



DOI: 10.22363/2312-9220-2026-31-3-588-604

EDN: AQPTTK

UDC 821.512.133-31

Research article / Научная статья

Posthumous Narration as a Marker of Postmodern Aesthetics in Contemporary Uzbek Literature

Alexandr G. Kovalenko^{ID}, Gulchira T. Garipova^{ID}✉,
Eleonora F. Shafranskaya^{ID}

RUDN University, Moscow, Russian Federation

✉ggaripova2017@yandex.ru

Abstract. The article examines the problems of identifying modern Uzbek literature in the context of the “postmodern situation” (J. Lyotard), which has determined a number of conceptual trends in the post-Soviet development of national literatures during the shift of the artistic paradigm in the 1990s. The authors identify the most obvious constants and markers that determined the inclusion of the aesthetic constants of literary postmodernism in the works of the most iconic Uzbek writers of the non-classical artistic paradigm. The purpose of the article is to identify, define, and theoretically substantiate the worldview and aesthetic dominants of postum narrative, which demonstrate the functioning of postmodernism as a type of artistic consciousness, method, and style of the national literary system of Uzbekistan. The scientific novelty of the work lies not only in the systematic analysis of literary works based on the methodology and theory of postmodernism, but also in the development of identification criteria for relating ethno-cultural texts to the worldview, world-modeling, and aesthetic principles of postmodernism. The authors analyze the general constants of the postmodern type of artistic consciousness, but they focus on postum narrative as a strategy for the specific organization of postmodern literary texts and a marker of the “world as a text” model. This type of narrative determines the poetics, methods of world-modeling, and representation of ethno-cultural identity in a number of works by contemporary authors with a pronounced postmodern aesthetic. The research material comprises the Uzbek-language novel *To’rt tomon qibla (Four Directions of the World)* by Aman Mukhtar and the Russian-language novel *Mbobo* by Khamid Ismailov, a transcultural author associated with the Uzbek underground and literary diaspora. The methodological framework of the study employs intertextual and narrative analysis, alongside receptive and hermeneutic approaches to the interpretation of cultural codes and ciphers. It has been established that in the contemporary Uzbek literary process, postmodernism functions not as a distinct literary movement, but as a variable manifestation of its principles and trends within individual literary works. These works feature a pronounced metafictional architectonics of the “world as text”, which structures both the stylistic (intertextual and hypertextual levels) and structural principles of text construction (the narrative level).

© Kovalenko A.G., Garipova G.T., Shafranskaya E.F., 2026



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

Keywords: postmodernism, artistic consciousness, novel, metafictional structure, Aman Mukhtar, Khamid Ismayilov

Author contributions. Supervision, conceptualization, & writing (review & editing) – Alexandr G. Kovalenko; investigation and writing (original draft) – Gulchira T. Garipova; investigation & drafting the final conclusions – Eleonora F. Shafranskaya. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding. The research was carried out within the framework of project No. 050119-0-000 on the basis at the Department of Russian and Foreign Literature, Faculty of Philology of the RUDN University.

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Article history: submitted January 25, 2026; revised March 18, 2026; accepted May 20, 2026.

For citation: Kovalenko, A.G., Garipova, G.T., & Shafranskaya, E.F. (2026). Posthumous Narration as a Marker of Postmodern Aesthetics in Contemporary Uzbek Literature. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, 31(3), 588–604. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2026-31-3-588-604> EDN: AQPTTK

Постум-нарратив как маркер постмодернистской эстетики в современной узбекской литературе

А.Г. Коваленко^{id}, Г.Т. Гарипова^{id}✉, Э.Ф. Шафранская^{id}

Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Российская Федерация
✉ggaripova 2017@yandex.ru

Аннотация. Показаны проблемы идентификации современной узбекской литературы в оптике «постмодернистской ситуации» (Ж. Лиотар), определившей ряд концептуальных тенденций постсоветского развития национальных литератур в условиях смены художественной парадигмы 1990-х гг. Установлены наиболее очевидные признаки и маркеры, описывающие включенность эстетических констант литературного постмодернизма в произведениях знаковых узбекских писателей неклассической парадигмы художественности. *Цель* – выявить, дефинировать и теоретически обосновать мировоззренческие и эстетические доминанты постум-нарратива, свидетельствующие о функционировании постмодернизма как типа художественного сознания, метода и стиля в литературной системе Узбекистана. Научная новизна работы заключается в системном анализе художественных произведений с опорой на методологию и теорию постмодернизма, в разработке идентификационных критериев соотнесения этнокультурных текстов с мировоззренческими, миромоделирующими и эстетическими принципами последнего. Проанализированы общие константы постмодернистского типа художественного сознания, при этом внимание акцентировано на постум-нарративе как стратегии особой организации постмодернистского художественного текста и маркере реализации модели «мир как текст». Этот тип нарратива определяет поэтику, способы миромоделирования и репрезентации этнокультурной идентичности в ряде произведений современных авторов с выраженной постмодернистской эстетикой. Материалом для исследования послужили роман на узбекском языке «Тўрт томон қибла» («Четыре стороны света») Амана Мухтара и роман на русском языке «Мбобо» транскультурного автора Хаида Исмаилова, связанного с узбекским андеграундом и литературным зарубежьем. Методологический аппарат работы включает интертек-

стуальный и нарративный анализ, а также рецептивный и герменевтический подходы к интерпретации культурных кодов и шифров. Установлено, что постмодернизм функционирует в современном узбекском литературном процессе не как художественное направление, а как вариативное проявление его принципов и тенденций в отдельных художественных произведениях с выраженной метафигиональной архитектурой «мир как текст», которая организует стилистический (уровень интертекста и гипертекста) и структурный принципы построения текста (уровень нарратива).

Ключевые слова: постмодернизм, художественное сознание, роман, метафигиональная структура, Аман Мухтар, Хамид Исмаилов

Вклад авторов. Научное руководство, концепция исследования, дополнение и редактирование – А.Г. Коваленко; исследовательская работа по теме, написание основного текста – Г.Т. Гарипова; исследовательская работа по теме, написание итоговых выводов – Э.Ф. Шафранская. Все авторы прочли и одобрили окончательную версию рукописи.

Финансирование. Исследование выполнено в рамках проекта № 050119-0-000 на базе кафедры русской и зарубежной литературы филологического факультета Российского университета дружбы народов.

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 25 января 2026 г.; отрецензирована 18 марта 2026 г.; принята к публикации 20 мая 2026 г.

Для цитирования: Коваленко А.Г., Гарипова Г.Т., Шафранская Э.Ф. Постмодернизм как маркер постмодернистской эстетики в современной узбекской литературе // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Литературоведение. Журналистика. 2026. Т. 31. № 3. С. 588–604. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2026-31-3-588-604> EDN: AQPТTK

Introduction

At the turn of the 1980s–1990s, the sociocultural situation defined by the dissolution of the Soviet Union determined the fundamental features of the artistic paradigm that literary criticism has designated as the “Noughties” (referring to the first decade of the twenty-first century). For the majority of ethno-cultural artistic systems within the literatures of the former Soviet Union, this process characterizes the dual functional state of post-Soviet literature. On the one hand, this is a stage of summing up the aesthetic and ideological quests of the entire 20th century; on the other, it is a period of defining landmarks and prospects for the further development of national literatures in the 21st century. It was precisely the postmodern condition that played a pivotal role in the aesthetic orientation of national literatures, predetermining various ethno-cultural modifications within the individual literatures of the collapsed state. While in Russian literature postmodernist aesthetics marked the principal aesthetic transformations of this period, in a number of national literatures that have emerged as an independent entity – Uzbek literature included – postmodernism is only just beginning to gain its influence.

In Uzbek literature, postmodernism developed amid a simultaneous collapse of the Soviet ideological paradigm and a drive toward ethno-cultural reconstruction of

tradition. In contrast, Western European and Russian postmodernism, for instance, emerged as a reaction to modernism, which itself provoked a shift in narrative strategies. If we proceed from Umberto Eco's formula that postmodernism's response to modernism consists in acknowledging the past – since it cannot be destroyed, for if we do so, we descend into complete silence – then it must be revisited ironically, but without naivety (1986, p. 228). From this premise, the thesis of postmodernism is defined, first and foremost, precisely by a narrative shift in creative perspective.

The deconstruction of reality and the description of “the world as text” constitute the writer's task. Proceeding from an understanding of the textual nature of the artistic universe, the author engages ironically with this artistic reality (which holds significance equal to objective reality), thereby creating a culture of simulacra. In these conditions, the process of devaluation, decoding, and decanonization of previous literary traditions – characteristic of postmodernism – is supplanted in the new “independent” Uzbek literature by the deciphering of Socialist Realism and the reconstruction (at the level of principles of remythologization) of authentic ethno-cultural traditions of the past. This applies primarily to the Jadid tradition, within which a modernist aesthetic was already present at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the turn of the century, Uzbek writers (Kh. Dostmukhammad, Kh. Sultan, R. Rakhmat, A. Faykh, S. Vafo, I. Sultan, N. Eshonkulov, A. Mukhtar, et al.) begin to employ individual aesthetic techniques of postmodernism without dismantling the classical principle of “text as world”. These include: a partial decanonization of mimetic conventions; play with form (the text is constructed as a collage or mosaic where genres, styles, and speech strata are intermingled, while strict linearity of plot and classic psychologism are deconstructed); intertextuality and hypertextuality; narrative fragmentation; and an ironic re-interpretation of canonical plots (serving as an instrument for criticizing archaic traditions, historiosophical concepts, and the dogmas of the Soviet era), among others. In their prose, postmodernism manifests itself through the re- and demythologization of ancient Eastern mystical plot patterns, ritualistic mythologems, as well as Zoroastrian and Sufi motifs. This process leads to the creation of a specific, oneiric architectonics with an emphasis on exploring liminal situations or states of the individual, world, and culture. The writers blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, employing a parabolic narrative that is often constructed not only on the deconstruction of myths and folkloric plots but also on transgressiveness. This quality metaphorizes the internal state of “meaninglessness” (or *loss of meaning*) in the situation of a shift in world models and paradigms of national existence. This method destroys boundaries and liberates the text from canons. Forms of conscious transgression into the “inner being” of culture embody the postmodernist principle of constructing “cultural architectonics” and the *homo faber* hero. Writers begin to actively employ authorial variations of the metafictional invariant – a writer writing about a writer who is inscribing the text of culture.

In its own way, Uzbek national literature begins to concentrate the cultural memory of the world, creating “a repository of continuity” for the non-classical paradigm. The postmodern condition (J. Lyotard) in the Uzbek model of literary development organically combines Western European and Russian postmodernist traditions, Eastern parabolic stylistics, and the principles of Latin American magical realism. This synthesis creates a unique hybrid style that places emphasis not on the formal dominance of the cultural text, but on “the semantic universe” (Nalimov, Drogalina, 1984, p. 118). This serves as an analogue to the metatext of culture, in which meanings play a key role, and the world is viewed through the prism of their revelation and interaction with interpretation. Postmodernist aesthetics found its most integral expression in the newest Uzbek novel, which demonstrates meta-fictional and meta-cultural architectonics.

The relevance of the present study stems from the absence of theoretical and literary-historical works that systematize the markers of postmodernist poetics, which are becoming not only key characteristics of contemporary Uzbek prose but also important factors in the transformation of the national literary process. Despite the existing body of scholarly work devoted to analyzing the specifics of postmodernist constants, there is no conceptual certainty within Uzbek literary studies regarding establishing the status of postmodernist aesthetics¹.

Current interpretations focus not so much on the problems of the ideological manifestation of postmodernism as on general non-classical principles that affect the formal level of a literary text’s poetics. This approach persists despite the fact that – on the contrary – postmodernism privileges to heterogeneity and difference as liberating forces in the redefinition of culture. The principal features of postmodernist thought are “fragmentation, uncertainty, and the rejection of all universal or totalizing discourses; [...] all this indicates profound shifts both in the cultural paradigm and in the ‘structure of world perception’ at the end of the 20th century”².

It is important to note that in Uzbek criticism, postmodernism is often regarded not as a method or a movement, but as a style within which writers experiment with non-classical techniques of writing. This reflects the search for new forms of

¹ Attempts to examine the development of non-classical novel forms are represented in the following works by Uzbek literary scholars: Mirza-Ahmedova, P. (Ed.). (2007). *Interaction as a Source of Enrichment for National Literature*. Tashkent: Akademiya Publ. (In Russ.); Mirza-Ahmedova, P.M. (2008). *Classics and Modernity in the Aspect of Interaction*. Tashkent: Akademiya Publ. (In Russ.) EDN: QTRSYZ; Sharafutdinova, M.O., Saidov, A.Kh., & Mirza-Ahmedova, P.M. (2009). *Artistic and Critical Thought in the Context of National and World Tradition*. Tashkent: Fan Publ. (In Russ.); Sharafutdinova, M.O. (2008). *Uzbek Prose of the 20th Century in the Context of World Literature*. Tashkent: Fan Publ. (In Russ.); Sharafutdinova, M. (2009). The stylistic originality of O. Mukhtar’s novel “A Thousand-Faced” in light of artistic national tradition. *Filologiya Masallari*, (1), 9–12. (In Russ.); Pardaeva, Z. (2003). *The Poetics of the Uzbek Novel*. Tashkent: Meros Publ. (In Uzbek.), et al.

² Gubin, V.D., Sidorina, T.Yu., & Filatov, V.T. (1996). *Philosophy: Textbook*. Moscow: Russkoe Slovo Publ.

reflecting contemporaneity and reinterpreting ethno-cultural traditions in fiction. In such postmodernist texts, the historical-philosophical dimension intensifies, structured within the narrative system of post-memory. This framework provides an opportunity – through the decentering of historical meanings of the recent past – to deconstruct its logic and understand the reasons behind the shift in national models of existence, which are often traumatic for ethnic identity.

In the Uzbek novels of this period, postmodernist irony increasingly gives way to a deeper analysis of historical traumas: the colonial past, the Jadid movement, forced collectivization, the Basmachi resistance, and the collapse of the USSR. The postmodernist text, with its inherent drive toward the devaluation of 20th-century ideological and cultural canons, provides an opportunity to work through the theme of collective memory. Undoubtedly, for Uzbek literature, postmodernism became a way to liberate itself from the ideological and aesthetic frameworks of the past, to find a new language for describing complex contemporaneity, and to occupy its own authentic place in the global literary process. It is worth recalling that the revised principle of devaluation in Western European postmodernism at the beginning of the new millennium transformed into the concept of postmodernism as an affirmation of values:

Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation. Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? The criterion of performativity is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just³.

Results and Discussion

Complex, multilayered transformational processes accompanied the emergence of the postmodernist Uzbek novel. These processes decanonized the very structure of novelistic thinking to such an extent that even M. Bakhtin's dialogic principle (1979) – wherein meaning is born not within a singular consciousness, but in the polyphonic interplay of meanings, in the mutual addressedness of voices – could no longer remain a universal method for analyzing the architectonics of new narrative forms. It should be noted that in the national model of the postmodernist novel, these techniques are often combined with elements of traditional realistic narration: psychologism, social authenticity, and ethical problematics.

However, the dominant principles of metanarration and the blurring of boundaries between reality and text – wherein a character begins to detach from reality and perceive themselves as both a participant in and a creator of the cultural text (a textual world that replaces the depicted actuality) – shape the fictional

³ Nicol, B. (Ed.). (2022). *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader* (p. 73). Edinburgh University Press.

worldview as a constructed “semantic universe” composed of cultural fragments. Within this framework, language functions as a mode of intertextual play. Works with this type of narrative composition, such as the posthumous narrative – wherein, in order to realize the principle of “removing the authorial presence from the text”, narration is organized through the voice of a “deceased” hero who exists not in this world but beyond it – are becoming commonplace among novelists. The narrator performs the function of the author’s *alter ego* (which is sometimes supported by biographical heteronyms), while the first-person form secures for such characters the position of narrating agent. This allows one to emphasize the constants of the postmodernist thesis regarding the “death of the author”. The hero no longer acts according to either the laws of reality or the classical logic of the text; he liberates himself from the author’s will, and his consciousness – within the limits of textual consciousness – constructs its own autonomous world, which the author as *homo scribens* attempts to record. According to M. Bakhtin, “that which the author formerly performed is now performed by the hero, who illuminates himself from all possible points of view; in turn, the author no longer illuminates the hero’s reality, but his self-consciousness as a second-order reality. [...] To the hero’s all-absorbing consciousness, the author can oppose only one objective world – the world of other consciousnesses that are co-equal with his own” (1979, pp. 57–58).

The posthumous narrative represents a specific type of storytelling in which the account of events is delivered not merely from “post-world”, but from a vantage point situated after the story’s finale, following a catastrophe, the conclusion of an era, or even the end of the text itself. The posthumous narrator already possesses knowledge of the eschatological outcome; however, their speech is permeated with a sense of loss, irony, or detachment – manifested less within the optics of evaluation than in description and retrospective fixation from within “those” very events, which are perceived simultaneously as both memory and present experience. V.B. Zuseva-Ozkan notes that “speaking on behalf of a dead narrator proves to be a fundamental phenomenon in contemporary prose, radically influencing all other levels of a work’s structure and connected with the most essential philosophical problems of modernity. On the other hand, this narrative mode is rooted in highly archaic representations, which receive a particular inflection in contemporary prose due to the ontological pessimism characteristic of postmodernist literature, within whose framework the posthumous narrative has become most widespread” (2022, p. 36).

In contemporary Uzbek literature, the posthumous narrative has become one of the key markers of postmodernist aesthetics because it precisely reflects the rupture with linear historical time and enables authors to engage with traumatic events of various origins – primarily historical and cultural ones.

***The Narratives of the Cultural Post-World in Aman Mukhtar's Trilogy Four Directions of the World (To'rt Tomon Qibla)*⁴**

It should be noted that in the contemporary Uzbek novel, the dynamics of external and internal factors of aesthetic world-building manifest themselves in the fusion of national-traditional and modernist elements, which often perform the function of a background tradition. For instance, in Aman Mukhtar's trilogy *Four Directions of the World*, virtually all primary elements of the modernist paradigm of artistry are actively present within the intertextual field: neo-mythologization, existentialist thematization, and the anti-mimetic principles of a "world-embracing" genre structure. The author creates a metanovel wherein the narrative plot foundation is eroded by extra-narrative elements (numerous mythotexts such as parables, legends, oral tales, etc., as well as literary quotations) within a unified textual novelistic flow. This occurs without distinguishing between reality and mythical space according to a fractal principle. Thus, characters from the present suddenly begin to live out their lives in a mythical city described via a "text-within-a-text" structure in subsequent chapters.

Postmodernist theorist Ihab Hassan (1987), constructing a paradigmatic opposition between narrative reality and the semantic field, identifies the following methods of blurring the boundaries between them: uncertainty, fragmentation, decanonization, impersonality (superficiality), the unrepresentable, irony, hybridization, carnivalesque, performativity, irony, and immanence. Almost all of these are used in the trilogy, which allows us to determine its postmodern status.

Most of the characters are metacharacters, embodying specific philosophical ideas, archetypal imagery, and axiological frameworks that are revealed through interpretation. The parabolic stylization of the text generates a metaphysical layer of liminal images (a driverless bus, mirrors, a cemetery, otherworlds, books, roads, a character disintegrating into three selves, etc.), constructing an eschatological model of the world on the border between death and life. The symbolism, highlighting the conventionality, fantastical nature, and mystical richness of the post-world, exists, however, intimately intertwined with reality (real people, events, details).

Aman Mukhtar depicts a transcendence of the mundane, understood through the lens of the individual semantic space of the protagonist, Abdullah Hakim, who finds himself on the other side of life and death after his death. The writer places the protagonist in a post-reality, creating a character-consciousness (posthumous narrator) dwelling on the border between post-reality and reality. The initial mystification of the protagonist's journey on a driverless bus predetermines all his

⁴ This translation is philologically and culturally substantiated. In Islamic tradition, the *qibla* represents far more than a mere geographical cardinal point; it signifies the sacred orientation toward the Kaaba in Mecca – the absolute spiritual axis of the universe for a believer. For an Uzbek author deeply rooted in Islamic culture, where Sufi concepts of divine seeking are paramount, this imagery implies that characters attempt to find a new spiritual center ("a qibla") in every direction simultaneously.

subsequent wanderings in the inter-reality. However, this is precisely Abdullah's path (conceived as the path of *tariqah* of a wise Sufi), observing the real world from nothingness and comprehending his "Self" in the mirror of memories of love and life, now equally past. Within the framework of this state of transition, an "inner being" is constructed, localized in his poetic consciousness through poetry. The posthumous narrator is defined as the *homo faber* of the "world as text", replacing his past life with "the world as text". This experience is realized through the hero's textual utterances (poems, parables, myths), developed as a cultural reflection on the traumatic experience of the entire country. Researchers note that "as a type of mentality, postmodernism is a hyper-reflection that arose in the context of a religious-philosophical vacuum and the discrediting of ideological concepts" (Lapina, 2008, p. 53).

R. Barthes, for example, pays great attention to the posthumous narrative "act of enunciation" of characters according to the principle – before saying "I am dead" the voice already says by the fact of its existence "I am speaking". According to the theorist, the conjugation of the first person (*je*) with the predicate *mort* (dead) turns out to be impossible in principle, since this is a performative construction. An impossible phrase reshapes its own impossibility. Barthes believes that (from a purely semantic point of view) the phrase *je suis mort* simultaneously asserts two opposite facts (*Life and Death*). This unique enantiosemia – the signifier, expresses the signified (*Death*), which is in contradiction with the fact of the utterance. Before us is a moment of transgression brought to paroxysm, a violation of the border. The phrase "I am dead" is not at all an "incredible message" (*l'énoncé incroyable*), but something more fundamental – an "impossible act of utterance" (*renonciation impossible*) (1989, pp. 453–455).

The origins of posthumous narrative lie in antiquity. In contemporary fiction, this narrative mode often serves to explore themes characteristic of postmodernism, such as the questioning of a metaphysical worldview or the reconfiguration of the concept of "authorship". Unlike earlier literary experiments with this technique – for instance, in Horacio Quiroga's novellas *El Espectro* (1921) and *Más allá* (1925); Muriel Spark's short stories *Portobello Road* (1956) and *The Girl I Left Behind Me* (1957); and Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis's novel *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881) – Aman Mukhtar structures the metafictional architectonics of posthumous writing throughout his trilogy.

The poems composed by the narrator-protagonist, Abdullah Hakim, during his lifetime, along with countless recalled quotations from world culture, now function within post-reality as the sole anchor of his selfhood and as a connective thread between being and non-being, past and present. The stream of consciousness and poetry that define this "stream of self-awareness" instantiate Jacques Derrida's model of "unbounded textuality". The hero's consciousness merges with a boundless text, while his combined reality (in life and in death) is perceived as an infinite

cultural continuum containing myths, metaphors, allusions, and quotations as elements of a “semantic universe” of revealed meanings:

It seemed to him that he was walking down a very dark, long road. A great deal of time passed before the road ended and an endless valley began, flooded with radiant sunlight. He felt himself flying freely and effortlessly, skirting the valley. And then, from above, he saw [...] that under a dried-out tree, half-concealed by branches and leaves, lay a corpse [...] one that looked eerily familiar [...]

“Hey, but that’s me”, he cried out upon taking a closer look.

“When a person dies, their bodily life ends too, while the soul, the spirit, remains forever – he had either read this somewhere or heard it...”

When he had been alive, he had never thought about this...⁵

The trilogy exhibits all the most conspicuous elements of posthumous narration: macabre and mortuary semiotics; shifting narrative focal points; an archetypal motif-complex of liminality (the crossing of world boundaries, wandering through fractal labyrinths of the underworld, the “living-dead” doppelgänger motif, the motifs of Last Judgment and resurrection, etc.); afterlife travelogues (*voyages dans l’au-delà*); colloquies of the dead; a Biblical onomasticon, and so forth. For instance, the sections of the second novel in the trilogy, *A Thousand and One Faces* (*Ming bir qiyofa*), which model an apocalyptic vision of the world’s destruction (serving as a symbol for the collapse of national culture and the hero’s individual consciousness), are titled *The First Circle* (*Birinchi davra*) and *The Second Circle* (*Ikkinchi davra*), thus alluding to the imagery of the circles of Hell.

Aman Mukhtar appears to be attempting to construct a universal model of either the world’s genesis or its eschaton, within which all the universal mythological constants of being are discernible: an analogue of the Christian model of the cathartic Last Judgment and the Great Flood; a system of four fundamental archetypal cosmogonic images of the world (rain, sky, bonfire/campfire, earth) symbolically corresponds to the four elements of Zoroastrianism (sky/heaven, water, earth, fire), coupled with the anticipation of the Messiah’s arrival to restore a renewed world and resurrect the dead; and the path of tariqa of spiritual ascent for the Sufi perfect sage.

By uniting mythologemes of various levels within a single receptive field, the author “weaves” them into the general picture of an “age of catastrophes”. One of the key concepts of the third novel is linked to cultural memory, through which man is capable of being reborn into a new life. The hero Mirza Ghalib becomes aware of his personal connection with the phantoms of memory that have haunted him – the resurrected poets Byron, Lutfi, and Mashrab. Their resurrection and encounter with Mirza Ghalib in the post-world both signify the moment of the “resurrection of the dead”, which will mark the end of chaos and the birth of a new harmony.

⁵ Mukhtar, O. (2000). *To’rt Tomon Qibla: Ush Romandan Iborat Sharq Daftari* (G.T. Garipova, Trans., p. 161). Tashkent: Sharq Publ.

In the novel, the central poetological theme of the hero-creator (*homo scribens* or *homo faber*) becomes an optic for deciphering the past – a time when ancient wisdom was sacrificed to ideology. He reconstructs Nietzsche’s godless world, marked by the “dehumanization of art” (J. Ortega y Gasset), into a world with God, resurrected through the cultural memory of humanity:

He has now recalled the word “ghost”, and then *arvoh-kapalak* (literally “butterfly-spirit”) – according to an old Eastern belief, the spirit of ancestors incarnates in it. [...] He circled over the valley for a long time, unable to draw nearer yet equally unable to depart. For him, it was becoming a space of hope⁶.

The foundation of Aman Mukhtar’s posthumous narration consists not so much in postmodernist deconstruction as in the metaphorical thinking characteristic of modernist artistry. José Ortega y Gasset emphasized that metaphor serves not only for naming but also for thought. In this, according to him, lies the second – deeper and more essential – function of metaphor: not only as a means of expression, but also as an important instrument of thought (1990, pp. 73–74).

Deconstructing Reality: Postmodernist Strategies in Hamid Ismailov’s Mbobo

One of Hamid Ismailov’s seminal underground novels, *Mbobo*, first published in Russian in the literary journal *Druzhba Narodov* (2009), reconstructs in the protagonist’s fate not only the literary consciousness of the late Soviet Russian underground but also the internal consciousness of the Uzbek literary underground – a movement that originated within the country’s borders and now persists far beyond them, continuing to this day.

The question of identifying Hamid Ismailov as an Uzbek writer is sufficiently ambiguous and complex. He writes simultaneously in several languages, including his native Uzbek, and is associated with the phenomenon of “alternative literature of Uzbekistan”, localized within a system of two schools: the Fergana School and the Tashkent School. In the 1990s, most of their representatives formed the core of what was known as the literary underground, which by the 2000s found itself in exile. Subsequently, many of them actively functioned as part of the Russian literary process before eventually integrating into the global literary system. For instance, since April 30, 2010, Hamid Ismailov has held the status of a Writer-in-Residence in the UK.

Ismailov’s artistic consciousness is predetermined by the socio-cultural de-bordering of linguistic and artistic-national worldviews, whose cultural codes constitute the basis of his aesthetic cipher – one characterized by pronounced principles of postmodernism. In Hamid Ismailov’s metafiction, the *homo narrans* concept is realized through a series of aesthetic hypostases: *homo scribens* (the writing man), *homo faber* (the making/creating man), and *homo interpres* (the interpreting man). The focal point of Ismailov’s metafictional narrative is the

⁶ Mukhtar, O. (2000). To’rt Tomon Qibla (pp. 31–32).

cultural underground. This phenomenon functions as the primary “inner text” of metafiction, wherein the metaphysical consciousness of the twentieth-century Russian underground is conceptualized as a continuation of the “secluded consciousness” model of post-Symbolism (with an emphasis on the avant-garde) in its conflict with official ideology.

The protagonist of the novel – a “strange Khakass-Afro-Russian boy” named Mbobo – is an ideal postmodern subject. His identity is not whole but assembled from fragments. Posthumous narration perfectly corresponds to this condition: the novel’s text constitutes a collage of Soviet Moscow realities, African American myths, Khakass folklore, and the Russian literary canon (he resembles Pushkin and is nicknamed as such by his friends). By restoring the lost “Self” in his “underground” nationally marginalized subject, Hamid Ismailov introduces new meanings and new value-based cultural orientations. The image of Mbobo embodies the metahero of the underground, severed from his cultural roots and the spiritual experience of his country – an experience that went underground into *samizdat* and *tamizdat* during the 1920s–1930s and 1960s–1980s (Leningrad LITO and METRO, Club-81, Moscow conceptualists, hippies, Mitki, the Society of Experimental Fine Arts), before descending into the actual Moscow (and St. Petersburg) metro in the 1990s, defining it as a space of unofficial culture (groups of the Leningrad Rock Club and the Moscow Rock Laboratory). A similar fate befell the Uzbek underground of the 1980s–1990s. A cultural project known as the “Eastern Silk Road” was created, within which collections like *Fergana and Poetry* were published; subsequently, its representative’s mass-emigrated from the country, localizing themselves in virtual space (websites such as *The Fergana Community*, *Library of the Fergana School*, *Crimean Club*, *Vavilon*, etc.). This gave rise to a specific phenomenon: the “underground in exile”.

Through the optics of postmodernist orientations toward the devaluation and deconstruction of the “grand narratives” of the past, Ismailov constructs a strategy of posthumous narration, intensifying the sense of the eschatological nature of an era that drives free culture into the space of the non-official. The novel’s protagonist exists not even in a liminal state, but in a metaphorical afterworld defined by the architectonics of the Moscow Metro map. From the perspective of his narrating posthumous consciousness, Mbobo records the realities of “traumatic time”, which seems to structure his utterly unhappy childhood as a “stranger among his own”:

When your Khakass-Negroid life, mostly un-lived as it is, is doomed to be spent underground, your closest friend becomes not the worms sucking the juice from your slanting lilac eyes, nor the shaggy fir roots drawing out your dark pigment for the night, and not even the other dead, each of whom rots alone, but the city metro. And not because when you turned five, your sobered-up mother, having no money to give you anything else, gifted you a multicolored Metro map and said: “This is your portrait, my puffy little sun, Mbobo!”; and not because I have always fled from the fears and obsessions of aboveground life into a realm where I myself became a pale shadow, indistinguishable in either color or

fate; and not even because my days ended within it while my nights began next door – no! It's just that – a rumble will pass through the earth, the tremor of a train passing nearby will spread, and one's bones involuntarily begin to knock together, teeth start chattering in rhythm, and the mites who have made their home here begin to scurry in all directions through that darkness where skin once was⁷.

The semiotics of the metro stations in which the hero's soul resides are marked by events of “personal mythology”, yet they remain correlative with epochal events of Soviet history. In N.B. Ivanova's view, “an obvious and primary thematic trend in recent years is a vectorial orientation toward the past, toward memory (collective or private), and toward history. [...] The future of Russian literature is our collective past. Memory is always subjective, colored by the personal as if by blood. [...] History – unlike memory – is objective and does not belong to the individual” (2019, 34–36).

Roland Barthes's concept of myth as a “speech act” allows one to consider the narration of Mbobo's text-memoir as a “personal myth”, determined by the author's attempt to construct a historiosophical interpretation of the Russian cultural underground not as a specifically historical phenomenon of the twentieth century, but as a certain national authentic worldview rooted primarily in the Pushkinian tradition. Mbobo is a simulacrum of the underground space of the anti-world/metro; his “personal myth” constitutes an existential-cultural “underground” with mental “subterranean” connotations of the individual's split consciousness (the individually-semantic space in postmodernist terminology). Ismailov employs a specific inversion in encoding the hero's narrative status; consequently, the simulacrum of the underground is simultaneously conceived as a sign of postmodernism, since “postmodernism's connection to the modernist-avant-garde canon is obvious” (Meskin, 2014, p. 6). The hero is a transnational marginal figure and a transcultural figure. Posthumous narration thus becomes for Ismailov an instrument for exploring the complex, hybrid identity of the Other – whose consciousness is formed at the intersection of cultures and traumatic experience.

The “dead zone” of the Moscow underground chronotope is also delineated by the metaphorical image of a photo negative as a simulacrum of true reality:

Ever since childhood I have looked at my pink heels and concocted theories that Negroes too must be born light-skinned, but the sun instantly blackens them upon encountering subcutaneous cells that absorb sunlight, reflecting only darkness. This is how developer acts on photographic paper. For even from within I did not feel like a Negro; rather, I felt Khakass when I sensed in my gaze my mother's gaze as well, as if fused with my own. And it was only the mirror that made me into that detestable person whom others perceived – those who called me Mbobo, branded me “Pushkin”, hailed me as “blackie” or “chocolate bar”, and God knows what else⁸.

⁷ Ismailov, H. (2022). *Mbobo* (p. 10). T8 Publishing Technologies.

⁸ Ismailov, H. (2022). *Mbobo* (p. 238).

By definition, posthumous narration is conducted from a point “after the fact” and is constructed on the “negative” of reality. This allows the author to abandon the creation of a unified, heroic metanarrative about the Soviet (or anti-Soviet) person, replacing it with a mosaic of memory fragments, myths, and cultural codes. The posthumous position permits one to view these events from a distance, but this distance does not heal; rather, it merely exposes a gaping wound:

I began to look around. Directly ahead, right across from the three-paneled vanity mirror, stood a chair; a leather jacket was thrown over its backrest, and resting against that jacket – on the seat itself – stood a well-worn guitar. In the corner, behind the guitar, hid a white porcelain vase bearing the portrait of some sullen-looking man. Before the vanity, several jars, cylinders, and boxes stood scattered haphazardly on a small table. Two bare bulbs on long, spindly legs protruded on either side of the table, and on the wall behind the farther lamp hung a photograph of that same angry, shaggy-haired man from the vase. However, in this large photograph, holding his guitar, he seemed kinder⁹.

The novel constructs a semantic opposition: the documentary corporeality of Vysotsky’s photograph is juxtaposed with the absent, “negative” image of Mbobo. This antithesis serves to crystallize the lifetime of the departed one, who testifies to the traumatic reality of the “Others” in an era of declared “universal happiness”. The songs and the figure of Vysotsky embedded within the text function as signs of cultural resistance, intensifying the effect of traumatic postmemory. This sentiment is felt most acutely by those who were displaced into the underground or into emigration. Their fates become projections of the “negative” – the strange, hybrid destiny of the little hero. His underground postmemory reflects the experience of the “generation after”, which internalizes the collective traumas of the past (the collapse of the country) through the prism of iconic figures’ destinies (Pushkin, Vysotsky), yet experiences this catastrophe as a deeply personal drama. The novel’s posthumous narration is linked to a certain universal “underground consciousness”, sustained by the protagonist’s specific didacticism (*resonerstvo*) and fixed in the significance of the metro as a cultural phenomenon.

In the novel *Mbobo*, a complex metaphorical chain is constructed: the underworld – the Moscow Metro – the cultural underground. This image functions on the brink of oxymoron, creating a field of polysemantics that builds a referential chain of seemingly random semantic associations. The multilayered semantics of the Moscow Metro as “eternally moving but stopped time” becomes the core of the posthumous structure. The hero exists in constant motion (his consciousness is “alive” only within the metro cars), but this movement lacks vector and purpose. It closes into a ring, symbolizing a historical dead end and the impossibility of escaping traumatic time. Here, time does not flow from past to future; rather, it exists simultaneously, like a posthumous reminiscence. The historiosophical core of this chronotope becomes the semantics of “suffocation”, generated by the

⁹ Ismailov, H. (2022). *Mbobo* (p. 35).

dissonance between the ideological myth of happiness and authentic life. Posthumous narration thus functions not merely as a stylistic device, but as a fundamental method of organizing the artistic world, one that directly deconstructs the modernist faith in linear progress and historical teleology.

In response to Baudrillard's theories and those of other proponents of the postmodernist condition – progress through negation – Christopher Norris (1992), in his critique of postmodernism, argues that their position is simultaneously politically ineffectual and philosophically muddled; that it rests on a wholly unwarranted skepticism regarding the claims of enlightened critique; that there exist more compelling alternative theories of truth, language, ideology, and representation; and that postmodernism is best understood as a symptom of deep cultural malaise.

Conclusion

The texts of postmodernist novels resemble a palimpsest – a manuscript where the old text shows through beneath the new. The posthumous narrator writes over an already written history, and through the new lines one can discern the old layers of meaning. This is directly linked to intertextuality. For instance, the novels of Aman Mukhtar and Hamid Ismailov are saturated with quotations from folklore, Russian, Uzbek, and world classics, as well as Soviet slogans. Unlike classical narration, where the reader moves alongside the hero from past into future, posthumous narration immediately places us in a temporal position “after the fact”. The perspective of the posthumous narrator is always mediated by the knowledge of the collapse of hopes or utopias. The plot structure relies on fragments, memories, and scraps that the hero attempts to piece back together, yet wholeness remains unattainable. Posthumous narration allows for a non-evaluative optic; within the inverted situation of a post-historical present, it addresses events that cannot be described linearly: the collapse of the USSR, the failure of social projects, and the loss of identity. Trauma destroys the continuity of time, and posthumous narration becomes its artistic equivalent. Operating within the framework of the “unreliable narrator”, the storyteller himself is part of a ruined world; his memory is fragmentary, and his judgments are subjective. An emphasis on metafictional architectonics allows the text to recognize itself as a text written “after” the events.

The trilogy *Four Directions of the World (To'rt Tomon Qibla)* proves to be a significant example of the interaction between global postmodernist practice and local ethno-cultural experience, offering the reader a unique artistic experiment that enriches the understanding of Uzbek literature at the turn of the 21st century. The consciousness of the posthumous narrator is presented as a metaphor for historical experience. The use of the technique of posthumous narration allows Aman Mukhtar to create a complex and multifaceted portrait of a society in transition. The hero's journey through various temporal and spatial levels underscores the idea of severed

ties with history while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity of restoring a connection with the universe of humanity's mythological culture.

In contrast to this notion of the universality of “cultural memory”, in Hamid Ismailov's novel *Mbobo*, the posthumous narrator acts as a bearer of specific Russian ethno-cultural consciousness – primarily its underground vector. Posthumous narration fulfills an essential epistemological task of postmodernism: it deconstructs the historical “grand narrative” of the Soviet idea of a unified culture for all Soviet peoples. Postmodernism declares “war” on such grand narratives.

The transcultural writer Hamid Ismailov, writing at the intersection of epochs, states, and languages, employs posthumous narration to reveal the existential tragedy of many people who found themselves captives of this utopia. The story is told from a point where the utopia has collapsed, and its debris has become material for the ironic play of meanings in the new post-world. A powerful metaphor emerges within the novel: the Moscow Metro as a model of the afterworld and a refuge for the cultural underground. However, the author does not create a pathos-filled hymn to the underground; instead, he exposes its tragicomedy and doom from the perspective of eternity (*posthum*). Irony thus becomes the only adequate way to speak of the great but traumatic past, stripping it of its sacrality.

In the novel, posthumous narration allows the author to destroy the illusion of linear history and unified meaning; to project a model of hybrid, traumatized identity at the intersection of cultures; and to play with oxymoronic images and pervasive irony for the purpose of reinterpreting historical experience. Thus, Ismailov demonstrates that one can speak of a traumatic past only from the vantage point of its absence, turning the ruins of history into material for complex intellectual and artistic play. Consequently, through the cultural discourse of “the beyond”, artificial narratives are deconstructed – those which Uzbek writers interpret as the destruction of the ethno-cultural boundaries of their authentic world. Posthumous narration in contemporary Uzbek literature is not merely a stylistic device. It is a fundamental method of comprehending history and culture in a post-ideological era. It enables authors to address a complex past not directly, but through the prism of irony, fragmentation, and cultural memory, which constitutes the very core of postmodernist poetics.

References

- Bahtin, M.M. (1979). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Sovetskaya Rossiya Publ. (In Russ.)
- Barthes, R. (1989). *Selected Works: Semiotics. Poetics* (G.K. Kosikov, Trans.). Progress Publ. (In Russ.)
- Eco, U. (1986). *The Name of the Rose* (A. Grishanova, M. Semernikova, & V. Uvarova, Trans.). In L.G. Andreev (Ed.), *Calling Things by Their Names* (pp. 224–229). Progress Publ. (Original work published 1983). (In Russ.)
- Hassan, I. (1987). *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Ohio State University Press.

- Ivanova, N.B. (2019). *A Literary Park with Figures and a Gazebo: A Selective View of 21st-Century Russian Prose*. Ruthenia. (In Russ.)
- Lapina, E.V. (2008). Basic concepts of postmodern aesthetics. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, (1), 56–63. (In Russ.) EDN: KVUXKF
- Meskin, V.A. (2014). Realizm – postmodernism in Russian literature yesterday and today. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, (4), 5–10. (In Russ.) EDN: TCRWBN
- Nalimov, V.V., & Drogalina, Zh.A. (1984). Probabilistic model of the unconscious: the unconscious as a manifestation of the semantic universe. *Psikhologicheskii Zhurnal*, 5(6), 111–122. (In Russ.)
- Norris, C. (1992). *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. (1990). Two great metaphors. In *Theory of Metaphor* (N.D. Arutyunova, Trans., pp. 68–81). Progress Publ. (Original work published 1924). (In Russ.)
- Zuseva-Ozkan, V.B. (2022). Posthumous narrative in modern fiction. *New Philological Bulletin*, (2), 27–38. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.54770/20729316-2022-2-27> EDN: MDRGHQ

Bio notes:

Alexander G. Kovalenko, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Head of the Department of Russian and Foreign Literature, RUDN University, 6 Miklukho-Maklaya St, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-6747-285X; SPIN-code: 4970-3875. E-mail: ak-taurus@mail.ru

Gulchira T. Garipova, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Professor at the Department of Russian and Foreign Literature, RUDN University, 6 Miklukho-Maklaya St, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-7675-2570; SPIN-code: 1926-8676. E-mail: ggaripova 2017@yandex.ru

Eleonora F. Shafranskaya, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Professor at the Department of Russian Language and Linguoculturology, RUDN University, 6 Miklukho-Maklaya St, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-4462-5710; SPIN-code: 5340-6268. E-mail: shafranskaya-ef@rudn.ru