

Imagology of the East in the Works of Elchin Safarli

Zeinab Sadeghi Sahlabad 

1. Associate Professor, Department of Russian Language, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: z.sadeghi@alzahra.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Elchin Safarli (b. 1984), an Azerbaijani-Russian contemporary writer, has created a distinct place for his Russian-language works among best-sellers. He is especially known for exploring personal crises, loneliness, migration, and intergenerational ties. His narrative depiction of the East as a concept extends beyond the purely geographical, serving as a comprehensive symbol of identity and relationships. This research article investigates the depiction of the East as the image of the “Other” in Safarli’s books and discusses whether this portrayal merely perpetuates prevalent stereotypes or whether he proposes an innovative and nuanced perception of this “Other”. Imagology, as an interdisciplinary field within comparative literature, addresses how the culture of the “Self” represents the “Other”. The present qualitative research undertakes a thematic corpus analysis of several significant novels of Elchin Safarli. It focuses on recurring motifs used by the author in creating the image type of the East, such as the use of olfactory language, intergenerational relationships, migration, and references to Persian culture. The study found that Elchin Safarli depicts the East as a multisided symbolic construct rather than a pure geographical one. Firstly, it is represented by a vivid olfactory language and cuisine. Childhood and traditional foods as means of access to memory and cultural identity carry strong nostalgic and identity significance. Secondly, intergenerational relations illustrate the East as a sacred space where knowledge from ancestors passes on to future generations and forms the story’s core of morals. Thirdly, the migration of protagonists and their search for home portrays Istanbul as a therapeutic utopia. The eastward journey becomes a conscious move towards spiritual equilibrium. Finally, the image of Iran is revealed through references to Persian poets—Rumi, Forough Farrokhzad, and Sohrab Sepehri—who represent spiritual mentors and establish the East as the foundation of wisdom. Elchin Safarli successfully moves beyond exotic and commonplace images of the East by utilizing simplified language to portray a humane and human-focused East, minimizing the “Other” distance, by accentuating universal human emotions such as love, loss, and the longing for one’s home. The East, as interpreted by Safarli, is not an unknown “Other”, but a site for spiritual restoration, interaction and reclaiming of identity. The research proves that the novel has successfully introduced a fresh imago type and has made a notable contribution to the literary discourse of migration and understanding the concept of identity in the world of globalization.

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