

Typological Foundations of The Poetics of Death in Contemporary Prose (Based on The Works of Nazar Eshonqul)

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Abstract: This article examines the thanatological motifs in the works of Nazar Eshonqul, one of the leading representatives of contemporary Uzbek prose. It analyzes the artistic and philosophical interpretation of death and explores the functions of such motifs as corpses, coffins, graves, cemeteries, spirits, and resurrection in the construction of plot, characterization, and artistic space. Particular attention is paid to the mythopoetic, demonological, and existential dimensions of the writer's thanatological conception. Several of Eshonqul's works are also compared with examples from Latin American literature. The study concludes that Nazar Eshonqul has developed an original aesthetic model for interpreting the relationship between life and death in modern Uzbek literature.

Keywords: Nazar Eshonqul, thanatology, death motif, Thanatos, mythopoetics, demonism, image of the dead, contemporary Uzbek prose, artistic space, existentialism.

Introduction: The works of Nazar Eshonqul occupy a distinctive place in post-independence Uzbek literature due to their departure from the framework of traditional realism and their philosophical and aesthetic interpretation of human existence, life and death, spiritual decline, and the relationship between the individual and society. As scholars have noted, "the question of human existence in literature has never been resolved within a single conceptual framework. Different writers approach life and death in ways that vary as greatly as other 'eternal' themes such as love, friendship, nature, and faith. Examining a writer's attitude toward life and death allows us to trace the evolution of their artistic vision, religious and philosophical views, and the extent to which they engage with the spiritual foundations of art. One of the crucial aspects of such an inquiry is determining in what historical period and under what circumstances, consciously or unconsciously, the author turns to the theme of death" [1]. In Eshonqul's works, death is not presented merely as a biological phenomenon; rather, it emerges as a complex artistic category associated with spiritual conditions, historical memory, social

oppression, and existential crisis. Motifs such as resurrected corpses, ghosts, liminal spaces, demonic figures, and forced death constitute essential components of the writer's poetics.

An analysis of thanatological motifs in Eshonqul's works, including "Execution" (Qatl), "Retribution" (Ajr), "The Bars of the Night" (Tun panjaralari), "The Forbidden Fruit" (Ta'qiq mevasi), "The Black Book" (Qora kitob), and "Go'ro'g'li, or the Water of Life" (Go'ro'g'li yohud hayot suvi), reveals typological affinities between his conception of death and certain poetic principles found in the works of Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez, and other representatives of Latin American literature. The purpose of this study is to elucidate the aesthetic function of the death motif in Eshonqul's works and to demonstrate its artistic potential in representing the relationship between the individual and society.

METHODS

Themes related to the resurrection of the dead, ghosts, spirits, and the dissolution of the boundary between life and death occupy a significant place in the literary

traditions of many cultures and historical periods. Such motifs are particularly prominent in mythology, magical realism, and Gothic literature, especially in Latin American fiction. The works of renowned writers such as Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Juan Rulfo frequently engage with concepts of eternal life and resurrection.

For comparative purposes, one may consider the figure of Melquíades in Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude". As one of the most memorable characters who returns after death, Melquíades shares a mysterious and enigmatic nature with the lecturer-teacher figure in Nazar Eshonqul's "Dead Season" (O'lik mavsum). Both characters transcend the conventional boundary between life and death and function as mediators between different ontological realms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The motif of the resurrected dead also appears in Nazar Eshonqul's short story "Execution" (Qatl). In this narrative, the entire city is overrun by the corpses of prisoners who had once been executed. These dead figures pursue the protagonist-narrator, seeking to subject him to the same fate that befell them.

A similarly death-saturated space populated by the dead can be found in Mexican writer Juan Rulfo's novella "Pedro Páramo" [2]. Written in 1955, the work combines elements of magical realism and modernism, establishing itself as one of the masterpieces of Latin American literature through its erasure of the boundary between life and death. The protagonist travels to the village of Comala in search of his father, "Pedro Páramo", following his deceased mother's dying wish. Upon arrival, however, he encounters inhabitants whose behavior appears strangely unsettling. As his journey through Comala continues, he gradually realizes that he is surrounded by the dead.

Thus, the novel constructs a mystical environment in which memories of the dead and the consciousness of the living become inseparably intertwined. Eventually, the protagonist discovers that Pedro Páramo, whom he sought, had long been dead and survived only in the memories of others. Pedro Páramo had ruled the village as a cruel and tyrannical figure whose oppression was so pervasive that even his death failed to improve the condition of Comala. This circumstance symbolizes the persistence of historical oppression and demonstrates how the consequences of violence and domination continue even after the disappearance of the oppressor. During his lifetime, Pedro Páramo subjected the villagers to ruthless exploitation, moral corruption, and spiritual degradation. Consequently, after his death, no one attempts to restore or govern

the village. Metaphorically representing the permanence of oppression and despair, Comala gradually transforms into an abandoned place inhabited by "living corpses." The villagers become spiritually and socially dead; only ghosts, memories, and echoes of the past remain. Juan Preciado himself eventually joins the ranks of the dead after communicating with them throughout his journey.

A comparable figure appears in Nazar Eshonqul's novel "Go'ro'g'li, or the Water of Life", embodied in the character of the Investigator. By the end of the novel, it becomes apparent that the Investigator, who maintains society under the control of bureaucracy and a totalitarian system, has long been dead. Nevertheless, his subordinates conceal this fact and continue to behave as though he were alive. Their unwavering belief in his continued existence prevents them from seeking liberation from the former regime. The corpses in Eshonqul's "Execution" similarly perpetuate the logic of the system that once victimized them. They pursue the protagonist – the only individual who remains genuinely "alive" – and drag him toward the execution ground. The story conveys terror, uncertainty, and philosophical reflection through a stream-of-consciousness narrative technique. Rich in metaphors and symbolic imagery, the text creates an atmosphere of suffocating oppression. Particularly noteworthy are the descriptions of the corpses' appearance, which reflect their inner state. Expressions such as "faces without distinct features" and "his face was bloodless, yet his eyes blazed with fire" emphasize the absence of vitality while suggesting the persistence of hatred and inner torment. Whereas the creation of a human being traditionally requires only water and earth, these corpses seem to have been "created from rage and hatred." Perhaps the most striking metaphor expressing their spiritual darkness is "the altar of eternity whose candles had gone out within the web of their pupils" [4]. Their skeletal bodies, expressionless faces, cave-like toothless mouths, soundless speech, and eyes filled with fear and hatred create a powerful antithesis that combines outward stillness with inner savagery. Through these images, Eshonqul transforms the resurrected dead into symbols of historical trauma and moral decay rather than merely supernatural beings.

The thanatological elements that permeate most of Nazar Eshonqul's works bear notable similarities to those found in the writings of the aforementioned Latin American authors. Having become acquainted with world literature relatively early and moving beyond strictly national and traditional literary models, Eshonqul developed a distinctive artistic style and mode of expression. This partly explains why the

thanatological dimension of his works is often perceived as complex by local readers.

In the short story “Retribution” (Ajr), for example, a father and son wait in the Valley of Judgment in the afterlife for the final reckoning. The son, a representative of an oppressive regime, recalls Pedro Páramo through his tyrannical characteristics. Likewise, in “The Man Led by a Monkey” (Maymun yetaklagan odam), the old man’s life is compared to a decaying tree, a metaphor reminiscent of the description in “Pedro Páramo”, where a spiritually exhausted character is likened to a rotting oak. The plot of “Retribution” also includes scenes in which buried corpses speak, laugh, cry, and dream, evoking the graveyard conversations between Dorotea and Juan Preciado in Rulfo’s novel.

Nazar Eshonqul further enriches the motifs of original sin, sacrifice, and divine destiny by incorporating elements of demonism. In literary studies, demonism refers to representations of evil forces such as spirits, devils, and demons. Within Romantic literature, demonism serves as a means of exploring the darker dimensions of the human psyche, rebellion, and the individual’s struggle with evil [6]. Romantic demonism frequently depicts satanic heroes or individuals engaged in conflict with supernatural forces. Such characters are typically afflicted by melancholy rooted in extreme individualism and are inclined toward destructive powers as they oscillate between nobility and moral degradation.

A defining characteristic of the demonic hero is alienation from society and a tendency toward self-determined yet ultimately tragic existence. In classical literature, demonism is associated with devils, curses, supernatural powers, and metaphysical evil. Goethe’s Faust, Byron’s Manfred, and Lermontov’s Demon are among the most prominent examples.

Similarly, in Eshonqul’s oeuvre, the demons of The Bars of the Night (Tun panjaralari) and the Satanic figures of The Forbidden Fruit (Taqiq mevasi) and The Black Book (Qora kitob) symbolize humanity’s spiritual weaknesses, surrender to temptation, and moral collapse. These figures are not merely supernatural entities; they represent both the origins and the culmination of humanity’s spiritual crisis.

According to the ideological framework underlying these works, the degeneration of the human soul begins at the very dawn of existence. This degeneration leads to distrust, isolation from society, and the loss of life’s meaning, ultimately resulting in the death of the spirit. Once the soul has died, physical death loses its significance. Consequently, the motifs of doubt, alienation, pride, inner emptiness, and heightened

emotional sensitivity toward death reveal the influence of major Western literary and existential traditions within the thanatological background of Eshonqul’s works.

A contrasting perspective is presented in the novel Go’ro’g’li, or the Water of Life. Here, the central plot revolves around a protagonist who has been officially declared dead by society yet spends the entire novel attempting to prove that he is still alive. The work belongs to the dystopian genre, which typically portrays dark, oppressive, and repressive social systems in order to expose social problems and warn against the dangers of totalitarianism.

The protagonist becomes a victim of a bureaucratic error after a newspaper mistakenly reports that he has died beneath a train. From that moment onward, society treats him as deceased. Throughout the novel, he struggles to prove both his existence and his identity, yet all his efforts fail. The system, which values documents and institutional authority above individual human life, gradually convinces not only society but also the protagonist himself that he is dead. Exhausted by the struggle and deprived of his work, home, and social position, the protagonist ultimately commits suicide. In the words of the narrator, everyone had already accepted him as dead, and nothing could reverse that verdict. Every attempt to affirm his existence only pushed him closer to the grave [5]. Having realized that throughout his thirty-three years he had lived as a nobody and would die as a nobody, the protagonist ultimately enacts the social sentence imposed upon him [5]. Ordinarily, suicide in literature is interpreted either as an act of self-negation or as a form of rebellion against society. In this novel, however, the protagonist’s suicide is neither. Rather than expressing resistance, it signifies surrender to an overwhelming social mechanism. This situation corresponds to what literary criticism identifies as the Kafkaesque effect [7]—a condition characterized by absurdity, incomprehensible bureaucracy, and dreamlike oppression. The term derives from the works of Franz Kafka, whose protagonists frequently find themselves trapped in irrational and incomprehensible circumstances. In this respect, the protagonist N. in “Go’ro’g’li, or the Water of Life” closely resembles Josef K. in Kafka’s The Trial. Both characters become victims of systems whose logic they cannot understand and against which they are ultimately powerless.

Sh. Davronova, who has examined the artistic synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions in post-independence Uzbek novels, argues that the roots of the protagonist’s suicide lie in the author’s existential worldview [8]. According to her interpretation, the character’s behavior in the liminal space between life

and death represents a departure from traditional national ideals and should be evaluated through the lens of Eastern ethical and religious values. At the same time, Davronova acknowledges that the protagonist's failure to assert his individuality and personal identity may be attributed both to the oppressive social system and to the existential reality that human beings sometimes remain powerless despite all efforts. She further contends that the suicide depicted in the novel should not be viewed as a direct expression of the author's aesthetic ideals but rather as a reflection of social problems. Nevertheless, it may be argued that the prevalence of forced death—and particularly suicide—in Eshonqul's artistic universe is connected not only to social circumstances but also to the writer's psychological disposition and philosophical outlook.

Eshonqul himself has responded to accusations that his works diverge from national literary traditions: "Literature has never developed in isolation. Traditions naturally pass from one literature to another. Every writer takes what he needs. I have done the same. In some of my stories, I have even done so deliberately and openly. I understand influence in a very simple way; therefore, I do not fear it. Writing differently, if it means writing uniquely, is an inevitable phenomenon" [9].

For Eshonqul, the distinction between Eastern and Western literature is ultimately artificial. He maintains that imposing rigid boundaries between literary traditions restricts artistic creativity and narrows the possibilities of representation. True literature, in his view, belongs to a universal cultural space rather than to isolated national traditions.

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that the motif of death in Nazar Eshonqul's works is not merely a narrative component but a central poetic element that embodies the author's worldview and artistic conception. In his interpretation, spiritual degradation, the loss of personal identity, and the negation of the individual by social systems are represented as tragedies more profound than physical death itself.

The images of resurrected corpses and posthumous existence in "Execution" (Qatl) and "Retribution" (Ajr) symbolize the enduring presence of historical oppression within human consciousness. In "Go'ro'g'li, or the Water of Life", the figure of a living person officially declared dead by society reveals the absolute dominance of totalitarian ideology over individual existence. The motif of demonism, in turn, serves as an artistic instrument for exploring the origins of evil and the spiritual crisis of humanity.

Furthermore, Eshonqul's poetics exhibit typological

affinities with such characteristic features of Latin American literature as magical realism, liminal spaces, and the dissolution of the boundary between life and death, particularly in the works of Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez, and other major writers of the region. However, these elements are adapted to the Uzbek cultural and literary context and employed to articulate national social, moral, and spiritual concerns.

From this perspective, Nazar Eshonqul emerges as a writer who elevates the motif of death beyond a purely aesthetic phenomenon, transforming it into a means of comprehending the complex relationships among the individual, society, and history. His thanatological poetics not only expands the artistic possibilities of contemporary Uzbek prose but also places it within the broader framework of world literary discourse.

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