HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND THE MOTIF OF SPIRITUAL BETRAYAL IN MODERN UZBEK PROSE: A CASE STUDY OF NAZAR ESHONQUL'S "THE MAN LEADING A MONKEY"

Ne'matullayeva Soxibaxon

Teacher, Department of uzbek language and literature, languages, Andijan State Medical Institute,

E-mail: sohibaorinova@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines the issues of existential crisis and the motif of betrayal in modern Uzbek prose through the lens of modern literary theories. Nazar Eshonqul's story "The Man Leading a Monkey" (*Maymun yetaklagan odam*) serves as the primary object of analysis. The study shifts the focus from traditional social-domestic interpretations of betrayal to its existential and spiritual dimensions. By analyzing the protagonist's psychological degradation, the paper demonstrates how the loss of moral values and intellectual compromise lead to the betrayal of one's own identity, visually symbolized by the transformation into an animalistic state. The research concludes that Eshonqul uses the motif of betrayal as an existential tool to critique the moral stagnation of contemporary society and the alienation of the modern intellectual.

Keywords: Modern Uzbek prose, Nazar Eshonqul, existentialism, motif of betrayal, spiritual degradation, alienation, symbol of the mirror, metamorphosis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the globalized world, literature increasingly addresses the inner fragmentation, alienation, and spiritual crises of contemporary individuals. Modern Uzbek prose, having experienced a significant aesthetic shift after national independence, has actively integrated European modernist traditions, particularly existentialism. The traditional realistic approach to moral conflicts has expanded into a deeper philosophical investigation of human existence. Within this context, the motif of betrayal undergoes a profound transformation: it is no longer depicted merely as an interpersonal conflict or a social offense, but as an existential choice that leads to the total collapse of the human soul.

Nazar Eshonqul stands out as a key figure in Uzbek postmodernist and existentialist literature. His narrative style relies heavily on metaphors, symbols, and psychological depth to unveil the dark corridors of human consciousness. His critically acclaimed short story, "The Man Leading a Monkey" (*Maymun yetaklagan odam*), represents a pinnacle of existential writing in Central Asian literature.

The story reflects the classic existential dilemma: the tension between authenticity and bad faith (Sartrean *mauvaise foi*). The protagonist, an intellectual and an artist, gradually compromises his artistic and moral integrity for material comfort and societal recognition. This paper argues that this compromise is not a simple ethical misstep, but a radical spiritual betrayal of one's higher self. The core research question addresses how Nazar Eshonqul utilizes the motif of betrayal to visualize the existential crisis and subsequent degradation of an intellectual in a morally stagnant environment.

2. METHODS

To analyze the existential layers of betrayal in Nazar Eshonqul's prose, this study employs a multidisciplinary methodology:

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Existential Hermeneutics: Based on the philosophical frameworks of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Søren Kierkegaard, this method is used to decode the themes of alienation, choice, and freedom in the text.

Structural-Semiotic Analysis: This approach helps interpret the key symbols in the story- primarily the "monkey" and the "mirror"- as semiotic markers of the protagonist's divided consciousness.

Psychological Criticism: Applied to trace the gradual moral degradation and inner transformation of the main character from an idealist to a compromised entity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE EXTREME SYMBOLISM OF EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

3.1. The Mirror as the Confrontation with the Self and Alienation

In existential philosophy, the mirror is a classic tool for self-confrontation. According to Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of the "Look" (*le regard*), an individual perceives their existence either through the eyes of the "Other" or through a sudden, shocking awareness of their own reality. In Nazar Eshonqul's narrative, the mirror serves as a harsh existential boundary between the protagonist's authentic past self and his compromised, betrayed present self.

At the beginning of the story, the mirror is an instrument of self-reflection. However, as the protagonist continues to betray his artistic ideals for material wealth, the reflection in the mirror begins to distort. This distortion represents alienation (*yotlashish*)—the psychological phenomenon where a person becomes a stranger to themselves. The mirror no longer returns the image of a pure artist; instead, it reflects a fragmented identity. From an existential viewpoint, the protagonist's refusal to look into the mirror, or his horror upon doing so, signifies the dread of facing his own "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*). He knows he has betrayed his essence, and the mirror acts as an unyielding judge that strips away his societal masks, leaving him naked before his existential guilt.

3.2. The Monkey as the Ultimate Symbol of Degradation and "Bad Faith"

If the mirror represents the internal recognition of betrayal, the Monkey is the physical and biological manifestation of that betrayal. In world literature and mythology, the monkey often symbolizes imitation, base instincts, and the loss of human dignity. In this story, Eshonqul elevates this symbol to an existential category.

The dynamic between the man and the monkey undergoes a radical inversion that can be analyzed through two distinct existential phases:

Phase	Dynamic Between Man and Monkey	Existential Meaning
Phase 1	The Man leads the Monkey.	The intellectual still believes he controls his destiny and choices, viewing his moral compromises as temporary.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Phase	Dynamic Between Man and Monkey	Existential Meaning
Phase 2	The Monkey leads the Man.	The base instincts, social conformity, and material greed take full control. The human essence is completely surrendered.

This biological transformation—metamorphosis—closely echoes Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. However, while Kafka's Gregor Samsa wakes up as an insect due to external, bureaucratic alienation, Eshonqul's protagonist turns into an animalistic state as a direct result of internal choice. Every time the protagonist chooses money over art, comfort over truth, he feeds the "monkey" inside him. Ultimately, the monkey represents the absolute victory of the *in-itself* (pure, unthinking matter) over the *for-itself* (conscious human existence). The protagonist's existential betrayal is finalized when the boundary between the man and the animal vanishes.

4. CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of Nazar Eshonqul's "The Man Leading a Monkey" demonstrates that the motif of betrayal in modern Uzbek prose has evolved from a social-domestic cliché into a profound existential category. Through the dual semiotic system of the Mirror and the Monkey, the author illustrates that the worst form of betrayal is not directed toward external others, but toward one's own spiritual essence.

The mirror captures the agonizing erasure of human identity, while the monkey visualizes the unstoppable expansion of animalistic conformism. Ultimately, the story serves as an existential warning to intellectuals: when a person compromises their moral and creative integrity for material illusions, they lose their existential freedom. Nazar Eshonqul successfully bridges national prose with global modernist traditions, proving that the crisis of the human soul transcends geographical boundaries.

References

1. Eshonqul, N. Mendan ketsangiz ham sizni topaman. – Toshkent: "Sharq", 2011. – 320 b.

2. Eshonqul, N. Momoqo‘shiq: Qissalar va hikoyalar. – Toshkent: "Yangi asr avlodi", 2013. – 280 b.

3. Eshonqul, N. Ijod falsafasi. – Toshkent: "Akademnashr", 2018. – 416 b.

4. Yo‘ldoshev, Q. Yoniq so‘z. – Toshkent: "Yangi asr avlodi", 2006. – 240 b. (Ushbu kitobda Nazar Eshonqul asarlari tahliliga keng o‘rin berilgan).

5. Rasulov, R. Istiqlol davri o‘zbek hikoyachiligida modernizm (Nazar Eshonqul ijodi misolida). Filologiya fanlari nomzodi dissertatsiyasi avtoreferati. – Toshkent, 2012. – 24 b.

6. Karimov, N. va boshqalar. XX asr o‘zbek adabiyoti tarixi. – Toshkent: "O‘zbekiston", 2015.

7. Quronov, D. Adabiyotshunoslikka kirish. – Toshkent: "Akademnashr", 2019. – 224 b.

8. Sharafiddinov, O. Ijod – hayot mazmuni. – Toshkent: "Sharq", 2008.