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EXPRESSION OF MYSTICAL IMAGERY IN ERKIN USMONOV'S SHORT STORIES

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22816095

Abstract: The literature of the Independence Period differs from the literature of other eras in its richness of various creative explorations, as well as its diversity in form and content. The freedom granted to creators during this period was clearly reflected in all spheres of literature, particularly in prose. Authors endowed with a modern worldview who assimilated the finest examples of world literature created artistic works capable of standing alongside global masterpieces infused with the national spirit. Works in the mystical genre also belong to such creative accomplishments. This article provides insights into mystical imagery, the distinctive features of mysticism, and character traits in several short stories from Erkin Usmonov's book "The Deceased Arrives at Eight in the Evening," who established a unique direction in Uzbek literature through mystical short stories.

Keywords: Independence era prose, mysticism, mystical imagery, "The Deceased Arrives at Eight in the Evening," adventure-mystical genre, fantasy, detective, short story, novella, novel, mini-novel.

INTRODUCTION. The past 20th century was an era rich in changes and renewals for the people of the world. Discoveries made in the fields of science and technology led to monumental achievements and events in human history. This, in turn, triggered shifts and transformations in social life, as well as in human consciousness and worldview. Signs of a different perspective on reality also began to manifest in literature.

At the turn of two centuries, an era of technology gave birth to a unique artistic creative style. This was driven by the distinct lifestyle and way of thinking in the West. During this period in Europe, science, technology, industry, and the economy developed rapidly, production efficiency increased, and opportunities for people to acquire wealth emerged. People gained the chance to live better with less hardship compared to previous eras. However, these developments failed to bring the expected happiness to either the individual or humanity as a whole. Human intellect and capability proved to be the cause not only of a better life, but also of human misery. As history shows, the creation of weapons of mass destruction through human intellect claimed thousands of lives. These events shattered the hopes of those who believed happiness lay solely in progress and scientific advancement. Consequently, a view emerged in literature marked by distrust in life, loss of hope in goodness, and the belief that human existence and life itself are absurd and futile. Literary figures viewed and portrayed life predominantly in dark tones. As a result, unprecedented characters appeared in the "notebook" of literature. After independence was attained, new directions emerged in Uzbek literature. The achievements and shortcomings of

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this period have been highlighted in numerous articles by literary scholars. Works created after independence reveal the steady development of prose. This freedom of expression granted creators the opportunity to perceive and understand the world, engage deeply with world literature, learn from creative experiments, and enrich these with the national spirit, thereby creating works capable of competing on the global stage. As a result, innovative methods began to be applied in our national literature, and new forms of attitude toward depicted reality and personality emerged. In artistic literature, focus shifted from events to the inner psychology of the character. Imaginative elements and subjects born of artistic thinking also began to appear in prose works.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS. Prose works of the Independence Period differ from those created in previous eras. Independence brought major changes to literature, just as it did to all other fields. Creators achieved creative independence in the true sense of the word, as previous barriers were removed. During this period, experimental works, modernist and postmodernist literature, seventy-page novels, and even mini-novels were created. Omon Mukhtor's novel "Ffu" and Ulug‘bek Hamdam's work "Na’matak" serve as examples of this. Mystical works, a relatively new direction in Uzbek literature, also began to develop during the independence period. Erkin Usmonov is considered one of the writers working in this mystical direction. The author's books published in the last decade, "Avenue of Death" and "The Deceased Arrives at Eight in the Evening," bring together several detective stories and collections of adventure-mystical short stories, clearly highlighting his role as a writer in this genre. The word "mysticism" derives from Greek, meaning secret or hidden. The literature of Independence is an aesthetic phenomenon developing naturally, unbound by any rigid mold in terms of theme or artistic principles. Showing real life for its own sake is not considered a virtue in itself for this literature; rather, the ability to reflect artistic truth is highly valued. In mystical works, events do not take place in an alternate realm or secret territories, but rather describe mysterious occurrences experienced by ordinary people living alongside us today. The author's works in the adventure-mystical genre stand out for their wealth of mysterious, unexpected, supernatural, and highly engaging events. "The talented writer Erkin Usmonov has been actively creating for many years. Several books of short stories and novellas by the author have been received with great interest by readers. In recent years, Erkin published dozens of stories in the adventure-mystical direction, which found their audience."

Indeed, literature is a matter of the heart. Every writer creates works based on their own style, worldview, and thinking. Erkin Usmonov's recent publications consist primarily of stories and novellas in the mystical genre. There are several reasons for this. The author likely aimed to bring book lovers back to literature through stories filled with mysterious, supernatural events—catering to readers constrained for time, distanced from literature by daily struggles, and weary of repetitive thematic formulas. Adventure-mystical works combine elements of detective fiction, fantasy, and adventure. The characters in his stories are ordinary people like us—living, working, and coping with daily struggles. What sets them apart are the mysterious, supernatural events in their lives that invite us to reflect. The writer's goal is not merely to narrate intriguing and mysterious events, but to foster human perfection, goodness, justice, and other human and universal virtues through such stories. "The direction of

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'mysticism' has existed in the literature of almost all nations of the world and continues to be written today. In such works, attention is drawn to the peculiar and mysterious states of the human psyche."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. In particular, in the author's story "The Light of a Faded Star," a student named Rahimjon finds a beautiful bouquet in the back seat of a taxi one day. Imagining its owner to be a beautiful girl, he plants the flower in a pot and nurtures it. Years pass; Rahimjon gets married and has children, yet that same flower remains alive, reminding him of his distant, pure youth. Almost no mystical imagery appears until the end of the story. However, the work concludes unexpectedly: one day, the flower wilts, and it is placed on the balcony among old belongings. Surprisingly, Rahimjon passes away shortly thereafter. A few days later, the household members experience strange occurrences. It feels as if someone is walking around their home or flipping through books. Most interestingly, the story concludes with the lines: "Husan tried to close the door again, but at that moment, seeing footsteps at the threshold, he trembled as if struck by an electric current. The footprints were fresh, and the traces of mud brought in on shoes were clearly visible." Mystical works do not serve to frighten people, but rather help them reflect deeply on life and existence through mysterious events, recognize that the world is full of wonder and mysteries, and draw life lessons through mystical depictions.

Another work by the author is the story "My Friend Horatio," which centers on actor friends Said Mansurov and Baxtiyor A'loyev. Both colleagues work at a major theater. Baxtiyor enjoys continuous success, with every role bringing him fame and honors. However, no matter how hard Said tries or how well he performs his roles, fortune turns away from him; prestige and glory repeatedly fall to Baxtiyor. Drunk one day, when Said reproaches the director for not giving him lead roles and favoring others, he is told that there is no warmth in his eyes. Ultimately, one evening in his home, he stabs a large portrait of his friend with a knife. The next morning, his wife informs him that his close friend was stabbed on the street the previous night. "Said involuntarily reached out his trembling hands to stroke and smooth that spot on the picture, but feeling a liquid on his fingertips, he pulled back as if shocked by electricity. Blood was seeping from the wound on Baxtiyor's chest in the portrait." Through this story, the author vividly illustrates how envy degrades a person, and how jealousy and blaming others for everything ultimately lead to one's own ruin.

Another story by the author is "The Witch," which tells the story of an elderly female director in a large garment factory who, according to some, should already be retired. Although advanced in age, this woman looked remarkably beautiful and energetic. This secret becomes clear to everyone at the end of the story. Other women who entered this female director's office would feel sick and remain ill for a long time. The word "witch," used by one of the characters, Husniya, helps the reader fully grasp the story's meaning. That this woman drains the beauty of the female employees in her workplace like a witch is clearly seen in these final sentences of the story: "As she tied the belt of her robe and stepped onto the threshold, one of the girls screamed in fear, and the other women froze in shock.

Standing before them was an old hag with graying hair, a sallow face covered in deep wrinkles, and a hideous appearance, with only a faint light flickering weakly in her tired, sorrowful, yet still charming dark eyes—like a lamp barely glimmering in the far distance..."

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"Interestingly, real and imaginary events blend together seamlessly in this genre. We see this clearly in the works of great writers such as Kafka, Akutagawa, Edgar Allan Poe, Mérimée, Hoffmann, and Tagore."

The greatest goal and duty of literature is to discover the human being. Whether the events in mystical works occurred in the past, are happening today, or will happen in the future, the center of these works remains the discovery of man and his complex inner world. "Lately, the work of one writer has caught my interest. He is a unique author whose works cannot be confused with anyone else's."

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, mystical works serve to convey universal human ideas to a broad reading public—such as revealing inner human experiences, attitudes, and societal flaws, as well as inspiring people toward goodness and virtue. Erkin Usmonov's ability to express mysterious, supernatural events in connection with real modern life reflects his mastery, demonstrating his skill in creating unique works in a direction that many hesitate to undertake.

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