

The Poetics of Moral Choice and Psychological Ambiguity in Odil Yoqubov And Henry James's Novellas

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Abstract: This article examines Odil Yoqubov's qissa-writing and Henry James's novellas through the comparative categories of moral choice, inner conflict, narrative perspective and psychological ambiguity. The analysis concentrates mainly on Yoqubov's Muqaddas and on James's Daisy Miller, The Aspern Papers, The Turn of the Screw and The Beast in the Jungle. Although the two writers belong to different literary systems, their shorter prose reveals a comparable interest in the moment when a private decision becomes an ethical test. In Yoqubov's prose, the moral problem is usually placed in a socially recognizable environment where conscience, love, honesty and personal responsibility are closely connected. In James's novellas, the same problem is often dramatized through uncertain perception, indirect narration and the instability of judgment. The article argues that both writers use the compact form of the qissa or novella not merely to tell a reduced story but to intensify the moral and psychological pressure of the narrative. The comparative approach allows the study to show that Uzbek realist prose and Anglo-American psychological fiction can be read together productively when attention is given to the structure of ethical conflict rather than to external similarity alone.

Keywords: Odil Yoqubov, Henry James, qissa, novella, comparative literature, psychological prose, moral choice, narrative ambiguity.

Introduction: The short prose form occupies a special place in both Uzbek and Anglo-American literary traditions. It is shorter than the novel, yet it is broader and more complex than the simple short story. In Uzbek literary terminology, the qissa often serves as a narrative space where a decisive period of a character's life is represented with moral, social and psychological concentration. In English and American literature, the novella performs a similar function: it gives the writer enough space to develop character and atmosphere, but it preserves the density, unity and dramatic tension of shorter narrative. For this reason, the qissas of Odil Yoqubov and the novellas of Henry James create a fruitful field for comparative analysis.

Odil Yoqubov is one of the major figures of twentieth-century Uzbek prose. His literary world is marked by a

strong concern for conscience, justice, human dignity and responsibility before society. In Muqaddas, one of his most widely read qissas, the central dramatic conflict grows out of a young man's moral weakness. Sharifjon's desire to achieve personal happiness leads him to an ethically compromised act, and the consequences of this act destroy the very love he hoped to preserve. The qissa therefore transforms an apparently private love story into a study of honesty and moral accountability.

Henry James, by contrast, develops psychological conflict through a highly refined narrative technique. His novellas frequently avoid direct moral explanation. Daisy Miller, The Aspern Papers, The Turn of the Screw and The Beast in the Jungle place the reader before situations in which judgment is necessary but never

fully simple. James's characters often misread others or themselves, and the reader must decide how far the narrator can be trusted. In this respect, James's novella becomes a laboratory of perception, interpretation and ambiguity.

The relevance of comparing these two writers lies not in claiming direct influence, but in identifying typological similarities in their use of compact narrative form. Both Yoqubov and James are interested in the ethical significance of inner life. Both show that a single decision, a concealed intention or an unspoken fear may determine a person's fate. At the same time, their artistic methods differ: Yoqubov's moral realism tends toward social clarity, whereas James's psychological prose tends toward interpretive complexity. This contrast forms the central problem of the present article.

METHODS

The article applies a comparative-typological method combined with close reading. The primary materials are Odil Yoqubov's *Muqaddas* and representative novellas by Henry James: *Daisy Miller*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Beast in the Jungle*. The analysis does not treat these works as identical in genre or cultural function. Instead, it examines how each writer uses a medium-length prose form to organize moral conflict, psychological movement and narrative tension.

The methodological basis of the study includes three main analytical directions. The first direction is genre analysis, which considers how the qissa and the novella concentrate narrative time and reduce the number of plot lines in order to intensify the central conflict. The second direction is ethical analysis, which examines the way moral choice is represented in the behavior of characters. The third direction is narratological analysis, which pays attention to point of view, reliability, silence, implication and the reader's role in completing meaning.

The comparative framework is especially useful here because Yoqubov and James represent different literary-historical conditions. Yoqubov's prose is connected with Uzbek realist traditions and with the social-moral problems of the twentieth century. James's fiction belongs to transatlantic realism and psychological modernity, where the central problem is

often the relation between consciousness and reality. The article therefore avoids superficial parallelism and focuses on structural similarities: moral testing, psychological hesitation, loss, self-deception and the consequences of interpretation.

THE QISSA AND THE NOVELLA AS CONCENTRATED FORMS

The qissa and the novella are flexible forms, but both tend to be organized around a limited number of characters and a decisive conflict. Their artistic power depends on concentration. In a large novel, a writer may follow several generations, social layers or historical processes. In a qissa or novella, the writer usually selects one ethically or psychologically charged situation and develops it until the character's inner nature becomes visible. This principle is clearly present in both Yoqubov and James.

In *Muqaddas*, the plot is not built on external adventure but on the moral consequence of one action. Sharifjon's conduct during the admission process reveals the contradiction between his feeling of love and his weakness of conscience. The qissa is therefore structured as a movement from desire to loss, from hope to self-recognition. Yoqubov does not need a broad epic plot to show the tragedy of dishonesty; the compact form allows him to demonstrate how a seemingly small moral compromise changes the fate of several people.

James's novellas also depend on concentration, but the main force of concentration is psychological rather than openly social. In *The Aspern Papers*, a nameless narrator's attempt to obtain private letters becomes an inquiry into literary obsession and moral violation. In *The Beast in the Jungle*, the drama is not external action but the protagonist's belief that some extraordinary destiny awaits him. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the narrative is concentrated around perception itself: what the governess sees, what she believes, and what the reader can reasonably infer. Thus James uses the novella to compress uncertainty, while Yoqubov uses the qissa to compress moral consequence.

MORAL CHOICE IN ODIL YOQUBOV'S QISSA-WRITING

Odil Yoqubov's prose is strongly ethical, but it is not didactic in a mechanical sense. His characters are not divided simply into positive and negative figures. Instead, they are placed in situations where their inner

weakness or strength becomes visible through action. In *Muqaddas*, Sharifjon is not presented as a villain. He is a young man capable of love, hope and emotional sincerity. Precisely for this reason, his moral failure becomes more painful. The *qissa* shows how selfishness can hide under the language of love and how personal happiness loses meaning when it is obtained through injustice.

The image of *Muqaddas* has symbolic importance. She is not merely an object of romantic feeling; she represents moral purity and the demand for honesty. Sharifjon's mistake is not only that he harms her future, but that he misunderstands the ethical foundation of love itself. Yoqubov's artistic logic suggests that love cannot be separated from justice. Where dishonesty enters, affection loses its moral legitimacy. This idea is expressed through the development of the plot rather than through abstract moral preaching.

The social environment in Yoqubov's *qissa* is also significant. The problem of admission, acquaintance, privilege and unfair advantage is not merely a background detail. It connects the private drama with the public order. Sharifjon's act becomes meaningful because it takes place in a system where another person's opportunity can be taken away. In this sense, *Muqaddas* is not only a love story but also a story about social conscience. Yoqubov's realism shows that ethical decisions are never purely private; they enter the lives of others and produce consequences that cannot be easily repaired.

The *qissa* form helps Yoqubov to maintain emotional clarity. The reader follows the main conflict without being distracted by secondary plot lines. At the same time, the story gains depth because the conflict is psychologically credible. Sharifjon's self-deception, his hope of preserving love, and his later awareness of moral defeat make the narrative persuasive. The *qissa* becomes a compact moral drama in which conscience is the real measure of character.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY IN HENRY JAMES'S NOVELLAS

Henry James's novellas are also concerned with moral choice, but they rarely state moral meaning directly. James prefers indirect presentation, ambiguity and the pressure of interpretation. His characters often inhabit a world where motives are hidden and where social

behavior must be read like a difficult text. The reader is therefore placed in an active position. Instead of receiving a completed judgment, the reader must evaluate the narrator's perspective, the character's self-knowledge and the reliability of available evidence.

In *Daisy Miller*, the conflict arises from the difference between social codes and individual spontaneity. Daisy is judged by others because her behavior does not fully correspond to European expectations of feminine propriety. Yet the novella does not reduce her to either innocence or guilt. Winterbourne's perception is limited, and his inability to understand Daisy becomes part of the moral problem. James thus turns social judgment into psychological inquiry: the question is not only who Daisy is, but also why others cannot read her fairly.

In *The Aspern Papers*, the narrator's obsession with the poet Jeffrey Aspern's letters reveals the ethical danger of aesthetic and scholarly desire. He presents his quest as devotion to literature, but his actions involve deception, manipulation and emotional exploitation. The novella is psychologically subtle because the narrator does not fully recognize the ugliness of his own conduct. James makes the reader observe the gap between self-justification and moral reality. The result is close to Yoqubov's concern with conscience, but James expresses it through irony and unreliable self-narration.

The Turn of the Screw represents James's most famous use of ambiguity. The governess believes that she sees ghosts and that the children are in danger. Yet the narrative never completely eliminates the possibility that her visions are psychological projections. The ethical conflict is therefore inseparable from epistemological uncertainty: before judging the governess, the reader must decide what kind of reality the narrative permits. The power of the novella lies in this refusal of a final explanation. Moral terror grows from uncertainty itself.

The Beast in the Jungle presents another form of psychological tragedy. John Marcher believes that an extraordinary event is waiting for him, and this belief prevents him from living fully. His failure is not a visible crime but a deep incapacity for reciprocal feeling. May Bartram's quiet devotion exposes the emptiness of Marcher's self-absorption. The novella shows that a

person may lose life not through dramatic wrongdoing but through passive egocentrism, fear and emotional blindness.

DISCUSSION

The first important similarity between Yoqubov and James is their attention to the ethical meaning of inner life. In both writers, a character's fate depends not simply on external events, but on the structure of consciousness. Sharifjon loses Muqaddas because he fails to unite love with honesty. The narrator of *The Aspern Papers* compromises human dignity in the name of literary possession. John Marcher loses the possibility of happiness because he mistakes self-importance for destiny. These figures differ culturally and historically, but they share a common artistic function: each reveals how inward distortion becomes outward tragedy.

The second similarity is the importance of loss. In *Muqaddas*, loss is the result of moral compromise. In *The Beast in the Jungle*, loss is the result of emotional paralysis. In *Daisy Miller*, loss emerges from misrecognition and social judgment. In *The Turn of the Screw*, loss is connected with the destructive force of uncertain perception. For both writers, loss is not accidental. It is the final form of a moral or psychological process that has been developing from the beginning of the narrative.

The main difference lies in the degree of interpretive openness. Yoqubov's qissa usually guides the reader toward a clear ethical conclusion. The reader understands that Sharifjon's action is morally wrong and that the tragedy is connected with this wrongness. James, however, often delays or complicates conclusion. His works ask the reader to judge, but they also show how difficult judgment can be. This difference reflects broader literary orientations. Yoqubov's realism emphasizes conscience as a social and moral category, while James's psychological art emphasizes perception as an unstable medium.

Another distinction concerns the relation between individual and society. Yoqubov's characters are closely tied to recognizable social institutions, customs and moral expectations. His qissa shows how injustice in one practical situation affects human relationships. James's characters often move in refined social circles, but the real conflict is frequently located in perception,

desire and interpretation. Society is present, yet it functions as a network of signs that characters read correctly or incorrectly.

Nevertheless, the comparison reveals that both literary traditions value the shorter prose form as a means of artistic compression. The qissa and the novella are not secondary genres. They are capable of representing serious moral and psychological problems with great intensity. Yoqubov's *Muqaddas* and James's major novellas show that a limited narrative space can produce deep ethical resonance. The compactness of form increases pressure on the character and forces the reader to concentrate on the decisive movement of conscience or perception.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of Odil Yoqubov's qissas and Henry James's novellas demonstrates that the qissa and the novella are powerful forms for representing moral choice and psychological ambiguity. Yoqubov's *Muqaddas* shows how a single dishonest action can destroy love, dignity and trust. Its artistic strength lies in the clear connection between personal desire and social conscience. James's novellas, especially *Daisy Miller*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Beast in the Jungle*, represent moral conflict through uncertain perception, indirect narration and psychological self-deception.

The two writers differ in method but converge in artistic purpose. Yoqubov seeks moral clarity through realist narration, while James creates ethical tension through ambiguity and interpretive difficulty. Yoqubov's reader is led toward the necessity of conscience; James's reader is compelled to examine the very process of judgment. Both approaches enrich the understanding of prose as a form of ethical knowledge.

The study also shows the usefulness of comparative literary analysis for Uzbek and world literature. When Odil Yoqubov is read alongside Henry James, his qissa-writing appears not only as a national literary achievement but also as part of a broader world tradition concerned with conscience, responsibility and the hidden drama of the human self. At the same time, James's novellas become more visible as ethical narratives, not merely as exercises in psychological complexity. The comparison confirms that different

literary cultures may approach the same human problem through different narrative techniques, and this difference is precisely what makes comparative study productive.

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