



"EVA" BY ZULFIYA KUROLBOY KIZI: INVERSION OF THE SACRED AND THE POETICS OF "QUIET" MAGICAL REALISM IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK PROSE

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Abstract

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the story of the contemporary Uzbek writer Zulfiya Kurolboy kizi " Momo Khavo " (translated as "Eva") is examined through the lens of magical realism. The novelty of this study stems from the lack of scholarly work examining this work as a representative text of "quiet" (or "transcendental ") magical realism, which emerged at the intersection of post-Soviet trauma, gender issues, and the Eastern mythopoetic tradition.

Keywords: Zulfiya Kurolboy kizi , magical realism, Uzbek literature, poetics, myth, Eve archetype, female images, post-Soviet realism, chronotope , ontological instability.

Introduction

Contemporary Uzbek prose is experiencing a period of active exploration of new forms of artistic expression, departing from the canons of socialist realism and embracing the arsenal of world literature. Magical realism is becoming one of the most sought-after, yet least studied, methods. As Z. A. Karimov rightly notes, turning to this method allows authors to "combine tangible details of everyday life with universal archetypal images," creating the effect of "extended reality." [4][8] Zulfiya's work Kurolboy Kizi occupies a special place in this process, since her works, deeply rooted in national soil, demonstrate an organic synthesis of realism, psychologism and mystical principles [3][9].

The story " Momo " " Khavo " (in the Russian version - "Eva") [1] is a complex, multi-layered text that, at first glance, can be read as a harsh social drama about the fall and death of the alcoholic Akbar. However, a detailed analysis reveals the presence of stable structures of magical realism. The goal of this article is to prove



that "Eva" functions within the paradigm of magical realism, but a special type of realism, which we propose to designate as "negative" or "inverse." If classical magical realism (in the spirit of García Márquez or Cortázar) introduces miracles into the everyday, then Zulfia Kuroloy Kesey takes the opposite approach: behind the facade of the ordinary and tragically real lies sinister magic, an archaic curse, a temptation scenario as ancient as the world.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks must be addressed: first, to examine the theoretical boundaries of magical realism as they apply to the post-Soviet literary context; second, to analyze the story's chronotope and its mythopoetic underpinnings; third, to explore the figure of Nafosat as a bearer of the magical principle; fourth, to identify the role of detail and symbol in creating the effect of "ontological instability"; and fifth, to interpret the story's ending as a magical-realistic denouement.

Theoretical aspects: the problem of definition and the specificity of “negative” magical realism

Before moving on to an analysis of the text, it is necessary to outline the theoretical framework. As the Encyclopedia Britannica notes , magical realism is a narrative strategy characterized by "the dispassionate incorporation of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction"[5]. However, this definition, while essentially correct , does not encompass the full diversity of national modifications of the method. An important clarification is Matthew Stricher's , who defines magical realism as a situation in which " a highly detailed , realistic setting is intruded upon by something too strange to be believed"[1].

In the context of post-Soviet literature, which has experienced the collapse of ideologies and social chaos, magical realism often takes on a traumatic connotation. As researchers write in an article on the work of Kazak and Kidruk , "the aesthetics of magical realism and postmodern aesthetics are based on an epistemological crisis caused by doubts about the legitimacy of 'classical' knowledge." [2] In this vacuum of legitimacy, alternative—magical, mythological, intuitive—experiences of understanding reality gain equal status with the empirical .

The story "Eve" is built on precisely this crisis. Akbar's world is disintegrating: he has lost his social status (a failed scientist), his family (his wife's departure, his daughter's disability in an orphanage), and his humanity (alcoholism). At this moment, something "too strange to believe" intrudes into his life—an ideal woman who isn't



above lifting him from the mud. This intrusion isn't an outright miracle (no one flies through the air or comes back to life), but it's too perfect, too precisely calculated, to be a coincidence. Here we encounter the phenomenon of "negative miracle" or "inverted sacredness," where the role of divine providence is played by a diabolical plan disguised as mercy.

Chronotope and the Element of Water: Between Reality and Myth

The story's spatial and temporal organization establishes a dual register of perception from the very first lines. The realistic plane is overly marked: "It had been raining for three days, drizzling incessantly. The asphalt had washed away, and the path had turned into a bumpy dirt road, covered in squelching mud."^[2] This detail alludes to the poetics of "harsh realism," which captures the unsightly aspects of everyday life. However, in the mythopoetic tradition, water is not only a natural phenomenon but also a symbol of boundaries, chaos, the unconscious, as well as purification and death. A three-day rain (the number three is sacred) blurs the boundaries between worlds. Akbar is in a liminal state—he's drunk, sick, and lying on the ground. This is a state of "threshold," when a person is most open to contact with other forces. He "curled up, snored, and fell asleep" right there on the wet ground, symbolizing his return to the womb, from which he is destined to be reborn or die forever.

At this moment, the invasion occurs. The rain stops falling on Akbar's face—an umbrella appears above it. A woman in a black cloak—the traditional color of mourning and magic—literally shields him from the elements. A realistic act of mercy takes on the characteristics of a magical gesture: she doesn't simply shelter him from the rain, she snatches him from the embrace of the chthonic element. The crystal drops she shakes from the umbrella ("crystal drops splashed in all directions")^[3] are a moment of aestheticization, the elevation of water from the category of dirt to the category of preciousness, characteristic of magical discourse that transforms reality. The space of Akbar's house is also ambivalent. On the one hand, it is a pauper's dwelling ("nothing conspicuous except a single bed"); on the other, "fresh and clean wallpaper" and a gas stove, which he did not sell. These details, seemingly purely realistic, yet in the context of subsequent events, they read like a stage set for a sacrifice.



The figure of Nafosat : the archetype of Eve in the infernal dimension

The central character around whom the narrative's magical plan crystallizes is Nafosat. Her very name (translated from Arabic-Persian as "precious," "valuable," "soul") is a polysemantic symbol. Akbar directly calls her "Eve" and "Bibi Fatima," placing her in the sacred context of the mother of humanity and patron saint. However, the development of the plot casts doubt on this identification.

In the classical theory of magical realism, dating back to Alejo For Carpentier, the source of "miraculous reality" is often folkloric Belief—the faith of the people, a myth rooted in the collective consciousness.[6] Nafosat fits this archetype perfectly: she appears as the embodiment of a dream, as an answer to the unspoken cry of a lonely, fallen man for salvation. Her behavior is impeccable: she is not squeamish, caring, chaste (the first night occurs only after courtship and marriage registration), and she is willing to take on the care of another man's disabled child.

However, magical realism differs from fairy tales in that its magic is ambivalent. Details that initially seem like manifestations of holiness gradually accumulate and form a different picture. Let's analyze the key signals:

Refrigerator. After their marriage, Nafosat, aware of her husband's passionate desire to quit drinking, leaves a bottle in the refrigerator. Her explanation is mundane: "Tomorrow is my birthday." But for Akbar, in remission, it's a magical temptation, a materialized temptation. She's testing him, provoking a relapse.

Doctor Davlat. The familiar doctor summoned to Akbar's sick room is more than just a colleague from the factory. In the final scene, it turns out he's an accomplice, "the man with the pointed beard," who supplies the arsenic. Their brief conversation in the kitchen completely reverses the meaning of the preceding events. Nafosat's words—"Arsenic again?" and "This time, if we increase the dose a little, our difficulties won't last long"—rip off the saint's mask, revealing the murderer's guise.

"Sincerity" as a Mask. The author repeatedly emphasizes the heroine's extraordinary sincerity: "The woman's words and gaze were sincere." In the finale, this characterization reaches a chilling conclusion: "...the sincerity, skillfully attached to her face, peeled away." The metaphor of "peeling" and "attachment" suggests that



sincerity was not a quality, but an artifact, a mask that could be put on and taken off. It is a purely magical transformation.

Thus, Nafosat embodies the archetype not of Eve the giver of life, but of Lilith, or the demonic temptress who appears in the guise of a savior. Her magic is the magic of perfect simulation. She plays the role of the "good woman" so perfectly that no one (neither Akbar nor the reader until the very end) can suspect a trick. This transforms the story into a noir mystery, where the magical element lies in the sinister anomaly of absolute good, which, upon closer inspection, turns out to be absolute evil.

A detail as a carrier of magical meaning: a bottle and arsenic

In the poetics of magical realism, the world of objects plays a huge role. Objects cease to be mere background and become active participants in events, bearers of hidden power or meaning.

In the story "Eve," such an object isn't just the notorious bottle in the refrigerator. The central magical artifact is "arsenic." It's not described, colorless, or odorless in the text, but it is precisely this substance, introduced into the body (probably along with the "medicines" so thoughtfully administered by Nafosat), that is the true agent of action. Arsenic here is "black magic" in its purest form. It is tangible, but its effects are irrationally hidden.

The symbolism of poisoning takes on a mythological dimension. The poison Akbar takes is an inversion of Holy Communion. Nafosat, like a priest, gives him "medicine" ("That was for fever, and this for cold")[6], but this medicine kills. The motif of "drinking" (alcohol, medicine, tea) permeates the entire text. Akbar begins by drinking to forget, and ends by drinking death from the hands of the woman he considered his angel-savior. This transmutation of substance (water, wine, medicine, poison) creates the very effect of magical realism that D. Y. Lodge writes about: "miraculous and impossible events occur in what is otherwise a realistic narrative"[1]. The event here is murder, disguised as a natural death from alcoholism. The impossible lies in Nafosat's absolute, inhuman capacity for pretense and calculation. Another significant object is "wallpaper." Akbar notes that his squalid apartment has "fresh, clean wallpaper on the walls." It's a detail one might overlook, but in the context of magical realism, it works to create an ominous aesthetic. Wallpaper is what conceals the wall's true structure; it's a surface, a mask. It seems to anticipate Nafosat's



final revelation : everything clean and fresh in this house is merely a shell concealing rot and death.

Inversion and the "missing miracle" as the basis of the method

Of Zulfiya's magical realism Kuroloy Kizi's difference from canonical Latin American examples lies in the absence of positive wonder. In Márquez's Macardo is filled with yellow butterflies, while Remedios The beautiful woman ascends to heaven. Here, however, there is no miracle—only its sinister simulacrum.

However, this absence is precisely what creates the magical effect. The reader, like Akbar, awaits a miracle. The woman who comes to his aid is perceived as divine intervention ("Eve or Bibi Fatima!..."). The entire narrative is structured as a preparation for this miracle: Akbar cleanses himself (shaves, washes), tries to quit drinking, and finds a family. The climax should be salvation, but instead, death occurs. This technique can be called a "negative epiphany ." Instead of a divine manifestation, a demon appears; instead of salvation, there is final destruction. In the final scene, Akbar dies, "tightly clutching Nafosat's hand ." He departs this life with the illusion of love and gratitude, never knowing the truth. The reader, however, discovers the truth in the final scene, where Nafosat calmly smokes in the kitchen and discusses a new dose for Yakhshigul with Davlat .

It is this reader's knowledge, contrasted with the hero's ignorance, that creates a powerful magical-realistic effect. The story's world is divided: for Akbar, it is a world of regained paradise; for us, it is a world of hell, hidden behind a veneer of decorum. The murder of a disabled girl, planned as a routine continuation of the "work," lends this duality a truly metaphysical dimension. The story of Adam and Eve is rewritten in reverse: the woman does not give life, but takes it away; she does not bestow hope, but sows death, and is ready to do so again.

Conclusion

The analysis carried out allows us to state that Zulfiya's story Kuroloy Kizi's "Eva" is a unique example of magical realism in contemporary Uzbek literature. The writer avoids external, fantastical trappings (flights, transformations), but creates a magical aura through a profound inversion of archetypal plots and masterful attention to detail. The magical in the story manifests itself "negatively"—through a monstrous discrepancy between appearance and essence. The ideal woman turns out to be a cold-



blooded killer; care turns into poisoning; salvation—into death. The chronotope, built on the mythologem of water as a boundary, and the world of objects (a bottle, arsenic, wallpaper) work to create an atmosphere of ontological instability, where every everyday gesture can conceal a ritual, and every word, a spell.

Thus, "Eva" can be seen as a work that expands the boundaries of magical realism, demonstrating its adaptability to the post-Soviet cultural space. Zulfiya Kuroloy Kizi creates a text that challenges the reader's perception, forcing them to seek hidden, irrational meaning in the darkest and most realistic scenes of reality. Prospects for further research are seen in a comparative analysis of "Eve" with the author's other works, as well as in the context of studying "women's fiction" and the gender aspects of magical realism in Eastern literatures.

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[^1]: From here on, the quotation of the story is given from the provided file: Zulfiya Kurolboy kizi . Momo Havo (Eva) / Translation from Uzbek . - 2025. Manuscript.

[^2]: Ibid. P. 1.

[^3]: Ibid. P. 4.

[^4]: Ibid. P. 14.

[^5]: Ibid. P. 15.

[^6]: Ibid. P. 3.