

Social Problems of The Era in Elbek's Short Stories

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Abstract: *The article analyzes the short stories of Mashriq Yunusov (Elbek), one of the most prominent representatives of early 20th-century Uzbek Jadid literature, from thematic and ideological perspectives. Although Elbek was primarily a poet, publicist, and educator, his stories reflect a number of pressing issues of that period. Through their study, it is also possible to identify the distinctive features of Jadid short story writing. The article reveals when and in which publications these stories were published, as well as their ideological and artistic aspects. In particular, special attention is paid to the writer's stories such as "Fohisha," "Jadid Qoravoy," "Kuzatishda," "Ona," and "Kelgusining quyoshi."*

Key words: *Elbek, Story, Jadid, Fitrat, Image, Theme, Style, Motif, Journal, Episode, Time and Space*

1. Introduction

The Jadids also laid the foundation for modern short story writing. However, this did not emerge suddenly. Drawing from folk oral creativity and nourished by the examples of classical literature, this genre appeared in a new form. Epic genres that had existed for centuries in the form of *masnavi* gradually began to transition into prose. Defining the short story, Fitrat writes: "Works written in a narrative manner that depict the condition of a person or an event are called a story. A story reveals the psychological state of its protagonist; it illuminates the dark corners of many events that occur in our lives[1]. It presents many of our habits, whose harmful nature is not fully recognized, together with their tragic consequences, and shows them to us. Therefore, the short story occupies an important place in life" [2].

At first, translations were published in the press, and later, stories written by Jadid prose writers began to appear frequently. Alongside figures such as Behbudiy, Avloniy, Qodiriy, Cholpon, and Hamza, a number of Elbek's stories also adorned the press of that period[3].

2. Methodology

Eight of Elbek's short stories "Fohisha," "Ona," "Anorgul," "Dadamot," "Chirchiq," "Who Will I Become?," "Qahhorxo'ja," and "Qo'shchi Turg'un"—were included in his *Selected Works* published in 1999. The story "Kelgusining quyoshi" was published in issues 5–6 of the journal *Maorif va o'qituvchi* in 1925, while "Yangi turmush izlovchi" (this story was later included in *Selected Works* under the title "Qahhorxo'ja") appeared in issues 7–8. The story "Jadid Qoravoy" was published in issue 4 of the journal *Yer yuzi* in 1926.

There are also a number of stories and prose works that have not yet been republished in modern editions, such as "Qishloqqa sayohat" (a prose sketch), "Kuzatishda," "Mashshoqchi Erbo'ta", "Oyxon," and "Me and the Painter," as well as several other works that remain less known. Publishing these in contemporary editions and making them accessible to the public would play an important role in promoting Elbek's literary heritage. Through his stories, Elbek conveyed important ideas to the people: that educated and determined youth are the future of the nation; that women should be free and have access to education; and that building a free and prosperous homeland requires

self-awareness and the development of our language and literature.

3. Results

The language of Elbek's short stories is simple and clear, the imagery is original, and the style of expression is distinctive. Most of these stories are brief and concise, free from excessive descriptions and embellishments, with the main focus placed on the event itself. While depicting events, the writer strives to present descriptions of nature that correspond to the mood and psychological state of the characters[4].

For example, the story "*Fohisha*" begins with the following lines: "The ruins of a collapsed building still showed that once there had been a proper structure here". Through this, the author hints that the protagonist's present condition is also internally ruined, spiritually and physically oppressed, although she had once been a complete person full of dreams. In the following lines, the writer intensifies the imagery and "animates" the building. Like a human being, the building "seemed ashamed before the structures that raised their heads to the sky and tried to sink into the ground." After such thought-provoking and sorrowful imagery that evokes compassion, the narrative reveals that the protagonist was born and raised in this very ruined hut[5].

The story deals with one of the great tragedies of that period—the consequences of lack of upbringing and education. It portrays how a poor orphan girl becomes a victim of deception, how her delicate soul is broken and trampled, and how she takes steps onto the disgraceful path of prostitution. Society is depicted as being so deeply immersed in corruption that everyone is concerned only with their own pleasure and comfort. "The girl had passed sixteen and was stepping into seventeen; she had tasted the bitterness and sweetness of life, yet she had fallen into the filthy trap of existence." Having entered the house of a wealthy man as a servant, she becomes a victim of her masters' cold desires. The girl was originally pure, but the environment corrupts her and forces her into degradation. The author describes this as follows: "The girl lost her former state. Although she had not considered such actions acceptable before, after living in this immoral household, she absorbed them into her nature[6]."

The girl, having unwillingly entered a corrupt path, ultimately falls victim to an incurable disease. She becomes physically weakened, her back bent, unable to control herself. The story concludes with the words: "The muddy, filthy stream of life, flowing without cease, had engulfed her." As one reads the story, one feels compassion for the prostitute girl. At the same time, one's hatred grows toward those who placed her in such a vile environment. One even begins to feel disgust toward such an unjust society. This was precisely Elbek's intention. He sought to hold a mirror up to society and reveal its true face, to openly demonstrate the consequences of ignorance and lack of upbringing[7].

Speaking about the rich man's sons, the author writes: "To avoid such expenses, he did not educate his two grown sons. Thinking constantly about the money that would be spent on them, he wasted several years without noticing, and even though his sons had reached his own height, he still had not married them off." This is where the root cause lies. The true tragedy behind the repulsive life depicted throughout the story is precisely the greed and stinginess of wealthy men like 'B,' who think only of their own desires and fail even to provide education for their children. In Elbek's prose, as in that of other Jadid write[8].

4. Discussion

In Elbek's prose, as in that of other Jadid writers, didacticism prevails. As literary scholar Islomjon Yoqubov notes, "It is natural that elements of didacticism are abundant in early 20th-century Uzbek prose and that realism could not fully manifest itself. This is because our new literature was just beginning its formative stage. Literature had not distanced itself from social life. Uzbek literature was in the initial phase of assimilating the advanced traditions of both the East and the West. The leading aim of our prose was to select characters from ordinary people and to glorify their nobility, spiritual purity, kindness, and generosity"[9].

Nature descriptions reflecting the human psyche are also skillfully employed in the story "*Kelgusining quyoshi*." The story begins as follows: "The sun set. Its rays lingered for a while as if

waiting for something, then suddenly scattered away. Darkness, fleeing from the sun, enveloped everything around; it seemed to open up, frowning as it looked about"[10]. While depicting the calm evening, the author makes use of various metaphors and figurative expressions.

Narrated in the author's voice, the story leads the reader so gently through the quiet night that it feels as if one has entered that very scene, listening to the mysterious sounds of the night. The work portrays figures striving toward light. As the narrator moves through the dark night in search of light, he notices a faint glow coming through the crack of a door. It is a very small house, with broken windowpanes and scattered belongings inside. In this ruined dwelling, "a young boy was sitting on a small stool, reading a book." The author calls him "the sun of the future," suggesting that the bright days dreamed of by the Jadids can be achieved through such sources of enlightenment[11].

Elbek's main profession was that of a teacher. For this reason, he pays great attention to the education of youth in his works. Through his cycles of poems and a number of his short stories, it is evident that he sees salvation precisely in education. In the story "*Kelgusining quyoshi*," he expresses hope that the boy who is reading a book will build the future. This very hope is reflected in the title. The young adolescent, who draws strength from the light of enlightenment, is almost invisible even in the light of the lamp. For "the boy's body, filled with radiance, was such that for those who truly looked, it could hardly be distinguished from the lamp itself." Elbek wishes for many such enlightened young people to exist.

While analyzing this story, researcher Kholiyor Safarov also points out certain shortcomings: "The skill of creating landscape, characteristic of Elbek's style, is clearly manifested in the story. The event is depicted with pathos and in a tense psychological state, and it instills a sense of light in the reader's heart, making one feel the warmth of the sun. However, the repeated use of the word 'darkness' throughout the text to emphasize the situation becomes somewhat tiresome"[12].

In a кандидатская dissertation written by literary scholar Bo'is Qoriyev, a critical opinion about Elbek is expressed, stating that "his work lacks poetic quality, his ideas are scattered and superficial, and originality is insufficient" [13]. However, any perceptive critic who pays attention to the essence of Elbek's works can understand that his ideas are not superficial and that his imagery possesses poetic qualities. Therefore, it is difficult to agree with such criticism. Indeed, the following descriptions from this very story demonstrate how sensitive and perceptive a writer Elbek was: "The night was truly full of sorrow. The darkness in the hearts of the sorrowful seemed to be fragments lost from that very night." "How can light be seen when it merges with light?"

Such imagery is frequently found in Elbek's works. In the story "*Jadid Qoravoy*," the following description is used to portray the protagonist: "The building, which appeared worn to passersby, was the place where Qoravoy had been raised since youth; the building, like Qoravoy himself, was well-formed and attracted everyone's attention" [14]. Qoravoy, who imitates others, loses his identity, considers himself superior, becomes separated from his family, and loses his reputation in society, is described as a "monkey of life."

At that time, there were many individuals who considered themselves superior to others, blindly imitated them, and turned into superficial "Jadids." As a result, they became disgraced and humiliated in the eyes of the people. Qoravoy, being the son of a merchant, measured everything by money and believed that money was the key capable of solving all problems; therefore, he did not even think about whether education was necessary or not. With the emergence of the "New Economic Policy" for merchants, Qoravoy, who engaged in hidden trade, restrains himself somewhat. After the revolution, his awareness begins to awaken, and imitation becomes his dominant trait. He now wishes to "associate with educated women and walk hand in hand with them in public..." However, he fails even in this. Then he decides to go to the theater, considering that "the theater is a place of instruction." Yet, "as he sits and watches, he places his hand on his temple as if understanding something, but cannot take his eyes off the women"[15].

Eventually, after watching one act of the performance, during the intermission he meets a woman and tries to win her favor. "The imitator Qoravoy increased his foolishness day by day. He could not even restrain himself from lying like a dog at the woman's doorstep," the story states. This short story ends with the news that Qoravoy's wife has died and that he himself has been absent since the previous night. When this news is conveyed to the narrator, he responds: "It has turned out as he wished; he

must be content.” Thus, for a person who sees life as nothing but pleasure and amusement and has forgotten who he is, even the destruction of his family holds no significance[16].

In the story “*Jadid Qoravoy*,” the portrait of the protagonist is drawn with great skill. Qoravoy is depicted with such pathos and irony that even the following description alone reveals that this character is merely an imitation of a Jadid figure: “He never failed to attract the attention of anyone who saw him. The clothes he changed every two days, his hair stretched in curls down to his forehead, and his beard and mustache, trimmed every other day, further enhanced his appearance.” In another instance, the author remarks that “it was absolutely necessary for him to wear the cloak of a Jadid”. The title of the story itself is chosen ironically. The author seeks to mock such imitators of the time. The artistic imagery used throughout the story and the development of events also reveal a distinctive humor. The protagonist, who has abandoned his true self in pursuit of desires and ambitions, is subjected to bitter satire. According to literary scholars, “although the short story is small in form, it is capable of containing and expressing immense meaning. In this sense, brevity of form, conciseness, and semantic completeness are its traditional external features”. Mashriq Yunusov’s story “*Ona*” (“Mother”) is also compact in size, yet rich in meaning. The story depicts a mother sending her son away to study and a son leaving his family for the first time. In order to reveal their psychological states, the writer once again employs descriptions of nature.

He describes the descent of night upon the village as follows: “Evening fell. The sounds of the day gradually faded away with the sun. Now the creatures of the night began to cry out with all their might: crickets chirped, and an owl nesting nearby hooted unpleasantly”. Both the son, Yoldosh, who is leaving home, and his mother, who sees him off, are unable to sleep throughout the night. However, neither expresses the reason for this sleeplessness to the other. When the son asks, “Mother, why are you not sleeping?”, her only response is a sigh[17].

Striving for brevity and conciseness, the author does not elaborate on the inner feelings and emotions of these two characters. Instead, he conveys everything through that single sigh. At dawn, the mother and son part in tears. After spending a year in the city, occupied with studies and life’s concerns, the son returns home but cannot find his mother. He is told that she died after waiting for him. The story concludes with the son falling into despair and visiting his mother’s grave: “As he walked away from the grave with darkness clouding his vision, he recalled his mother’s words: ‘My dear child, I am a warm soul—do not make me miss you.’”

The definitions of the short story given by literary scholars correspond closely to Elbek’s works of this type. “A short story,” emphasizes Jack London, “is a completed episode of life: a unity of mood, situation, and action.” “A short story, undoubtedly, is the depiction of some significant fact,” says the Dominican writer Juan Bosch. “If the event underlying the story is insignificant, then its expression is not a short story but merely a sketch—a simple narration of an event” [18]. According to L. I. Timofeev, a short story is built upon a single event in a person’s life; the character is relatively well-formed, the number of characters is limited, and they all participate in one event. For this reason, the length of a short story is not large. The event underlying the plot usually has its own exposition, climax, and resolution—all occurring within the framework of a single episode of human life. Elbek aimed to make his short stories as concise and compact as possible. For instance, “*The Sun of the Future*” consists of 408 words, while “*Mother*” contains 522 words. The relatively longer stories include “*The Jadid Karavoy*” with 716 words and “*The Prostitute*” with 818 words. For comparison, one of the finest examples of Uzbek short fiction, Abdullah Qahhor’s “*The Thief*” contains 756 words, while “*The Patient*” consists of 382 words. Abdulla Qodiriy’s comparatively longer story “*In the Uloq Game*” contains 2,195 words.

Freedom is understood differently by everyone. Some believe it means returning to one’s essence and expressing one’s most noble qualities, while others interpret it as doing whatever one wishes, even to the extent of abandoning national values and universal human principles. During this period, the essence of the freedom and liberation promoted by the Jadids was not blind imitation of Europe, but rather learning from its science and knowledge and building a society based on national values and our own identity. Due to the influence of colonial Russian practices that were incompatible with Eastern culture—such as revealing clothing, alcoholism, and the involvement of women in the hardest forms of labor—young people often experienced confusion and uncertainty about which path to

follow. Through his stories, Elbek aims to guide his compatriots toward the correct path. Indeed, through the tragic fate of characters such as Qahhorxo‘ja, who abandons his family for so-called “great ambitions,” the ruined destiny of the wealthy youth in “*What Will I Become?*”, and the disgraceful life of Jadid Karavoy, the author calls readers to awareness and moral reflection[19].

One of the distinctive features of Elbek’s short stories is also evident in his mastery of portrait creation. As literary scholars acknowledge, “Through depicting the external appearance of a character, a writer also seeks to enter their inner psychological world. In particular, elements of portraiture such as the eyes, face, laughter, tears, and others serve as keys for revealing the character’s spiritual and emotional state. In general, the art of character depiction through portraiture plays an important role in literary creativity”. In the stories under analysis, one can also find excellent examples of artistic portraiture. In the story “*What Will I Become?*”, the protagonist is described as follows: “Umar the wealthy youth was not yet twenty, wheat-colored, with black and slightly narrowed eyes, a broad forehead, sparse mustache and beard, resembling poorly grown thin wheat scattered across his face”. Through this description, the character’s personality and psychological state at that moment can also be understood.

In the same story, the portrait of Mamaraim is presented as follows: “This young man was originally from the same village; tall, strongly built, with sharp eyes, shaved mustache and beard, and a scar on his forehead from an old wound. His complexion was dark, and he looked like an overbaked loaf of bread from a tandoor.” Here, the character’s prosperity and hardworking nature are clearly emphasized and given a positive evaluation.

In the story “*Qahhorxo‘ja*,” we also pay attention to the portrait of the main character: “A young man around 21 years old, dark-complexioned, of medium height, with black eyes that seemed lively like beads; his hair fell from his forehead onto the bridge of his nose. Apart from a mark left by some injury on his forehead, he was quite a well-built young man. When speaking, he always gestured emphatically with his hands, spoke loudly and forcefully, and often burst into loud laughter between his words. Wearing a shirt made of bluish fabric, he would frequently take out a watch with a golden chain from his pocket and look at it, giving others the impression that he was an important official engaged in serious affairs” .

Through such descriptions, a realistic image of a human being emerges before the reader. Although the young man appears physically well-built, it becomes clear that he is a negative character with moral shortcomings. Such precise portraits enable a deeper perception of the characters’ psychology, allowing readers to closely observe and understand them. In Elbek’s short stories, as in his poetry, natural landscapes are described with great enthusiasm and artistic pleasure. In such depictions, he even creates fine examples of rhythmic prose (saj‘), demonstrating his literary skill. For example, at the beginning of the story “*Dadamad*,” the following passage appears: “Spring[20]. The Ugom River roars, crashing against stones and foaming; it washes the edge of the village lying at the foot of the hill and joins the famous Chirchiq River. The two rivers continue their journey, conversing with a rumbling sound. What becomes visible in the merging of these two waters is the sediment brought from the mountains by the Ugom River, which flows rapidly and playfully in the Chirchiq River”.

The rhythmic harmony of the sentences in this passage corresponds perfectly with the noisy, dynamic sound of the flowing river.

Similarly, in the story “*Chirchiq*,” one can find numerous passages that vividly draw the beautiful landscapes of nature before the reader’s eyes. Here is one example: “In these places, even before the sun becomes visible from behind the mountains, night begins to tremble, and it disappears among the valleys, making way for the sun. The rays rising from the mountain peaks shimmer softly and gently, moving gracefully over the grass and trees, and pausing on the surface of the waters, where they begin to play with the waves. They attract even an unsuspecting gaze and make it join their dance. These rays play upon the water, move through the valleys, and finally hide again among the mountains. These life-giving rays of the sun, scattered from its gaze, conceal themselves within the valleys”.

In order to create such landscape descriptions, a writer must have seen nature with their own eyes, felt it deeply in their heart, and loved it sincerely. Elbek was precisely such a lover of nature—“a son

of the sun,” a child of rushing rivers and towering mountains. Therefore, in his writings, the fragrance of nature, the movement of turbulent waves, and the majesty of high cliffs are all distinctly perceptible.

Literary scholars define landscape (paysage) as follows: “First of all, in the composition of a literary work, it undoubtedly expresses a clear ideological purpose: (a) it depicts the natural environment in which the character acts; (b) it helps to reveal certain aspects of the character’s personality; (c) it gives a historically concrete and natural coloring to the events described in the work, etc”. These definitions fully correspond to Elbek’s works as well, since the landscapes he portrays particularly give a historically concrete and natural setting to the events being described.

5. Conclusion

In general, Elbek’s short stories are distinguished by the breadth of their themes, clarity of description, conciseness, and a tendency toward simplicity and sincerity in narration. Although the number of his short stories is relatively small (16 identified works), they cover a wide range of themes: love and loyalty (“*Anorgul*”), knowledge and enlightenment (“*The Sun of the Future*,” “*The Jadid Karavoy*,” “*The Prostitute*”), the conflict between modernity and tradition (“*Qahhorxo‘ja*,” “*Anorgul*”), the struggle between wealth and poverty (“*What Will I Become?*”), the consequences of ignorance (“*The Prostitute*”), the impact of immorality on society (“*The Jadid Karavoy*,” “*Qahhorxo‘ja*”), a mother’s suffering (“*Mother*”), and the life of the working people (“*Dadamad*,” “*Chirchiq*”).

Of course, not all of these stories can be regarded as fully perfected works. Some shortcomings can be observed. For instance, in “*Dadamad*” and “*Chirchiq*,” a journalistic style tends to dominate, while in some other stories there are underdeveloped descriptions and incomplete expression of ideas. However, such shortcomings are not uncommon among all writers and poets who created at the beginning of the 20th century, the early stage of modern short-story development. Most importantly, they were able to express essential ideas of their time through artistic literature. They captured public attention and held up a mirror to society, helping people become aware of themselves and see life from a new perspective. From this point of view, the minor shortcomings in the above-mentioned stories appear insignificant.

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