

Narrative Design in Pictorial Carpets of the Qajar Period: A Perspective from Gérard Genette

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Abstract: Pictorial carpets of the Qajar period constitute one of the artistic forms in Iran in which narrative design predominates. In most examples, a wide range of stories is conveyed through woven imagery. By combining pictorial scenes, symbolic motifs, and diverse visual elements, these carpets construct complex visual narratives that rely upon the cultural knowledge and interpretive competence of their viewers. Beyond their decorative function, such narratives also reflect the social, political, and artistic transformations of the Qajar period. The present study aims to examine the visual narrative of a Qajar pictorial carpet depicting the story of Bahrām Gūr receiving counsel from the shepherd, derived from Neẓāmī's *Khamṣa*, through the application of Gérard Genette's narratological framework. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study investigates a purposively selected pictorial carpet representing this episode and analyzes the manner in which the narrative is constructed, together with its constituent narratological elements, based on Genette's theory. Data were collected through library-based research. The study seeks to answer the following question: What are the narrative elements, according to Gérard Genette's narratological theory, embodied in the pictorial carpet depicting Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd, and how are these elements employed to construct the visual narrative? The findings demonstrate that, despite the inherent static nature of the image, the visual narrative establishes a multilayered temporal structure through the integration of the climactic scene with the poetic inscriptions surrounding the composition. Focalization in the literary narrative is characterized by variable internal focalization, whereas the pictorial representation is governed primarily by fixed zero focalization. The marginal verses play a crucial role in compensating for temporal discontinuity and reinforcing narrative continuity. Furthermore, the carpet performs a function that extends beyond the illustration of a literary text; situated within the historical context of the late Qajar period, it offers an allegorical and critical interpretation of political authority.

Keywords:

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1. Introduction

Since ancient times, Persian painting has maintained a profound relationship with literature; indeed, it may be argued that painting constituted the principal artistic medium through which literary narratives were visually represented. During the Qajar period, one of the new media employed for the visual illustration of verbal narratives was the pictorial carpet. While the two dimensions of time and space remain distinct in verbal narratives, they are integrated into a single static image in visual narratives. Accordingly, the present study approaches pictorial carpets as forms of visual narration.

Pictorial carpets commonly depict a wide range of stories. Their designs are predominantly narrative in character, encompassing literary, mythological, religious, social, and other forms of narratives, which are conveyed through a series of visual scenes representing the selected story. Previous studies on Qajar pictorial carpets have not addressed the issue of narrative design; rather,

they have primarily focused on identifying and classifying the various stories represented in these carpets. The present research, therefore, adopts a new perspective by examining narration in Qajar pictorial carpets. Narrative may be defined as any medium that conveys a story and can be expressed through diverse forms of communication, including books, newspapers, photographs, paintings, films, cartoons, radio, television, and other media. Every narrative consists of two fundamental components: the story and the narrator. In addition, characters, setting, time, and the narrator's point of view constitute the principal elements of narrative.

This study examines the constituent elements of narrative, from the perspective of Gérard Genette, within a visual narrative represented by a Qajar pictorial carpet depicting the story of Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd. To this end, the narrative elements are first examined on the basis of Genette's theoretical framework, followed by an analysis and application of these elements to the selected pictorial carpet. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following question: according to Gérard Genette's theory, what narrative elements are embodied in this pictorial carpet, regarded as a visual narrative, and in what manner is the narrative act realized within it? Narrative in written sources, which unfolds through textual discourse over time, differs fundamentally from a static image in which only a single scene from a story is visually represented. One of the principal challenges, and indeed one of the major objectives, of the present research is therefore to establish a coherent and theoretically grounded relationship among the narrative elements within a static visual representation.

2. Research Methodology

The present study seeks to examine and apply the narrative elements proposed in Gérard Genette's theory to a static image, namely a pictorial carpet depicting the story of Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd (Fig. 1). Within this framework, the limitations of a static image in conveying narrative are explored, while the capacities of visual representation for employing narrative elements are also assessed. The statistical population comprises narrative pictorial carpets, from which a single example illustrating the story of Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd was purposively selected in accordance with the objectives of the research. Following the identification and extraction of the narrative elements in Genette's theoretical framework, these elements were systematically applied to and analyzed within the selected case study. Data were collected through library-based research, and the study was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in Gérard Genette's narrative theory, with particular emphasis on the comparative analysis of narrative and its constituent elements from Genette's perspective.

3. Research Background and Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted on narratology from the perspective of Gérard Genette. The most significant of these are reviewed below in chronological order. Ya'qoubi (2012), in the article *Narratology and the Distinction between Story and Discourse Based on Gérard Genette's Theory*, examined the concept of narrative from Genette's perspective. The findings indicate that story and discourse are fundamentally distinct, and that narrative encompasses conceptual divisions and structural elements that differentiate it from the story itself.

Pashaei (2015), in the article *An Analysis of Narrative in the Novel Her Eyes from the Perspective of Gérard Genette*, analyzed the narrative structure of the novel according to Genette's theory. The results demonstrate that, in terms of narrative duration, temporal organization, and continuity, the novel may be divided into two sections: one characterized by a rapid narrative pace and high positive narrative acceleration, and another, comparatively shorter section, in which greater narrative time is devoted to story events, resulting in a noticeable discrepancy between narrative time and the chronological time of the events.

Khajeh Ahmad Attari et al. (2024), in the article *The Visual Narrative of "The Capturing of Zahhāk" in the Baysunghur Shahnameh Based on Gérard Genette's Narratological Theory*, examined the applicability of Genette's narrative categories to the aforementioned miniature painting. Their

findings suggest that, owing to the structural differences between verbal and visual texts, the painter could not rely on the continuous progression of imagery in the same manner as the poet relied on verbal narration. Instead, by disrupting the chronological sequence of events and combining two or more episodes, the artist created a unified visual composition. Furthermore, through interventions in narrative time and mood, the painter enhanced the role of the viewer, while the narrative voice predominantly reflected the perspective of an omniscient narrator.

Norouzi et al. (2026), in the article *A Narratological Analysis of the Story of Zāl and Rudāba Based on Gérard Genette's Theory with an Approach to "Sudden Changes in Focalization"*, analyzed this narrative within Genette's theoretical framework. Their findings reveal that the principal levels of Genette's narratological model are evident throughout most sections of the story. However, in a limited number of instances, the narrative is advanced by agents who do not occupy primary or surface-level narrative roles, to the extent that focalization and final narrative judgment are ultimately determined from their perspective.

The majority of the reviewed studies have examined and applied Genette's narrative structure to literary texts and written narratives. Only one of these studies (Khajeh Ahmad Attari et al., 2024) attempted to identify narrative elements within a miniature painting as a static visual image. The present study differs from previous research in two important respects. First, no narratological investigation has thus far been undertaken on pictorial carpets; existing studies have instead focused on other aspects, such as typology or historical and socio-cultural analyses. Accordingly, by adopting a narratological perspective, the present research offers a new approach to the study of pictorial carpets, opening a fresh avenue for scholarship in this field and providing a foundation for future research on pictorial carpets.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Narrative from the Perspective of Gérard Genette

Gérard Genette, a French structuralist and one of the foremost theorists of narratology, conducted extensive research on narrative theory and is widely regarded as one of the most influential scholars in this field. Indeed, he has been described by some scholars as the father of narratology (Bahmani, 2011: 67). In Genette's theoretical framework, narrative may be examined through three principal dimensions: time, mood (or mode), and voice. Time refers to the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the narrative. Mood (or mode) concerns the forms and degrees through which the narrative is presented, whereas voice denotes the manner in which the act of narration is performed. The temporal dimension further comprises three subcategories: order, duration, and frequency. According to Genette, narrative represents the interaction between the story itself and the manner in which that story is communicated. Consequently, the concept of narrative may be classified into three interrelated components: story, narrative (discourse), and the act of narration (Ghahramani et al., 2017: 57).

A text consists of a collection of verbal, linguistic, visual, plastic, auditory, physical, gestural, or other signs through which communication is established with an audience. Thus, the concept of text encompasses novels, short stories, poetry, drama, cinema, and painting. In other words, a text is any entity composed of signs and elements that can be examined and interpreted. Narrative, however, differs from text, since not every text conveys a story; consequently, not every text necessarily constitutes a narrative. Within a narrative, the sequence and organization of events differ from their chronological order in reality. This organization of events and the manner in which the story is presented constitute narration. It is precisely for this reason that a single story may generate multiple narratives. Narrative also operates on multiple levels, and one of its most significant components is the point of view from which it is presented (Ya'qoubi, 2012: 298). Character is another structural element of narrative, referring to the individuals who participate in the story and are defined by a set of personal attributes. These characteristics may be represented as they actually are or may appear in modified forms. Indeed, any textual element may function as an indicator of character, while in other contexts it may deliberately be presented in a manner that

diverges from the expected characteristics of that character in accordance with the objectives of the narrative.

One of the principal distinctions between story and narrative concerns the treatment of time. Temporal organization in the story may differ substantially from that of the narrative; in other words, the chronological progression of events within the story does not necessarily correspond to the order in which those events are narrated, as narrative may rearrange events through different temporal strategies (Okhovat, 1992: 11). As noted above, narrative time concerns the relationship between the occurrence of events in the story and their presentation within the narrative. Genette distinguishes four temporal positions of narration: subsequent narration, prior narration, simultaneous narration, and interpolated narration. Among these, interpolated narration possesses the most complex structure, since additional narrative episodes may be introduced during the principal narration, thereby integrating two or more interconnected narratives into a single narrative sequence. Narrative levels constitute another feature distinguishing narrative from story, as they concern the hierarchical organization of events within a narrative. A narrative may be recounted by a character whose own actions constitute the subject of narration, or a portion of the narrative may consist of another story narrated by a different narrator. Whenever one narrative is embedded within another, multiple narrative levels emerge, producing a primary narrative accompanied by one or more subordinate or embedded narratives (Ya'qoubi, 2012: 308).

Concerning narrative voice, Genette distinguishes between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narration. In extradiegetic narration, the narrator does not participate in the narrative world. In intradiegetic narration, the narrative is conveyed through one or more characters who are themselves present within the story (Mirsadeghi, 1993: 328). Within this framework, Genette classifies narrators into four categories: in the first, narrators are absent from the narrative world; in the second, they are present within it; in the third, they are among the characters of the story; and in the fourth, they are not characters within the story. Correspondingly, he identifies four narrative situations: (1) the narrator is absent from the narrative world and is not a character in the story; (2) the narrator is absent from the narrative world but is nevertheless one of the story's characters; (3) the narrator is present within the narrative world but is not one of the story's characters; and (4) the narrator is both present within the narrative world and one of the story's characters (Ya'qoubi, 2012: 308). Narrative refers to the manner in which a story is communicated, and alongside the act of narration, the narrator occupies a central role. Narration may be undertaken by a single narrator or by multiple narrators, making the narrator's voice and tone equally significant. Accordingly, Genette emphasizes the narrator, the narrator's voice, and the subject of narration, and conceptualizes narrative through three principal dimensions: narrative time, narrative levels, and person (Ahmadi, 2001: 317).

4.2. The Story of Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd

Neẓāmī Ganjavī's *Khamṣa* was among the most celebrated literary works during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp and was repeatedly copied, illuminated, and illustrated. Its most renowned manuscript, known as the *Royal Khamṣa*, was completed in 949 AH (1542–1543 CE) (Azhand, 2005: 139). During this period, alongside romantic subjects, politically oriented narratives also became important themes for manuscript illustration and painting. One such narrative is the story of Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd, also known as *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd Who Hanged His Dog* (Fig. 1). Originating from *Haft Paykar*, this episode was illustrated on numerous occasions because of its distinctive thematic content. Unlike romantic or entertaining narratives, the story is fundamentally political in nature and reflects the political thought of its time. Neẓāmī adapted this narrative from one of the major political treatises of the medieval Islamic period, *Siyāsat-nāmeḥ* (*The Book of Government*) by Khwāja Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī. The story addresses the institution of vizierate and the qualities expected of an ideal vizier, while portraying a king who receives moral instruction from a humble shepherd. One of the principal reasons for the popularity of this subject in the Safavid period, particularly under Shah Ṭahmāsp, relates to the political circumstances of his reign.

Ascending the throne at a young age, the office of vizier frequently shifted among the Qizilbash amirs, creating a period of considerable political instability within the kingdom (Keshavarz Afshar et al., 2010: 37).

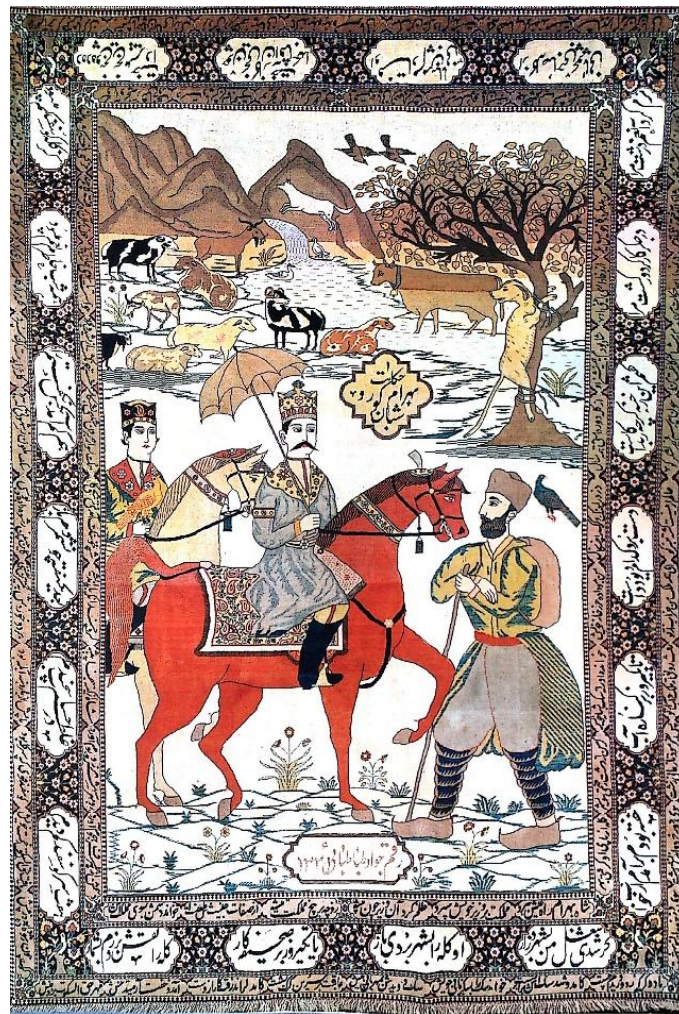


Figure 1. Pictorial Carpet Depicting Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd. Place of manufacture: Kashan; date: 1331 AH (1913 CE). Present location: Private Collection (Sakhai, 2008: 123).

This narrative, preserved in classical Persian literary sources, including Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeḥ* and Neẓāmī's *Haft Paykar*, albeit in different versions, constitutes an allegorical representation of the relationship between the ruler, state officials, and subjects within the tradition of Iranian political thought. According to the narrative, Bahrām Gūr, preoccupied with pleasure and neglectful of his royal responsibilities, entrusts the administration of the kingdom to his vizier, Rāst-Roshan. Exploiting the king's symbolic absence, the vizier oppresses the subjects while simultaneously conspiring with the Khāqān of China to invade the kingdom, thereby committing an act of profound treason. Upon learning of the impending invasion, Bahrām finds himself in a position of both military and economic vulnerability. In this moment of crisis, he withdraws into the countryside to reflect upon his circumstances. There, he encounters a shepherd who has hanged his own dog, an episode that constitutes the narrative's decisive turning point. The shepherd explains that the dog, entrusted with protecting the flock, had secretly allied itself with a wolf and had surrendered one sheep to the predator each day. Bahrām immediately recognizes the allegorical significance of the scene, interpreting it as a direct reflection of his own kingdom: he identifies himself with the shepherd (the ruler and ultimate guardian), the treacherous vizier with the dog (the corrupt official), the subjects with the flock of sheep (the people under royal protection), and the foreign enemy, the Khāqān, with the wolf. This moment of sudden insight exposes the vizier's betrayal and reveals the underlying cause of the kingdom's crisis (Riazi, 2006:

160–163). Bahrām's return to the palace symbolizes the restoration of his royal authority and his transition from negligence to justice. The conclusion of the narrative, which includes hearing the grievances of the subjects and executing the treacherous vizier, completes the re-establishment of a justice-oriented political order. As a whole, the story emphasizes such fundamental concepts as the ruler's neglect of responsibility, official corruption and betrayal, the vulnerability of the subjects, and restorative justice, presenting the resolution of the political crisis as contingent upon the ruler's resumption of his rightful role and the removal of corruption from the machinery of government.

4.3. Description of the Image

The scene represented in this pictorial carpet consciously departs, both compositionally and symbolically, from conventional royal imagery. Within the composition, the elderly shepherd, Bahrām Gūr, the pastoral setting, the flock, and, most significantly, the hanged dog are depicted without the idealized aesthetic conventions typically associated with royal or courtly scenes. The dog is portrayed with its mouth open and tongue protruding, deliberately stripped of any aesthetic idealization to emphasize its symbolic function as the embodiment of treachery. The selection of this particular narrative is itself highly significant: rather than portraying the king at the height of his military power in battle, amid the pleasures of the royal banquet, or even during the royal hunt, the image presents him in the unusual role of a humble listener receiving moral instruction from an elderly shepherd, one of his own subjects. This inversion of conventional social roles distinguishes the narrative from other royal representations and reinforces its ethical and political message (Keshavarz Afshar et al., 2010: 56).

The significance of this visual representation is further enhanced when considered in relation to the date of the carpet's production. The inscription records the date 1331 AH (1913 CE), corresponding to the reign of Aḥmad Shāh Qājār, the last monarch of the Qajar dynasty. Aḥmad Shāh ascended the throne at the age of thirteen following the deposition of his father, Moḥammad 'Alī Shāh. Until he reached legal maturity, the affairs of state were administered by the Qajar regent, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Mirzā Farmānfarmā, known by the title 'Abd al-Malik (Abrishami, 2008: 171). A particularly significant and open to interpretation feature of the composition is the presence of a second figure standing beside Bahrām Gūr. When compared with the facial characteristics found in Qajar portraiture, this figure may plausibly be identified as a representation of Aḥmad Shāh himself. If this interpretation is accepted, the carpet transcends its role as a mere illustration of a literary narrative and becomes a multilayered visual statement with profound political implications (Ahani et al., 2015a: 180-190; 2015b: 68).

5. Findings

5.1. Analysis of the Visual Narrative of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd* Based on Gérard Genette's Narratological Theory

This section examines the manner in which the story of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd* is narrated in the selected pictorial carpet. Drawing upon the narrative categories proposed by Gérard Genette, the carpet is analyzed as a visual narrative. These five narrative components comprise order, duration, and frequency, which relate to time, together with mood and voice, which concern the narrator, perspective, and focalization. According to Genette, narrative operates on three hierarchical levels: the story, the narrative (discourse), and the act of narration.

Genette regards narrative time as one of the fundamental components shaping the process of storytelling, arguing that narrative acquires both form and structure through time. In effect, both narrative and story derive their meaning from temporal organization. In the textual version of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd*, the temporal position of narration is interpolated narration. While the shepherd recounts the story of his own dog, Bahrām Gūr simultaneously relates the story of his treacherous vizier as an illustrative parallel, thereby merging two interconnected narratives into a single narrative framework. In the pictorial carpet, alongside the scene in which Bahrām Gūr

receives counsel from the shepherd, the hanging of the dog is also depicted. From the perspective of narrative time, this represents subsequent narration, since the event has already occurred before being visually represented. If the verses inscribed around the borders of the carpet are considered part of the narrative, it may further be argued that simultaneous narration is also present, as the visual representation and the poetic narration unfold concurrently within the same work.

Genette examines time through three principal components: order, duration, and frequency. In relation to order, the principal concern is the temporal sequence of events. By order, Genette refers to the linear arrangement of the narrative. In any narrative, however, events may be presented outside their chronological sequence, either retrospectively or prospectively. Such discrepancies between the chronology of the story and that of the narrative are termed anachronies. Genette designates the most pronounced form of such temporal dislocation as anachrony. When the narrative moves backward in time and recounts events after they have occurred, it is termed analepsis (retrospective narration); conversely, when the narrative anticipates future events before their occurrence, it is termed prolepsis (anticipatory narration). Both constitute major forms of temporal anachrony. A third possibility is simultaneous narration, in which narration occurs concurrently with the unfolding of events (Ya'qoubi, 2012: 299).

Concerning narrative levels, the textual version initially presents the story through the shepherd's narration, after which the narrative perspective shifts to Bahrām Gūr, who recounts a related story functioning as an analogy to the shepherd's account. In the present case study, however, the narrative is represented through a single static image. Because only one frame from the entire story is depicted, the sequential progression of events, together with their chronological order, cannot be represented in the same manner as in a written narrative. The visual narrative therefore differs fundamentally from its textual counterpart, which provides a detailed sequential description. Within the pictorial carpet, the narrative unfolds on two visual levels. The foreground presents Bahrām Gūr receiving moral instruction from the shepherd, while the background depicts the hanging of the dog, the dramatic climax of the narrative, which has been deliberately selected to maximize its visual impact. It appears that the narrative has been intentionally frozen at this decisive moment. A third narrative level may also be recognized in the poetic verses woven into the borders of the carpet. By incorporating selected verses from the story, the artist not only reinforces the visual narrative but also partially restores its chronological sequence, enabling viewers to perceive the temporal progression of events through reading the accompanying poetry. Although the image itself arrests time at the climactic moment of the story, the thoughtful inclusion of these verses compensates for the temporal limitations of the static image and, in effect, reconstructs narrative time.

The second temporal component identified by Genette is duration, which concerns the relationship between the length of the narrative and the duration of the events represented. Since these two temporal dimensions are not necessarily equivalent, they provide a basis for determining the narrative's speed. According to Genette, constant speed serves as a hypothetical benchmark against which variations in narrative tempo may be measured. Relative to this benchmark, narrative speed may either increase or decrease, producing positive or negative acceleration (Kazempour et al., 2023: 512).

According to Genette, when a relatively brief section of the narrative corresponds to an extended period within the story, the narrative exhibits positive acceleration. Conversely, when an extended narrative is devoted to a brief episode within the story, it demonstrates negative acceleration, often described as a descriptive pause, in which events receive more detailed elaboration. These variations in narrative speed also reveal the relative significance assigned to particular events within the story (Ahmadi, 2001: 317–318).

The visual narrative of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd* clearly embodies temporal structure. Nevertheless, because only the scene depicting the hanging of the dog is represented, while the sequence of preceding events is condensed into a single image, the composition conveys a sense

of temporal anachrony. In the textual narrative, events are recounted retrospectively, making the narrative analeptic. The same retrospective structure characterizes the pictorial representation, in which the completed act of hanging the dog is subsequently depicted. The verses surrounding the image contribute to the continuity and expansion of narrative time. If the image alone is considered, independent of the accompanying poetry, it may be interpreted as exhibiting zero duration combined with negative acceleration, since an extensive sequence of events leading to the hanging has been omitted and only the final climactic scene has been selected for representation. However, because the poetic inscriptions constitute an inseparable component of the composition and were deliberately incorporated to ensure a more complete narrative, they effectively restore narrative continuity. In this sense, the verses function like a written narrative, recounting the sequence of events within a meaningful temporal framework, while the artist intentionally suppresses intermediate events and confines the visual representation to the narrative climax.

The third temporal component in Genette's theory is frequency, regarded as one of the principal analytical dimensions of narrative. Frequency refers to the relationship between the number of times an event occurs and the number of times it is narrated (Pashaei, 2015: 51). Genette distinguishes three forms of frequency: singulative, repetitive, and iterative narration. In singulative narration, an event occurs once and is narrated once, representing the most common narrative form. In repetitive narration, an event occurs once but is narrated multiple times. In iterative narration, an event that occurs repeatedly is narrated only once (Khajeh Ahmad Attari et al., 2024: 79).

Within the present image, two forms of frequency, singulative and repetitive, can be identified. The episode of the hanging of the dog occurs once within the story and is represented once in the pictorial composition, corresponding to singulative frequency. Simultaneously, the accompanying poetic verses recount the same event once again, thereby creating repetitive frequency. Furthermore, each time viewers return to the image, the narrative is effectively reactivated, and because different viewers inevitably produce different interpretations, these repeated acts of reception may also be understood as a form of repetitive narration. The third category, iterative frequency, is not present in this visual narrative.

Following the discussion of time, Genette introduces the concept of mood (mode). Mood refers to the conditions under which the story is narrated, in other words, whose perspective the narrator adopts, and is realized through the two components of distance and perspective (Scholes, 2000: 232). In the textual narrative, the shepherd and Bahrām Gūr function as narrators, whereas in the visual narrative, the painter serves as the narrator.

Perspective refers to the point of view from which the narrative is conveyed and may therefore be regarded as one of the principal instruments of narration. It determines how characters and events are presented through the narrator's perception and exerts a direct influence upon the manner of narration. Put differently, the story is communicated through the narrator's viewpoint. This viewpoint, however, need not necessarily belong to the narrator alone; the narrative may also be filtered through the perspective of other characters (Khajeh Ahmad Attari et al., 2024: 79). Perspective therefore plays a decisive role in narrative construction, as the author selects the most appropriate viewpoint through which to communicate the story. Readers or viewers inevitably encounter events through the perspective from which they are narrated. If the narrator exists outside the story while possessing complete knowledge of its events, the narrative adopts the position of an omniscient third-person narrator. Conversely, if the narrator limits the narration to the knowledge and perceptions of one or more characters, the narrative assumes an internal perspective or limited omniscient third-person narration (Horri, 2013: 209). Within the process of focalization, all events are filtered through the perspective of a single individual, who may be either the narrator or another character.

Genette further develops the concept of perspective through his theory of focalization, one of the central concepts of narratology. By focalization, he refers to the perspective through which

events are implicitly perceived. He distinguishes three principal forms of focalization. The first, zero focalization, is characterized by the absence of perceptual restriction. Here, narration is not confined to the perspective of any single character; instead, the narrator freely enters the consciousness of all characters, possesses knowledge exceeding theirs, and functions as an omniscient narrator ([Andalibi & Koopal, 2021: 24](#)).

The second form, internal focalization, may be fixed, variable, or multiple. In internal focalization, the narrative is restricted to the perceptions of one or more focal characters, and the narrator communicates only what those characters know or experience. When a single character consistently serves as the focalizer, the narrative exhibits fixed internal focalization; when focalization shifts among several characters, each contributing part of the narrative, it constitutes variable or multiple internal focalization. Consequently, focalization need not remain constant throughout a narrative. The third category, external focalization, presents characters and events solely from an external perspective. The narrator remains outside the action and refrains from entering the consciousness of any character, functioning merely as an observer without attempting psychological explanation ([Andalibi & Koopal, 2021: 25](#)).

In the textual version of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd*, the story is narrated successively from the perspectives of both the shepherd and Bahrām Gūr. Since the narrative focus shifts between these two characters, the story demonstrates variable internal focalization. In the pictorial carpet, however, the visual narrative is primarily presented through zero focalization, as the entire story is represented from the stable, external perspective of the artist. Nevertheless, when the accompanying poetic inscriptions are considered integral to the visual composition, the narrative may also be interpreted as exhibiting variable internal focalization, since the verses introduce additional internal perspectives alongside the pictorial representation. By compressing spatial relationships and juxtaposing different moments within a single composition, the artist minimizes narrative distance and multiple viewpoints in order to concentrate attention upon the principal episode of the story.

Distance, another component of mood in Genette's theory, refers to the degree of separation between the story and its narration. When the narrator participates as one of the characters within the narrative, distance is created, and its extent depends upon the narrator's degree of involvement. The greater the narrator's presence within the narrative, the greater the narrative distance; conversely, reduced narrator involvement results in diminished distance ([Tyson, 2008: 372](#)). Applying this concept to *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd*, narrative distance is evident because part of the story is narrated by the shepherd, who is himself a character, before the narration shifts to Bahrām Gūr. Since both narrators participate directly in the story, narrative distance is established through their varying degrees of involvement. In the pictorial carpet, however, the painter, the sole narrator of the visual narrative, is absent from the represented scene. Consequently, narrative distance is considerably reduced. This diminished distance is achieved through the composition itself, the arrangement and multiplicity of the figures, and the carefully constructed spatial organization that enables the visual narrative to unfold.

The final component of Genette's narratological model is voice. Voice concerns the emotional and expressive quality through which narration is conveyed and may be understood as the narrator's attitude toward the audience or, more broadly, as the narrator's distinctive narrative tone. Voice determines the narrator's position and perspective while profoundly influencing the audience's response to both the characters and the narrative itself. Through voice, the atmosphere of the narrative is established, and the characters acquire their expressive identity within the story ([Beygzadeh et al., 2019: 6](#)). In narratology, voice therefore refers to the intellectual, emotional, and ideological stance from which the narrator recounts the story. Applied to the present pictorial carpet, voice is manifested in the manner through which the artist has visualized the narrative. This manner of representation depends partly upon the artist's creative ability and technical skill, and partly upon the cultural, social, and artistic circumstances of the period in which the work was produced. Accordingly, voice may generally be understood in terms of both place and time. In the

visual narrative of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd*, the artist created the composition within the specific historical and cultural conditions of his own period, and these contextual circumstances constitute the narrative voice embodied in the work (Table 1).

Table 1. Narrative Elements in the Story of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd* According to Gérard Genette's Narratological Theory (Source: Authors)

No.	Narrative Element	Analytical Components
1	Time	1. Order: Interpolated narration with retrospective (analeptic/posterior) anachrony. 2. Duration: Zero duration accompanied by negative acceleration (descriptive pause). 3. Frequency: Singulative and repetitive frequency.
2	Mood (Mode)	1. Perspective (Point of View): The Shepherd / Bahrām Gūr. 2. Distance: The Shepherd / Bahrām Gūr / the Painter (Image-maker).
3	Voice	The visual articulation of the narrative by the artist in accordance with the historical and spatial context in which the work was produced.

6. Conclusion

The present study sought to examine the applicability of Gérard Genette's narratological framework to the story of *Bahrām Gūr and the Shepherd* as represented in a late Qajar pictorial carpet. Within this context, the visual narrative was analyzed in light of the inherent limitations of the static image through such narratological concepts as time, narrative level, frequency, focalization, distance, and voice. The selection of this particular narrative within the historical context of the late Qajar period may itself carry allegorical significance. The figure of Bahrām Gūr, portrayed as a negligent ruler, can be interpreted as corresponding to the condition of a youthful and inexperienced monarch, particularly Aḥmad Shāh Qājār. Likewise, the hanged treacherous dog may symbolize corrupt officials or the ineffective political elite of the period. Within this allegorical reading, the flock represents the subjects, who become the principal victims of the rupture between the ruler and his officials. Consequently, the carpet transcends the mere illustration of a literary narrative and may instead be understood as a reflection of the political and social concerns of the late Qajar period, offering an allegorical critique of the prevailing structure of power.

In the textual version of the story, the narrative is interpolated, as the shepherd recounts his own experience while the story of Bahrām Gūr is simultaneously introduced as a concrete parallel. Consequently, two narrative levels become intertwined. The narrative is also retrospective (subsequent), since events are narrated after they have taken place. In the pictorial carpet, however, the climactic episode, the hanging of the dog, is fixed within a single static frame. This visual strategy produces a temporal pause while simultaneously eliminating the sequential progression of events. Nevertheless, the poetic verses inscribed along the borders of the carpet compensate for this limitation by reconstructing the preceding stages of the narrative and thereby establishing a sense of temporal continuity. In the absence of these verses, the image would exhibit negative acceleration and temporal discontinuity, as only the final episode of the narrative would remain visually represented.

In the literary narrative, the shepherd initially functions as the narrator before the narrative perspective shifts to Bahrām Gūr, resulting in a change of both narrator and narrative level. Within the pictorial carpet, however, the static nature of the image prevents the linear representation of chronological succession. Nevertheless, by distinguishing between the foreground scene, depicting Bahrām Gūr receiving counsel from the shepherd, and the background scene, depicting the hanging of the dog, the artist successfully integrates two narrative levels within a single composition. Moreover, the poetic inscriptions surrounding the image establish a third narrative

level that not only reinforces temporal continuity but also introduces an additional layer of narrative complexity.

The carpet exhibits singulative frequency, insofar as the event of hanging the dog occurs once within the story and is represented once in the image. Simultaneously, because the same event is reiterated through the accompanying verses and repeatedly reinterpreted by successive viewers, the work also demonstrates repetitive frequency. Iterative frequency, however, is absent from this narrative.

The literary narrative is characterized by variable internal focalization, as the narrative perspective alternates between the shepherd and Bahrām Gūr. In contrast, the pictorial carpet is primarily governed by fixed zero focalization, since the visual narrator, the artist, occupies the position of an external omniscient observer. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the poetic inscriptions permits an alternative interpretation involving variable internal focalization, as the written text allows viewers to encounter the perspectives of the narrative characters alongside the visual representation.

Within the literary narrative, narrative distance depends upon the degree of participation of the intradiegetic narrators and consequently changes as the narrator shifts. In the visual narrative, by contrast, the direct absence of the narrator and the reliance upon visual devices, including composition, the arrangement of figures, and spatial organization, significantly reduce narrative distance, allowing the viewer to engage with the represented scene more immediately.

Finally, the voice of the visual narrative emerges from the interaction between the artist's creative vision and the historical and cultural conditions under which the work was produced. Accordingly, the pictorial carpet should be understood not merely as a visual rendering of a literary narrative but also as an expression of the political and social voice of the late Qajar period.

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Conflict of Interest

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