, etc. Though in regard to Stefan Zweig and his works are, in spite of the many published translations of them in Iran, not many studies and researches available. The only research on him and his woks in Iran is an article named *Describing the Characters in Stefan Zweig's Works* which is carried out by Mehri Ghadimi Nouran.

1-3 Research Significance

Despite the fact that Alavi himself has declared his being influenced by Stefan Zweig, there exists no article or published work comparing the similarities and commonalities in the characters and other features in both *Her Eyes* and *The Royal Game* up until now. So the following article has made an attempt to fill this gap by having an exact look at Stefan Zweig's influence on Bozorg Alavi's writing style, which is clearly obvious in both works.

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2- Discussion

2-1 A Thematic Comparison of Her Eyes *and* The Royal Game

The novel *Her Eyes* has been written in the „I"-Form. The actions and all the events are thus presented from the ego-narrator's point of view. Master Makan, the great painter, who is against the dictatorial regime of Reza Shah, dies in exile. One of his paintings in the exhibition of his school has the name „Her Eyes"; the eyes of a woman who is likely to have a secret. The narrator, the schoolmaster and director of the exhibition has a burning curiosity to discover the secret of these eyes. Therefore he strives to find this woman and ask her about her relationship with master Makan. After a few years the schoolmaster finally meets this woman and they talk in her luxurious house about the past. This woman, who is named Farangis, says that she belongs to a wealthy family and attracts the attention of many men due to her beauty. But she thought of her relationships with men just as a means of entertainment and recreation. The only man who didn't pay any attention to her beauty and charm was master Makan. Farangis cooperates with the secret political organizations under Makan's leadership in Tehran in order to attract his attention and gain his love, and thus she finally manages to approach him. But makan neither took her sacrifices serious, nor he realized the depth of her feelings and her fine emotions. Instead he always feels a fear against Farangis, especially her eyes.

In the end Makan gets caught by the Police and Farangis accepts reluctantly the marriage proposal of a chief of police on the condition that he would save Makan's life. Master Makan goes into exile and never realizes what has Farangis for him done and how she sacrificed herself for him. He leaves all his feelings and perceptions towards her in a painting called „Her Eyes". This painting shows in general the image of a mysterious, flighty and fickle woman. But Farangis knows well, that Makan has judged her wrong and that the painted eyes are not hers.

The narrative in the novella *The Royal Game* is also like *Her Eyes* reported from the perspective of an I-narrator, who travels aboard a passenger steamer. There he notices Mirko czentovic, the world chess champion, and when he tells his millionaire friend, McConnor about him, he severely wants to play against Czentovic. The first game against Czentovic ends with their defeat. In the second game a strange gentleman named Dr. B. intervenes in the already almost lost game against the world champion and helps the game to end with a draw. He said the last time he played chess was 25 years ago and he is by no means ready for another game. The narrator meets him the next day and Dr. B. tells him in a friendly talk how he became a good chess player.

Dr B. has been arrested by Gestapo as a wealth administrator of the great monasteries and has been imprisoned in a hotel room whithout any entertainment for months, until he manages to steal a book during an interrogation; a book of past masters' chess games. He begins to play the games in his solitude, memorizes them and ultimately plays against himself, so that he gradually feels poisoned by the chess and thus attacks a guardian and gets seriously injured. The doctor at the hospital deliberately attests his insanity and so brings about his dismissal from imprisonment. He also warns him never to look at a chess board. The narrator, however, persuades him to play once more against Czentovic. Dr. B. agrees, though unwilling, to his request and beats Czentovic in the first game. During the second game he relapses into his former mania as the world champion now intentionally plays so slowly. He feels himself again in his previous detention and shows involuntary behavioural patterns like the time he was imprisoned. The narrator then interrupts the game, awakens him to the danger and brings him back into his normal condition. Dr. B. then apologizes to everyone and swears never to play chess again.

2-2 A comparative Study of Her Eyes *and* The Royal Game

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The two above mentioned works have lots of features in common. In order to examine these similarities in terms of a comparison more exactly, it is necessary to compare the following key factors: The main characters and the story motifs.

2-2-1 The Comparison of the Main Characters

2-2-1-1 Dr. B. and Master Makan

A. Both main characters enjoy a great respect among the folk. Dr. B. belongs to a renowned and noble family. His father is a member of the clerical party, who had a connection with the Austrian imperial house and the clergy. Master Makan has also been one of the greatest painters of Iran in the last century. He was so appreciated by the Iranians, that they would welcome him in every place with a passionate applause, and even the high officials tried to get close to him at the formal public places to increase their popularity.

B. Both figures play their role according to the social and psychological circumstances under which they live. They are not outside the society, and that, what they do because of their social and psychological states, will influence their fate. Both Dr. B. and master Makan were against the prevailing political circumstances in their country and were arrested as a consequence of this. Master Makan led a secret struggle against the dictatorial regime of Reza Shah and was arrested for his political, militant attitude to the regime and was then sent into exile. In *The Royal Game* Dr. B. works in a law firm in the property administration office of the imperial family and the monasteries. In the course of this activity he succeeds in saving the court and the monasteries a certain amount of money from the greed of Hitler and the national socialists. But a spy on the part of the Nazis, who had ensconced himself in their office caused later his arrest by the Gestapo.

C. When master Makan was in exile and Dr. B. imprisoned, they both provided an entertainment for themselves in order to escape the loneliness, pass the time and make their lives more bearable. Master Makan finished the painting titled „Her Eyes“ in exile, and Dr. B. tried to get a handle on the games of the chess book and became ultimately a champion in chess.

D. That, what master Makan during his exile and Dr. B. in prison have done, evokes greatly the wonder and curiosity of others. The people who visit the painting exhibition of master Makan, stay for a long time in front of the painting, on which Makan has written the name „Her Eyes“ with his own handwriting and stare at it so that they could discover the hidden secret of these eyes. But he has made a mistake in his representation of her eyes and has failed to show her eyes as they really are. Dr. B. manages also to amaze everyone on the deck by the skills he has acquired in chess during his captivity. But his continuing to play chess makes his mind crumble and so brings about a neurosis in him, so that he fails to continue playing.

2-2-1-2 The Narrators

In the novel *Her Eyes*, it is the narrator, the schoolmaster, who tries to find the truth about master Makan’s life and find the secret of the painting „Her Eyes“. So he meets Farangis, who has come to visit Makan’s painting exhibition on his death anniversary. There he tries every trick to make her speak. In *The Royal Game* one reads the similar scene there, where the narrator, burning with curosity, asks Dr. B. about his remarkable skill at playing chess and later his life story aboard the ship. It is in fact the curiosity of the narrators and their efforts at finding out the reality, which make these works go further. So it is obvious how similar is the narrative of the two authors.

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2-2-2 Comparison of the motifs

2-2-2-1 The narrative style

The influence of Zweig on Alavi can also be clearly realized by analysing their narrative techniques. In most of Zweig's works there are two narrators who tell the story from the perspective of the first-person singular. *The Royal Game* also begins with the I-narrator perspective. Then another narrator, Dr. B., who also belongs to the figures, continues the narrative, which is an overview of his past life. Bozorg Alavi also uses like Zweig this narrative style in his novel *Her Eyes*. First the schoolmaster tells the story from his point of view, then Farangis appears as the main figure and undertakes the narration of the internal story from the I-narrative perspective. The first narrator actually fulfills his task of introducing the figures to the reader, and then in the further course of the narrative he confines himself to the role of the passive listener, whom the past events are told. In most of Alavi's Works there is an enigma at first. The main event has actually happened before, and the narrator reconstructs the past events by putting different informations together.

2-2-2-2 Psychological Aspects

Bozorg Alavi, who has been [like Zweig] deeply influenced by Freudian psychological theory and the political theory of Marxism looks at the reality in this novel also from a psychological perspective (Azhand, 1995). The figures in this novel, especially Farangis and her spiritual conflicts have been masterly well described. The author is a master at exploring the feelings and characters of the women, though he also follows Freud's theories while describing their characteristics (Mirsadeghi, 1987). On the other hand Zweig is also well known as a creator of psychological novellas. One of the most noticeable characteristics of *The Royal Game* is also describing the psychological characteristics of Dr. B. and Czentovic. He has very well managed the description of Dr. B.'s life and his internal emotions.

2-2-2-3 Realistic Aspects

Alavi describes his figures so as they act in the real life. He writes about the very things, which he himself has seen and recounts the very events, which he himself has experienced. Alavi writes in an article, gathered in a collection by Ali Dehbashi, that he has tried to express a peculiarity of the Iranian people, which relates to the geographical, political and economical situations of Iran and also the boundless endeavor of our people in order to achieve perfection and beauty and to struggle against the enemies (cited in Ettehad, 2005).

Alavi is the kind of author, in the background of whose narratives lies the social reality of a new phase of Iran's contemporary history (Mirabedini, 2001). The historical events in *The Royal Game* have also been described with a realistic view. It seems possible to assume that this novel has been autobiographically portrayed. Stefan Zweig suffered also as well as Dr. B. from the National Socialist regime. Dr. B. was hurt due to the isolation of his prison and Zweig due to the fact that, he would never see his beloved homeland, Austria. Stefan Zweig has created this novel according to his personal feelings and experiences. He expresses his own immpressions of that, what has happened to him, since the war has also injured his feelings.

2-2-2-4 Political and Social Aspects

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The political and social aspects of the era of Stefan Zweig and Bozorg Alavi make up a considerable part of both works. *Her Eyes* is based on historical events. Alavi wrote this novel at the time, when the iranians suffered the rule of a dictatorial regime and he himself had emigrated to Germany. Alavi aims to increase the authenticity of his work and to present a credible novel by stating the historical events.

Alavi depicts some aspects of the social and political situations of Iran during the twenty-year reign of Reza Shah besides describing a new phase of a militant artist's life as well as the prevailing fear and anguish at that time in the novel *Her Eyes*. Alavi also points out the steps taken in iran and abroad to reveal the real nature of the dictatorial regime and describes how they fought against it (Mirsadeghi, 2005). Looking at the figures in the novel *Her Eyes*, especially master Makan and his followers, one could see that their whole life is based on the fight against fascism and the deprivation of freedom. Master Makan tries to fight against the prevailing corruption of the regime at that time by giving out some secretly printed flyers to the people.

The Royal Game is also studded with the political and social aspects of Zweig's era, i. e. the time when millions of people were suffering from the concentration camps of the Hitler's regime or the injustice of the National Socialism. Zweig persues in *The Royal Game* the goal of revealing the brutality of the fascist regime and criticizing severely the National Socialists on the part of a victim. He depicts the atrocities committed by Gestapo and the human rights they had violated. In almost more than half of the book he deals with the description of Dr. B.'s life and the consequences of the Gestapo for his whole life. The encounter of Dr. B. with Czentovic in The Royal Game is indeed a symbolic struggle between the oppressed and the fascist regime. So both authors depict the contemporary political and social situations of their own era in their works.

2-2-2-5 The External Conflict of the Characters

In *The Royal Game* the arrogant and proficient chess champion, Czentovic could be considered as a symbol of Hitler's oppressive policies and fascist regime, who fights against Dr. B., a man whose manners and humility represent his liberal personality. Siegfried Unseld writes in this regard that the reader is able to recognize the cruel fascist system behind the chess automat and the supreme intelligence of the malic of battle, which endangers the West, extinguishes its culture and turns it into a world of yesterday during the years of Zweig's emigration (in: Prater/Michels 1981:308). Czentovis wants to win at any cost. He is a materialist and enjoys succeeding in playing chess. But Dr. B., in contrast, has a mild, modest and an introspective personality. An example of such conflict in Her Eyes is to notice between Farangis and master Makan. They are examples of two extrovert and introvert characters, who, in this novel, face each other. Unlike Farangis, whose all efforts are directed towards satisfying Makan and strengthening her relationship with him, master Makan thinks of just his social duty and strives to break out of love, so that he could achieve his goals. Makan actually prefers the struggle against dictatorship to his love for Farangis.

> But he was quite different, a man whose personal and individual concerns had no importance for him… His works of arts were also dependent on the society and the people among whom he lived. (Alavi, 2014)

In Fact master Makan's rigid logic in this work is placed versus Farangis' love and emotions. The conflict and sometimes the paradox between the characters are the featurs, which in most of Alavi's literary works could significantly be seen. In this novel he has proficiently depicted two antithetic figures, i. e. Farangis and Makan using an attractive writing style. (Vakili, 2005)

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2-2-2-6 The internal Conflict of the Characters

Another common feature of Stefan Zweig's works, which appers also in those from Bozorg Alavi, is the internal conflict of the main protagonists, i. e. when a figure is in constant contradiction to himself. Dr. B., the main protagonist of The Royal Game can't help playing chess despite his awareness of the danger, it poses to him. When he notices that he has no competitor, against whom he could play, he finds no other choice than to divide his brain into two halves and play against himself, as he says:

> If one person tries to be both Black and White you have the preposterous situation that one and the same brain at once knows something and yet does not know it; that, functioning as White's partner, it can instantly obey a command to forget what, a moment earlier as Black's partner, it desired and plotted. Such cerebral duality really implies a complete cleavage of the conscious, a lighting up or dimming of the brain function at pleasure as with a switch; in short, to want to play against oneself at chess is about as paradoxical as to want to jump over one's own shadow. (Zweig, 2007)

These competitions continue in his brain, so that they finally lead to his mental and physical collapse. This internal conflict appears later in his behavior, as Czentovic purposely delays to move the chess pieces. He is completely affected by the time he was imprisoned during the war. Although in this novel he is described as a modest and affable person, he is not able to reveal his own self by overcoming his past. Any single move on the chess board reminds him of his period of detention and the mental tortures he had to endure. His past overcomes him and gradually brings about his mental disturbance.

> He had just about consumed his third glass of water; it came to my mind that he had spoken of his feverish thirst in his cell. Every symptom of abnormal excitement was plainly present: I saw his forehead grow moist and the scar on his hand become redder and more sharply outlined… Dr. B. bit his lips. I noticed under the table the growing restlessness with which he lifted and lowered the sole of his shoe... (ibid)

Such a conflict could also be noticed in the dual character of Farangis in the novel *Her Eyes*. She lived in a wealthy and affluent family and so had the opportunity to provide a calm and carefree life for herself. But she wasn't able to do so. She felt always a conflict between that, what she was and that, what she wanted to be in herself. On the one hand she is happy to have spent a period of her life at master Makan's service, and on the other hand she blames Makan for her unpleasant fate. A painful doubt arises in her. She sometimes assumes to have driven master Makan to death and sometimes believes that her life had been destroyed because of him. She herself confesses even her internal contrast by saying:

> In my life I always lacked a firm will. I was thrown back and forth by opposing forces… deep in my being I had ambiguous feelings. (Alavi, 2014)

The schoolmaster also notices her mental conflict even from the depicted eyes in the painting (Mirabedini, 2001):

> I couldn't decide wether these eyes were the eyes of a chaste woman in love or those of a wanton, self-indulgent woman. (Alavi, 2014)

2-2-2-7 Dynamic Characters

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The presence of dynamic Protagonists is one of the recurring features in Zweig's works, which could also be clearly seen in the novel *Her Eyes*. Dr. B. and Farangis are both dynamic figures who change in the course of the events. When Farangis, filled with despair and tired of her monotonous life in paris, thinks of suicide, she gets to know Khadadad. This encounter with Khodadad makes then the turning point of her life. After that she goes back to Iran to help master Makan and does there everything to win his heart:

> I decided to go back home the next morning and go straight to his school to tell him what prompts me to make such sacrifices. I was strongly determind to tell him I would wholeheartedly welcome any danger, but not because of that, what he thinks. (ibid)

The Royal Game is the story of a liberal person, who is forced to live in a total isolation because of having been against the regime. His only entertainment, the chess book changes him greatly and drives him to a mental illness, so that he, affected from his mental breakdown, attacks a prison guard.

2-2-2-8 Admitting Failure

Giving in to fate and admitting the failure belong to the dominant characteristic features of Zweig's novellas, which also appear in most works of Alavi including the novel *Her Eyes*. Although this ending to failure in Zweig's novellas results often in the protagonist's suicide, the protagonist in *The Royal Game,* i. e. Dr. B. tries to admit the reality the way it is. When he, in his last game, is driven to distraction and insanity and the narrator awakens him from his frenzy, he apologizes to tha audience, leaves the game and admits that he shouldn't continue to play. *The Royal Game* ends as well as his other works with a tragic hopelessness and despair. The protagonist fails to achieve what he wants and tries to cope with the current situation, which he is not able to change.

Alavi also comes to a tragic end in his novel *Her Eyes*. After Makan's arrest Farangis reluctantly agrees to marry the chief of police and doesn't succeed in trying to see Makan again and so all her desires will be suppressed. She is now a lonely woman who leads a sad life. She feels to have been unfairly treated and has ultimately no choice but to accept her bitter fate.

3- Conclusion

The comparative study of *Her Eyes* written by Bozorg Alavi and *The Royal Game* from Stefan Zweig and at the same time clarifying the thematic and stylistic similarities in both works have shown that Zweig's writing style has influenced that of Bozorg Alavi. In this article has been attempted to affirm the influence of Zweig on Alavi by comparing the characters and the motifs in their works. Dr. B. and master Makan are the most important figures in these works who bear the most similarities to each other. Moreover the narrators of the two works have also the same roles. Their curiosity and attempt at finding the truth lead both works to a new phase. Comparing the two works revealed that both authors have been against the fascist regime. Both works contain political and psychological aspects and their contents are based on their authors' political and social situations in the past. Furthermore, in describing the psyche and emotions of their protagonists, is the influence of Sigmund Freud's psychological theories on Alavi and Zweig apparent. They both choose the style of Realism, and Alavi himself claims to have been influenced by Zweig in using this writing style. Studying the examples of those literary works of Zweig and Alavi reflecting the influence of Freud's thoughts on them and also the comparative study of their other prose works could be suggested for further studies in this field.

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