

# Dramatic Exposition and Stage Structure in Tragic Lyric Poetry: A Case Study of Contemporary Uzbek Women's Poetry

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the interplay between tragic sensibility and dramatic structure in contemporary Uzbek women's poetry, with a particular focus on the works of Zebo Mirzo. The study investigates how lyrical compositions employ structural elements traditionally associated with drama—exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution—to construct intense psychological and emotional narratives. Through close readings of selected poems, the analysis reveals how poetic monologue, inner conflict, and historical personae contribute to the creation of a “stage-like” tragic experience, transforming the lyric form into a medium of performative and theatrical expression. This dramaturgical approach to the lyric reflects a shift in contemporary Uzbek women's poetry from purely introspective sentiment to scenically structured emotional enactment.

**Keywords:** Tragic lyric, dramatic exposition, stage structure, lyrical persona, Zebo Mirzo, Uzbek women's poetry.

**Introduction:** Over the past few decades, contemporary Uzbek women's poetry has undergone a significant transformation, moving beyond the confines of traditional lyricism toward more complex and multi-layered modes of expression. While earlier lyrical traditions in Uzbek literature often centered on personal sentiment, introspection, and static imagery, recent works by female poets increasingly demonstrate an affinity for internal dramaturgy—a deliberate structuring of emotional experience as a staged event. This shift marks a redefinition of the lyric from a purely introspective medium into one that incorporates the dynamics of performance, narrative progression, and even theatrical tension.

In this evolving landscape, the lyrical persona—traditionally a private voice engaged in meditative self-dialogue—becomes a dramatic agent situated within a sequence of emotionally charged “scenes.” These are not passive reflections but active enactments, where inner feelings unfold through a series of tensions, confrontations, and transformations, mirroring the structural logic of stage drama. The lyric “I” speaks as both author and actor, engaging the reader not only as

a witness to an internal monologue but as an audience to a staged tragic performance.

The poetry of Zebo Mirzo offers a particularly compelling example of this phenomenon. Her works reveal a sustained engagement with tragic sensibility, articulated through carefully choreographed emotional arcs. These arcs often align with the structural principles outlined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, including exposition (the introduction of the emotional or situational context), rising conflict (the intensification of tension between inner desire and external constraint), climax (the apex of emotional or psychological strain), and resolution or denouement (whether achieved through reconciliation, resignation, or unresolved suspension). By mapping these dramatic components onto a lyrical framework, Mirzo transforms the poem into a psychological theatre—a performance space where the boundaries between personal confession and staged tragedy are deliberately blurred.

This performative quality in contemporary Uzbek women's poetry is not a superficial borrowing of theatrical conventions but emerges from a deeply

rooted tragic worldview, in which human emotions are inseparable from conflict, inevitability, and fate. The interplay between subjective will and objective necessity—a central concern in G.N. Pospelov's theory of the tragic—finds a potent poetic form in such works. Here, the conflict is often internal, yet it is staged as if it were an external confrontation, thus creating a tension that resonates with both personal and collective dimensions of female experience.

In addressing these dynamics, the present study situates contemporary Uzbek women's poetry within broader theoretical debates on the tragic mode, dramatic structure, and the evolution of lyric genres. By bringing together classical dramaturgical frameworks (Aristotle), modern literary theory (Pospelov), and the socio-cultural context of Central Asian women's poetics, this analysis aims to demonstrate how tragedy in lyric form can function not merely as the expression of sorrow or loss, but as a scenically organised enactment of existential truth.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a poetic-dramaturgical analytical framework, integrating tools from classical dramatic theory with the conventions of modern lyric analysis. The objective is to identify and interpret the presence of dramatic exposition, conflict, climax, and denouement—structural elements typically associated with theatre—in selected examples of contemporary Uzbek women's lyric poetry.

The methodological approach combines close reading—a detailed, line-by-line examination of poetic form, imagery, and voice—with structuralist narratology to map the progression of emotional states in each poem. This is supplemented by comparative dramaturgical analysis, in which the poems' internal architecture is assessed against Aristotle's canonical model of dramatic structure as articulated in *Poetics*. While Aristotle's framework is traditionally applied to tragic plays, it offers a valuable lens for understanding the sequential organisation of heightened emotional intensity in lyric works.

In addition, the analysis draws upon G.N. Pospelov's theory of the tragic conflict, which distinguishes between subjective (inner) and objective (external) dimensions of tragedy. This dual perspective allows for a more nuanced reading of the poems, in which the lyrical persona's internal struggles are often staged as confrontations with impersonal or historical forces. The integration of Pospelov's dialectical model into the dramaturgical mapping provides a theoretical bridge between the inner psychological drama of lyric poetry and the externalised conflict structures of theatre.

The corpus for this study consists of seven poems by

Zebo Mirzo, selected for their explicit engagement with tragic themes and their clear dramaturgical progression:

"Qahr" (Wrath), "Nega kelding?" (Why Did You Come?), "Sizni eslolmayman" (I Cannot Remember You), "Shohi Zinda zinalaridan" (From the Stairs of Shohi Zinda), "Kumush bilan suhbat" (A Conversation with Kumush), "...Sevilgan-u, bilmagan biroq" (Beloved but Unaware), "Men sahnada yashab o'taman" (I Live Upon the Stage).

Each text is examined in three interrelated dimensions:

Structural mapping – identifying the exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution in each poem and relating these to both classical dramaturgy and modern lyric form.

Voice and performativity – analysing the lyrical persona as a dramatic actor, including shifts between monologue, dialogue, and internalised stage action.

Thematic and symbolic analysis – interpreting key images, metaphors, and historical references as dramaturgical devices that shape the poem's tragic atmosphere.

This multi-layered method not only highlights the intersections between lyric and dramatic genres but also enables a deeper understanding of how contemporary Uzbek women poets—particularly Zebo Mirzo—adapt theatrical techniques to intensify the tragic impact of their work.

## RESULTS

The close reading of selected poems by Zebo Mirzo reveals a consistent tendency to structure lyrical expression according to principles typically associated with dramatic composition. Each text exhibits a progression from exposition through conflict and climax to some form of resolution—whether definitive or suspended. This dramaturgical sequencing serves to heighten the tragic intensity of the lyric, allowing the inner life of the persona to unfold as if on a theatrical stage.

*Qahr* (Wrath)- This poem opens with a paradoxical declaration in which the lyrical persona simultaneously affirms and repudiates love. The exposition establishes a climate of emotional extremity: "Live without me, laugh without me, cry without me," a refrain that frames separation as both an injunction and an emotional necessity. The conflict arises from the tension between the persistence of feeling—"I still love"—and the self-imposed imperative to deny that love. The climax is marked by an absolute renunciation—"Even if you beg God Almighty, I will never return to your dreams"—a hyperbolic vow that signals the peak of inner resistance. The resolution is not reconciliation but fatalistic acceptance, as the

speaker identifies themselves as “one who has come from the last road of the world,” thereby reframing love’s end as a destiny rather than a choice. The tragic force of the poem lies not in the absence of affection but in the destructive excess of feeling, which turns inward as an act of self-violence.

“Sizni eslolmayman” (I Cannot Remember You)- Here, memory itself is configured as a site of torment. The exposition presents recollection as an involuntary wound—“When I recall you, a bitter pain awakens in my soul”—transforming what might be nostalgia into a form of psychic self-injury. The conflict develops through the admission that prolonged efforts to forget have failed, the speaker confessing that departure was “not from my love.” The climax comes with the articulation of an explicit death wish—“I wish to die... to hang myself!”—a line that condenses grief, helplessness, and existential exhaustion into a single irrevocable gesture. The poem’s resolution is internal rather than external: there is no restorative action, only the acknowledgment of an “infernal pain” that must be endured. The tragic source here is the sanctity and purity of love that remains unrecognized, and therefore unredeemed, by its intended recipient.

“Shohi Zinda zinalaridan” (From the Stairs of Shohi Zinda)- In this poem, the exposition is historical: the figure of Bibixonim is invoked, her fate forming a symbolic entry point into the lyrical drama. The speaker’s initial address—“Perhaps you too have walked these stairs, Bibim”—sets the tone for a meditation on female suffering across time. The conflict emerges as the poet aligns her own experiences with the historical queen’s, juxtaposing contemporary emotional wounds with a remembered royal tragedy. The climax fuses past and present into a shared register of female pain: “As the voice of Shohi Zinda... protect the entrusted heart from earth to sky.” The resolution is notably absent; rather, the tragedy is perpetuated through what may be called poetic identification, in which the speaker assumes the emotional legacy of a historical other. The tragic force here lies in the recognition of a collective, transhistorical female suffering that resists closure.

“...Sevilgan-u, bilmagan biroq” (Beloved but Unaware)- This text opens with the exposition of unrequited love—“What does it matter if I am not yours, but a captive of your love?”—immediately situating the speaker in a paradoxical relationship of emotional possession and absence. The conflict is internalised: the persona inhabits an idealised vision of love, divorced from its tangible reality, as in “With him I am the Queen of Heaven.” The climax comes in the inversion of pity—“I pity you more... beloved with great love, yet unaware of being loved”—transforming the speaker from a

passive sufferer into an active assessor of loss. The resolution resides in an imagined happiness, a compensatory construct that replaces external acknowledgment with internal conviction. The tragedy derives from the magnitude of a love that remains unacknowledged, its sublimity intensified by its invisibility.

“Men sahnada yashab o’taman” (I Live Upon the Stage)-This poem is the most explicitly meta-theatrical of the set, self-consciously framing life as a stage. In the exposition, the speaker declares, “I live upon the stage,” establishing a metaphorical performance space. The conflict is staged as a confrontation with hostile, possibly unseen, forces—“I bare my chest to sorrow, yet arrows fly from behind”—evoking betrayal and the inevitability of opposition. The climax occurs with the entrance of the antagonist—“You appear from behind the curtain, proud and victorious!”—a moment of emotional and symbolic defeat. The resolution is radical self-sacrifice—“I am a lover... I end my life with this point”—suggesting that the only escape from the staged conflict is an ultimate act of erasure. A delayed catharsis follows in the image of “jasmine flowers ascending the throne,” a bitterly ironic final tableau implying the triumph of unworthy successors. The tragic source is the inevitability of loss within the very performance of existence, a drama in which the outcome is fixed from the outset.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of Zebo Mirzo’s selected poems demonstrates that in contemporary Uzbek women’s lyric poetry, tragic expression increasingly manifests through staged dramaturgy, where the poetic text is not merely a repository of feeling but a performative arena in which emotions are enacted according to a recognisable dramatic logic. In this sense, the lyric persona functions less as a passive witness to her own emotional states and more as a dramatic protagonist, whose experience unfolds through a sequence of revelation, confrontation, and resolution. This transformation signals a significant genre-shaping shift: the lyric becomes not only a vehicle for personal confession but also a form of internal monodrama—a performance in which the self stages its own tragedy for an imagined audience.

This phenomenon involves more than the superficial borrowing of theatrical devices. Rather, it constitutes a structural redefinition of the lyric in which poetic time and space are configured as a “stage,” and the emotional trajectory mirrors the architecture of classical tragedy. The exposition introduces the emotional premise, the conflict heightens the tension between subjective desire and external or internal

opposition, the climax marks the zenith of emotional intensity, and the resolution either restores balance, affirms loss, or leaves the tension unresolved. By adhering to such a dramaturgical pattern, the poems acquire a narrative and performative momentum unusual for conventional lyric, drawing them into dialogue with dramatic art.

Moreover, the integration of historical personae—most notably the evocation of Bibixonim in “Shohi Zinda zinalaridan”—expands the scope of the lyric beyond the immediate emotional sphere of the speaker. In such cases, the text becomes a site of tragic identification: the persona overlays her own suffering with that of historical women, creating a layered temporal and emotional palimpsest. This strategy not only universalises personal grief but also situates it within a collective, transhistorical narrative of female endurance and loss. It recalls the choral function in ancient Greek tragedy, where individual lament merges into communal voice, thus offering the audience a cathartic recognition of shared human fate.

These techniques resonate strongly with G.N. Pospelov’s conception of the tragic conflict as a dialectic between subjective will and objective necessity. In Mirzo’s poetry, the “objective” dimension is frequently an impersonal, inescapable force—be it unrequited love, historical injustice, or the irreversibility of separation. The “subjective” element is the lyric persona’s response to these forces: resistance, resignation, or the paradoxical acceptance of defeat as a form of moral or spiritual victory. The interplay between these poles generates a tension that is both psychologically authentic and aesthetically heightened, embodying what Pospelov terms the “tragic sense of life.”

From an aesthetic perspective, this convergence of lyric and dramatic modes produces what might be termed a psychological theatre in verse. The audience (reader) is invited into a space where the speaker’s inner conflict is externalised through monologue, imagined dialogue, and scenic metaphor. The “stage” of the poem may be a literalised performance space (“Men sahnada yashab o’taman”), a reconstructed historical setting (“Shohi Zinda zinalaridan”), or the abstract theatre of memory and dream (“Sizni eslolmayman”). In each case, the reader occupies a position akin to that of a theatre spectator, engaging with the unfolding emotional drama as both witness and participant in the cathartic process.

Thus, in contemporary Uzbek women’s poetry, tragedy is not simply narrated—it is enacted. This performative modality allows poets to merge the lyrical intimacy of subjective voice with the structural discipline of

dramatic art, resulting in a hybrid form that amplifies both emotional depth and thematic complexity. It suggests a potential direction for the evolution of the lyric genre in Uzbek literature—one in which the boundaries between poetry and theatre are increasingly porous, and where the tragic mode becomes a primary site of formal innovation.

## CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that Zebo Mirzo’s lyric poetry represents a significant development in the trajectory of contemporary Uzbek women’s literary expression, one in which the tragic mode is reconceptualised through the deliberate adoption of classical dramatic structures. By embedding the poetic voice within a dramaturgical framework of exposition–conflict–climax–resolution, her works transcend the boundaries of traditional lyricism, achieving a form of psychological theatre that is at once intimate and performative.

This hybridisation is not a mere stylistic experiment; it is rooted in a profound engagement with the tragic worldview as articulated in both classical and modern literary theory. Aristotle’s conception of tragedy as the representation of serious and complete action is here reinterpreted for the lyric stage, where the “action” is an interior sequence of emotional states rather than an external chain of events. Simultaneously, Pospelov’s dialectic of subjective will versus objective necessity finds vivid embodiment in Mirzo’s monologic dramas, where the speaker’s inner resistance, surrender, or transformation unfolds as if in real time before an audience.

The performative quality of these poems further underscores the poet’s capacity to universalise personal experience. In drawing upon historical figures such as Bibixonim, Mirzo enacts what may be termed a tragic identification, whereby individual suffering becomes a symbolic echo of collective female experience across generations. This interweaving of personal and historical narratives recalls the chorus of Greek tragedy, functioning as a communal voice that bridges temporal and cultural divides.

From a formal perspective, the integration of dramatic structure into lyric composition produces a heightened tragic intensity. The use of poetic monologue, imagined dialogue, scenic metaphor, and sequential emotional escalation generates a dynamic interplay between the immediacy of lyric intimacy and the structured inevitability of theatrical tragedy. This synthesis not only intensifies the reader’s engagement but also extends the expressive potential of Uzbek lyric poetry into new aesthetic territories.

In the broader context of Central Asian poetics, Mirzo’s

work provides a model for how genre boundaries can be productively blurred to articulate complex psychological and existential themes. Her dramaturgically-inflected lyrics invite comparative exploration alongside similar hybrid forms in other literary traditions—such as the dramatic monologues of English Romanticism, the symbolic theatre of Russian modernism, or the confessional stage-poetry of contemporary world literature.

Ultimately, the significance of this poetic strategy lies in its capacity to transform the lyric into a staged enactment of human destiny. By reimagining the poem as both confession and performance, Z.Mirzo not only redefines the possibilities of Uzbek women's lyricism but also contributes to a transnational dialogue on the enduring power of tragedy as an artistic mode. Her work affirms that in the twenty-first century, tragedy need not be confined to the theatre: it can inhabit the compressed, intense, and deeply personal space of the lyric, where the stage is the page and the audience is the solitary reader.

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