

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PIRIMQUL QODIROV'S "YULDUZLI TUNLAR" AND IAN MCEWAN'S "ATONEMENT": THE INTERPLAY OF HISTORY, MEMORY, AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**

*Teacher of the "Foreign Languages" department  
of Namangan State Technical University,*

**Xoldorova Shahlo Shuhratjon qizi**

+998507090021

**Abstract.** *This paper explores the thematic and stylistic parallels between Pirimqul Qodirov's Yulduzli Tunlar (Starry Nights, 1978) and Ian McEwan's Atonement (2001), two seminal works representing Uzbek and British post-war literature. Though written in different cultural and political contexts, both novels examine the moral consequences of human actions, the distortion of truth, and the tension between individual conscience and historical reality. Using a comparative literary approach supported by principles from contrastive linguistics and translation studies, this research investigates how both authors construct memory and guilt within their respective national identities. The study reveals that while Qodirov uses historical fiction to preserve national heritage and promote moral ideals, McEwan employs psychological realism and postmodern narrative techniques to question the reliability of perception and narrative truth. Despite stylistic and cultural divergences, both writers emphasize the redemptive potential of love, sacrifice, and truth-seeking.*

**Key words:** *comparative literature, historical novel, moral responsibility, cultural identity, narrative perspective, memory, Pirimqul Qodirov, Ian McEwan*

**Introduction.** Comparative literature seeks to bridge linguistic and cultural divides by exploring how authors from different traditions address universal human experiences. Although Uzbek and British literatures have evolved under distinct historical and ideological influences, they often converge on shared moral



and philosophical questions. This paper examines Pirmqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Starry Nights) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* as two profound reflections on human guilt, moral responsibility, and the reconstruction of historical truth.

Pirmqul Qodirov (1928–2010), one of Uzbekistan's most influential novelists, wrote *Yulduzli Tunlar* during the Soviet period, portraying the Renaissance-era poet and statesman Alisher Navoi. The novel not only reconstructs a significant epoch of Uzbek cultural history but also explores the moral dilemmas of intellectuals caught between personal duty and political constraints. Through Navoi's spiritual journey, Qodirov conveys the enduring value of truth, justice, and cultural preservation.

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) represents a modern British counterpart. Set before, during, and after World War II, it follows the consequences of a false accusation made by a young girl, Briony Tallis, which destroys two lives and burdens her with lifelong guilt. The novel explores the fragility of human perception, the ethics of storytelling, and the impossibility of complete moral redemption.

Both Qodirov and McEwan depict moral self-examination against the backdrop of historical transformation. The central aim of this paper is to compare how these authors use narrative structure, historical reconstruction, and moral reflection to address questions of truth, guilt, and human responsibility.

The key research questions are:

1. How do Qodirov and McEwan represent the moral dimension of personal and historical guilt?
2. What narrative techniques do they employ to express human consciousness and ethical struggle?
3. How do their cultural and historical contexts shape their treatment of truth and redemption?

**Materials and Methods.** This research employs a comparative qualitative method, integrating perspectives from comparative literature, contrastive linguistics, and narratology.

Primary materials:



- Pirmqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Starry Nights), translated into English and Russian versions for cross-linguistic reference.
- Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, including critical essays and interviews by the author.

Analytical framework:

1. Thematic analysis: Identifying shared motifs such as guilt, love, moral awakening, and historical truth.
2. Narrative analysis: Examining point of view, temporal structure, and the reliability of narration.
3. Cultural-contextual comparison: Assessing how each author reflects his socio-political background—Qodirov under Soviet moral idealism, McEwan under postmodern skepticism.
4. Linguistic and stylistic comparison: Investigating symbolic language, metaphors, and moral discourse in both texts.

The research also refers to theoretical frameworks by Mikhail Bakhtin (dialogism and polyphony), Linda Hutcheon (historiographic metafiction), and Eugene Nida (dynamic equivalence in translation) to interpret how each text reconstructs history and morality through narrative art.

Data collection is textual and interpretive: passages were analyzed in original and translated forms to observe stylistic and cultural nuances

**Results and Discussion.** Historical Consciousness and the Role of the Individual. Both novels are deeply rooted in historical consciousness. Qodirov reconstructs the 15th-century Timurid era to celebrate Uzbekistan's intellectual heritage, portraying Navoi as a moral and cultural reformer whose loyalty to truth transcends temporal politics. The historical setting functions not merely as a backdrop but as a moral landscape where individual choices determine national destiny.

In contrast, McEwan's historical backdrop—Britain during World War II—reveals the collapse of moral order amid human suffering. His characters, particularly Briony and Robbie, are victims of personal misjudgment and social





hierarchy. McEwan's use of historical realism serves to question how history itself can be distorted by subjective memory. Thus, while Qodirov's history is restorative, McEwan's is interrogative. Both view the individual as morally responsible for shaping and interpreting history.

**Moral Responsibility and Guilt.** Moral responsibility lies at the heart of both narratives. Navoi's inner conflict mirrors the tension between intellectual integrity and political power. His decision to speak truth to authority, even at personal risk, represents moral courage—a recurring theme in Uzbek classical literature.

McEwan's *Briony*, on the other hand, represents moral failure and self-reflection. Her childhood lie causes irreversible harm, and her adult attempts at literary confession become an act of atonement. However, McEwan problematizes the very notion of redemption, suggesting that guilt can only be expressed but never fully erased.

Qodirov's moral world is rooted in spiritual idealism—truth as divine order—while McEwan's moral world is grounded in psychological realism, portraying guilt as a perpetual internal dialogue. Yet both authors depict human conscience as the ultimate judge beyond social or political authority.

**Narrative Structure and Point of View.** *Qodirov* uses a third-person omniscient narrator with historical distance, creating an epic tone that fuses biography, history, and philosophy. The linear narrative reinforces clarity and moral resolution. Dialogue and monologues reveal ethical depth and emotional sincerity.

*McEwan*, however, employs a multi-layered narrative structure, moving from realism to metafiction. The revelation that *Briony* is the author of the story challenges the reader's trust in narrative truth. This postmodern self-awareness contrasts with Qodirov's traditional realist method but achieves a similar purpose: examining the tension between truth and interpretation.

Both writers use narrative as a means of moral inquiry. While Qodirov seeks to immortalize moral ideals through historical representation, McEwan exposes the fragility of those ideals in the modern world.



Language, Symbolism, and Style. Symbolism in both works carries moral and emotional resonance. In *Yulduzli Tunlar*, the recurring image of the starry sky symbolizes divine guidance, destiny, and the continuity of truth across time. Navoi often gazes at the stars, seeking moral illumination amid worldly turmoil. The star becomes a metaphor for eternal values and national identity.

In *Atonement*, McEwan's recurring images of water, reflection, and writing symbolize guilt, memory, and the attempt to rewrite the past. Water scenes—Robbie's immersion, the drowning of twins, and Briony's final confrontation—suggest purification and the fluidity of truth.

Stylistically, Qodirov's prose is ornate and lyrical, reflecting Eastern narrative aesthetics and moral didacticism. McEwan's language is precise and introspective, marked by psychological depth and irony. Despite stylistic differences, both writers use language as a moral instrument that mirrors human conscience.

Love and Redemption. Love functions as both salvation and tragedy. In *Yulduzli Tunlar*, Navoi's affection for Guli symbolizes the unity of moral and spiritual love—a pure devotion that transcends human frailty. In *Atonement*, love between Cecilia and Robbie becomes unattainable due to societal and moral failure. McEwan transforms love into an ethical ideal, destroyed by human error but preserved in artistic imagination.

Both novels suggest that redemption is possible only through truth and creation—Navoi through poetry and moral reform, Briony through writing and confession. However, McEwan questions whether art can truly atone for moral wrongs, while Qodirov affirms that art serves as the eternal bearer of truth.

**Conclusion.** The comparative analysis of Pirmqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* demonstrates that despite their distinct historical and cultural frameworks, both authors converge on universal themes of guilt, truth, and moral responsibility.

Qodirov's novel represents the moral optimism of the Eastern intellectual tradition, viewing history as a medium for ethical instruction and national renewal.



McEwan, conversely, embodies the postmodern skepticism of Western thought, portraying history and morality as fluid constructs shaped by perception and narrative.

Both works ultimately affirm the enduring human need for moral coherence and emotional truth. Their shared emphasis on love, conscience, and artistic creation reveals that literature, regardless of time or place, serves as a means of self-examination and spiritual redemption.

This study highlights the significance of intercultural literary comparison as a tool for understanding not only linguistic diversity but also the shared moral consciousness that unites humanity. Future research could expand this comparison to include translation analysis of *Yulduzli Tunlar* into English, examining how Qodirov's moral and poetic imagery survives linguistic transformation.

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