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An Analysis Of Folklore Elements In Nazar Eshonkul's Short Story "Sibizga Volasi"

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Abstract

This article examines the folkloric elements, their functions, and their integration with modern literary thought in the myth-story "Sibizga volasi" (The Reed-Pipe's Melody) by Nazar Eshonkul, a representative of contemporary Uzbek prose. It provides a comparative analysis of the work's plot and motifs in relation to the traditional folk legend, "Alexander Has Horns". Specifically, the study explores the symbolic meanings of characters and objects – such as Alexander, the barber, the well, the reed, and the reed-pipe – as well as concepts rooted in Zoroastrian mythology, traditional modes of expression, and the artistic functions of the motif of mythological transformation. The research demonstrates how the author enriches a traditional folkloric plot with psychological, philosophical, and social depth. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn regarding the novel interpretation of the legend's motifs, the shifts in the narrator's voice, and the expression of the theme of revealing the truth through the lens of folk poetics.

Keywords: Nazar Eshonkul, "Sibizga volasi," folklore, myth-story, Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnayn), mythologism, folklorism, symbol, barber, well, "sibizga" (folk flute), artistic interpretation.

Introduction. Folklore is considered one of the significant sources for the formation and development of written literature. The folk worldview, characters, and narrative motifs – embodied in legends, tales, epics, and myths – have been reinterpreted by writers across various eras. Through this creative engagement, the traditional content inherent in folklore is transformed into a vehicle for expressing new historical, social, and philosophical ideas.

In contemporary Uzbek literature, drawing upon folkloric traditions is not limited to the mere repetition of ancient plots. Mythological figures are also actively employed to explore themes such as the human psyche, societal conflicts, freedom, and moral responsibility. Analyzing the significance of mythological figures and motifs in modern literature, literary scholar Sadullo Kuronov notes that folkloric elements take on new meaning, shaped by the specific artistic and ideological objectives of the creator [5].

Nazar Eshonkul's short story "Sibizga volasi" serves as a distinct example of this phenomenon. First published in the 5th issue of "Yoshlik" magazine in 2012, the work is categorized by the author as a "myth-story" [1]. It reworks the widely known folk legend about the horns of Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnayn), placing human fear, inner turmoil, and the compelling need to speak the truth at the heart of its artistic narrative.

The objective is to identify the folkloric elements within "Sibizga volasi," demonstrate their connection to traditional sources, and provide a scholarly analysis of the new artistic content created by the author.

The "myth-story" "Sibizga volasi" was selected as the object of study, while a publicly available version of the folk legend "Alexander Has Horns" ("Iskandarning shoxi bor") was chosen as comparative material.

Research methodology and literature review.

The article employs comparative-typological, mythopoetic, and hermeneutic methods of analysis. Through the comparative-typological approach, the similarities and differences within the plot-motif systems of the folkloric narrative and the short story are identified. Mythopoetic analysis serves to uncover the symbolic meanings of mythical figures, while the hermeneutic approach is used to interpret the layers of meaning within the work. "Sibizga volasi" has been examined by literary scholars from various perspectives.

For instance, Manzura Otajonova analyzes the synthesis of mythological and literary thought, evaluating Nazar Eshonkul's work as an example of the emergence of the "myth-story" (myth-narrative) form

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in contemporary Uzbek prose. According to the researcher, the interplay between mythological plots and artistic thought gives rise to new genre-related and expressive possibilities [3].

Suxrob Saitov, meanwhile, explores the story through the lens of it being a symbolic expression of social issues. He interprets the character of Iskandar not merely as a historical figure, but as an artistic symbol evocative of the despotic ruling systems of the past [4].

In her article "Cho'pchakdan ne muddao?" (What is the Purpose of the Tale?), Gulnoz Sattorova acknowledges the story's connection to an ancient narrative while offering a critical perspective on its artistic innovation and style. The researcher notes that the reworking of a folkloric plot does not always rise to the level of an independent artistic discovery [6].

These perspectives indicate that one should avoid a one-sided assessment of the story. Consequently, in this article, the artistic value of the work is evaluated primarily based on the changes introduced relative to the folkloric source and the meanings generated by those changes.

Results and Discussion.

1. The Genetic Connection of the Story "Sibizga Volasi" to its Folklore Plot.

The primary plot source for the story "Sibizga Volasi" is the legend "Iskandar Has Horns" (Iskandarning shoxi bor), which exists within Uzbek oral folklore.

In the version of the legend published in the Ziyo.uz electronic library, it is recounted that Iskandar Zulkarnayn (Alexander the Great) has horns on his head, and that the ruler has had barbers killed in order to keep this secret hidden. One particular barber is spared, on the condition that he never reveal the king's secret to anyone. However, keeping the secret causes him great psychological distress. Eventually, the barber whispers the secret into a well. A reed that grows from the well then reveals the secret through sound [2].

The core motifs of this plot include: a ruler with an unusual physical trait, a hidden secret, a barber who discovers the secret, a prohibition, psychological torment, the act of confiding the secret into a well, the growth of a reed, and the dissemination of the truth through sound.

In Nazar Eshonkul's story, the fundamental sequence of these motifs is preserved. However, the author expands upon the traditional plot, explaining the causes of the events through the social environment and the protagonist's internal emotional experiences. While the primary focus in the folk legend is on how the secret is revealed, the short story centers on the barber's experience of living with that secret. Consequently, the narrative transcends the scope of a simple moral tale, taking on the characteristics of a psychological story that explores the internal conflicts of the human psyche.

Another significant difference emerges in the endings of the folk legend and the short story. In the version of the folk legend chosen for comparison, Alexander forgives the barber, taking his honesty into account [2]. In Nazar Eshonkul's story, however, after whispering the secret into a well, the barber vanishes; he subsequently wanders the world, confiding his burden to various other wells – becoming, in effect, a figure bound to an unending destiny [1].

This shift introduces a new philosophical dimension to the work's content. In the author's interpretation, what was a specific event in the folk legend transforms into a phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of time and space. The barber's fate can be interpreted as a universal tragedy – the plight of individuals who possess the truth but are unable to speak it freely.

Thus, rather than merely replicating the folkloric plot, the author has expanded its semantic potential by incorporating psychological and social dimensions.

2. Mythological conception and symbolic generalization in the character of Iskandar.

The character of Iskandar in the story is a significant mythological figure derived from folklore sources.

In oral tradition, Iskandar Zulkarnayn (Alexander the Great) emerges as a complex figure, blending perceptions of a historical personage with legendary attributes and the popular view of what a ruler should be. The horn on his head is not merely an external physical trait within the folklore narrative; rather, it serves as a motif that sets in motion a sequence of events centered on the act of keeping – and ultimately revealing – a secret.

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In Nazar Eshonkul's story, the significance of this symbol is deepened. In the popular imagination, Iskandar is exalted as a magnificent, near-perfect ruler endowed with divine power. The perceptions surrounding him are reinforced by the common people's fear and their blind faith in their sovereign.

However, upon entering the palace and seeing the ruler firsthand, the barber realizes that the man does not at all correspond to the descriptions circulating outside. Instead of legendary grandeur, a person with ordinary human flaws is revealed. The exposure of the horn on his head casts doubts upon the artificially constructed, divine image of the ruler.

In this respect, the symbol of the horn can be analyzed across two layers of meaning.

The first is its nature as a mythological marker characteristic of folklore. It distinguishes the ruler from others and gives rise to the narrative plot centered on a secret.

The second aspect is a socio-philosophical symbol. In the story, the ruler becomes a sign that exposes the falsity of the perception of absolute perfection cultivated around him. This interpretation does not require equating the ruler figure with any specific historical individual. Iskandar, as presented in the work, is primarily an artistic and mythological figure through whom the conflict between power and truth is generalized.

In his analysis of the story's social content, Suxrob Saitov suggests that the figure of Iskandar serves as a lens through which one can understand autocratic regimes and the phenomenon of the cult of personality [4].

However, interpreting the work solely as a symbolic representation of events from a specific historical period may narrow its scope; the issues of fear, falsehood, silence, and truth explored in the story are, in fact, universal human concerns.

3. The artistic function of elements related to Zoroastrian mythology.

In the story "Sibizga Volasi", alongside the folkloric narrative concerning Iskandar (Alexander), references are also made to ancient religious and mythological concepts.

The work incorporates notions such as Ahura Mazda, Ahriman, the priest, sacred water, divine light, and eternal sovereignty – all of which evoke concepts rooted in Zoroastrianism.

In Zoroastrian tradition, Ahura Mazda is understood as a divine being associated with goodness, wisdom, and cosmic order, while Ahriman appears as the opposing principle, representing evil and destructive forces [7].

In the story, the sacralization of Iskandar's authority is achieved precisely through these mythological concepts. The courtiers liken the ruler's power to that of Ahura Mazda and attempt to interpret his personal traits as divine signs.

The artistic significance of this portrayal lies in the fact that religious and mythological symbols are transformed into a means of legitimizing the ruler's authority. Through this, the author illustrates how myths and beliefs within a society can be exploited for improper ends.

Upon discovering Iskandar's horns, the barber's perception of the ruler shifts; he begins to associate the ruler's true nature not with goodness, but with evil. Thus, the mythological opposition between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman serves to highlight the conflict between truth and falsehood, justice and oppression within the work.

Another intriguing mythological detail in the story is the sacred beverage consumed by the ruler. In the text's commentary, it is referred to as "mada" or "haoma" and is linked to concepts of eternal life [1].

However, it is necessary to distinguish between the artistic interpretation and the historical-religious data. According to the "Encyclopaedia Iranica", "haoma" – within ancient Iranian religious traditions – encompasses the plant itself, its deified personification, and the ritual beverage prepared from it [8]. Therefore, the immortality-granting drink in the story should be understood not as an exact depiction of historical Zoroastrian rituals, but rather as an artistic utilization of mythological concepts.

As a result, ancient religious images in the story do not serve as independent historical data, but rather function as symbols that reinforce the philosophical idea put forward by the author.

4. A psychological interpretation of the folklore motif in the character of the barber.

In folk legend, the barber is portrayed as an individual who discovers a secret and struggles to keep it. In Nazar Eshonkul's story, however, the inner world of this character is explored in much greater detail.

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Initially, the barber is an ordinary person, powerless in the face of authority. He knows that if he reveals the ruler's secret, both he and his family members will face punishment. Consequently, he finds himself caught in a profound conflict between the desire to speak the truth and the obligation to protect his loved ones.

This situation forms the basis of the dramatic conflict within the work.

In depicting the barber's psychological torment, the author blends traditional folk motifs with modern psychological portrayal. The protagonist begins to perceive the elements around him – the wind, the trees, the sky, and various sounds – not merely as surroundings, but as forces capable of exposing his secret.

While the personification of natural phenomena is a characteristic feature of folkloric poetics, the protagonist's pervasive sense of suspicion is rooted in his own internal psychological state.

In particular, living under a constant state of fear alters the way the barber perceives reality. Compelled to conceal the secret, he finds himself increasingly deprived of the ability to think or speak freely. The folk expression found in the story – "If I speak, my tongue burns; if I remain silent, my heart burns" – encapsulates this conflict in a concise and poignant manner [1].

This phrase, which resembles the fixed expressions and proverb-like units found in oral tradition, serves to illuminate the barber's inner turmoil through the lens of folk wisdom.

Crucially, the protagonist's anguish stems from something deeper than a mere desire to share a secret with others. For him, maintaining silence is tantamount to denying the truth he has come to know – in effect, a renunciation of his own self.

Consequently, the character of the barber transcends his traditional role in folklore, evolving into a psychological archetype: an individual who perceives the truth but finds himself constrained in his ability to reveal it.

5. A Mythopoetic Interpretation of the Images of the Well, the Reed, and the Sibizga.

One of the most significant folkloric elements in the story is the system of motifs associated with the images of the well, the reed, and the "sibizga" (flute).

These images also appear in folk legends, where they facilitate the revelation of a secret as it shifts from one form to another. In Nazar Eshonkul's story, however, their symbolic potential is expanded.

The motif of the well. In the work, the well initially appears as a source of psychological refuge for the barber. He confides a secret – one he cannot share with other people – into the well, believing that no one will hear it. Through this act, the protagonist's inner torment is, to some extent, alleviated.

From this perspective, the well can be interpreted as a symbolic intermediary between a person's inner world and the external world. The protagonist hears his own voice within it, yet he assumes that this voice does not reach anyone else.

However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the well is not merely a place for concealing a secret. On the contrary, it serves as the catalyst for the truth to emerge in a new form. Thus, the author imbues the image of the well with the dual functions of concealment and revelation.

The motif of the reed. In the folk legend, the reed is the instrument through which the barber's secret is revealed. In this story, however, the reed takes on a more complex significance.

It is depicted not merely as a simple element of nature, but as an artistic symbol that preserves human suffering. The growth of the reed signifies that the secret has not vanished; rather, it continues to exist in a different form.

Central to this is the motif of mythological transformation – the metamorphosis of one state of existence into another. The barber's voice is absorbed into a well; a reed grows from the well, and from that reed, a musical instrument is crafted.

The motif of the "sibizga" (reed pipe): Featured in the title of the work, the "sibizga" serves as the most significant symbolic element within the folkloric narrative. Through it, a private secret is transformed into a message that reaches everyone.

In the story, when children fashion "sibizga" pipes from reeds and play them, Alexander's hidden secret is disseminated through the instrument. The revelation –"Alexander has horns" – is no longer conveyed by a single person's voice, but rather through a melody that resonates in various places [1].

This process can be interpreted as a three-stage artistic transformation: first, personal spiritual anguish emerges; then, it is projected onto an image of nature; and finally, through musical sound, it becomes a vehicle for collective memory and awareness.

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In this way, the "sibizga" functions not merely as a musical instrument, but as a symbolic expression of free speech and revealed truth.

In this interpretation, the term *"vola"* – found in the work's title and connoting a lament or cry of distress – takes on significant meaning. The melody emanating from the "sibizga" does not simply disclose a secret; it also evokes the human suffering associated with it.

Conclusion. An analysis of the folkloric elements in Nazar Eshonkul's myth-story "Sibizga volasi" (The Flute's Lament) leads to the following scholarly conclusions.

First, the narrative's plot is directly rooted in the traditional folk legend, "Alexander Has Horns." While preserving the core motifs of this legend, the author has enriched the sequence of events with psychological and philosophical depth.

Second, the characters of Alexander and the barber have acquired new symbolic dimensions beyond their traditional roles in folklore. Alexander emerges as a symbol representing the absolutization of power and the cult of personality, while the barber is portrayed as an individual grappling with the conflict between knowing the truth and the possibility of revealing it.

Third, religious-mythological elements – such as Ahura Mazda, Ahriman, the priest, and the sacred drink – serve to illustrate the artificial sacralization of the ruler's authority, as well as the dichotomy between good and evil.

Fourth, the motifs of the well, the reed, and the flute (sibizga) form a cohesive symbolic system based on the concept of mythological transformation. Through these images, the work depicts the process by which a private secret is transmitted – via the medium of nature – into a public message. In the story "Sibizga Volasi", folklore elements are not merely simple artistic devices or sources for a historical plot; rather, they serve as fundamental tools for exploring the human psyche, truth, freedom, fear, and social memory. In this respect, the work serves as significant literary material for examining how the traditions of oral folk literature are reinterpreted within contemporary Uzbek prose, taking on new layers of meaning.

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