MEMORY, MORAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN O‘LMAS UMARBEKOV’S SHORT STORIES

Sharopova Farida Nodirovna
PhD Student in 10.00.06 — Comparative Literature, Contrastive Linguistics and Translation Studies Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan Email: faridasharopova@gmail.com
Safarova Khurshida Salimovna
PhD, Senior Teacher, Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan Email: safarovaxurshida8@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article investigates the relationship between memory, moral responsibility, and human dignity in four short stories by O‘lmas Umarbekov: Boboyong‘oq, Qiyomat qarz, Mehr, and Husn. Using qualitative close reading and an intratextual comparative approach, the study examines how remembered experience acquires force in present decisions. Particular attention is paid to material reminders, entrusted possessions, acts of care, and retrospective narration. The analysis proposes a distinction between memory as recollected information and memory as an ongoing demand upon conduct. A comparative matrix identifies the different temporal and ethical structures of the selected narratives. The central argument is that remembrance becomes ethically significant when a character must decide how to respond to a relationship that remains consequential despite loss, absence, or social change. At the same time, the article distinguishes respect for commitment from an uncritical celebration of self-sacrifice. It concludes that a temporal approach to moral characterization can clarify both the persistence of responsibility and the limits of narrative consolation.*

Keywords: *O‘lmas Umarbekov; Uzbek literature; short story; memory; moral responsibility; human dignity; narrative time; comparative textual analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Memory becomes a literary problem when the past changes the meaning of a present action. A remembered event may justify loyalty, make an apparently ordinary object irreplaceable, or prevent an observer from treating another person’s suffering as insignificant. In such cases, recollection does more than provide background. It establishes a relationship between what has happened and what a character feels called upon to do. The ethical significance of that relationship cannot be explained by chronology alone.

This study approaches Umarbekov’s short fiction through that connection between temporal experience and responsibility. It asks three questions. What gives an earlier relationship continuing authority in the present? Through which narrative forms does that authority become perceptible? What happens when fidelity to the past conflicts with practical convenience, personal well-being, or changing social

circumstances? These questions make it possible to examine moral characterization without assuming that every persistent attachment is necessarily admirable or every adaptation necessarily a betrayal.

Human dignity is used here as an interpretive concern with the recognition of persons as more than their immediate usefulness, social reputation, or visible characteristics. Moral responsibility refers to a character’s narrated sense of answerability for conduct affecting others. These working definitions organize the analysis; they are not attributed to Umarbekov as explicit philosophical propositions. The article argues that the relationship between memory and responsibility is best studied through the choices and pressures a story constructs, rather than through a catalogue of virtues assigned to its protagonists.

Theoretical Orientation and Research Method

Narrative theory distinguishes the temporal sequence of events from the order and duration of their presentation. Scheffel, Weixler, and Werner (2014) explain how order, duration, and frequency describe relations between story time and discourse time. These distinctions help identify why a brief present encounter may carry the weight of many years. A retrospective passage can revise an initial judgment; an account of habitual activity can establish endurance; a pause can give interpretive prominence to what would occupy only a moment in chronological time. Temporal form therefore contributes to meaning rather than simply locating events on a timeline.

Focalization adds a complementary question: whose knowledge and experience regulate the information available to the reader? Niederhoff (2013) emphasizes the selection or restriction of narrative information. Applied to memory, this distinction prevents an observer’s inference from being mistaken for an established fact. It also draws attention to the difference between a character remembering an event and another speaker reconstructing that character’s history. The position from which the past is narrated affects the authority and emotional texture of the resulting account.

The study uses a purposive sample of four Uzbek-language short stories published electronically in the Ziyouz anthology. Selection rests on their contrasting ways of connecting remembered relationships to present conduct. Each text was examined for a present ethical difficulty, its connection with an earlier event, the narrative means of establishing that connection, and the degree of resolution at the ending. Table 1 records the interpretive comparison. Its categories are qualitative: they do not represent measured frequencies, statistical coding, or experimental findings.

The comparison is internal to one author’s selected short fiction. It does not claim to establish cross-national influence or a chronological evolution across Umarbekov’s complete oeuvre. The short-story version of Qiyomat qarz is used, rather than the dramatic adaptation. References identify the consulted online versions by their displayed 2013 posting dates, which should not be confused with the original dates of composition or first print publication. Because the electronic texts lack stable print

pagination, the analysis refers to identifiable episodes and supplies direct source links in the reference list.

Textual Analysis

Remembered Place in Boboyong‘oq

In Boboyong‘oq, the threatened removal of a walnut tree during village redevelopment troubles G‘ulomqodir ota. The tree originated in a sapling recovered from a dead man and subsequently became connected with the village orchard. An official’s practical description of the trees as firewood fails to acknowledge this history. The eventual survival of the walnut tree allows a remembered relationship to remain materially present within a changed environment (Umarbekov, 2013a).

The episode invites a distinction between replacing an object and acknowledging the relation it carries. A functional substitute cannot necessarily answer an injury to memory. The ethical issue is therefore not whether change should occur, but whether decisions about change recognize meanings that are not immediately visible. This interpretation places responsibility on the act of listening: the person who decides must first understand what the proposed loss means to someone else.

Entrustment in Qiyomat qarz

Qiyomat qarz makes remembrance inseparable from Sarsonboy ota’s care for sheep entrusted to him by Haydarali before his wartime disappearance. The animals have multiplied, yet their absent owner continues to determine how Sarsonboy understands them. His repeated visits to the market sustain the possibility of returning what he accepted. The ending preserves expectation instead of completing the obligation through reunion (Umarbekov, 2013d).

Here the moral question concerns the durability of entrustment. Possession does not automatically become ownership, and elapsed time does not supply permission to forget. The story can thus be read as a test of responsibility when reciprocal recognition is unavailable. The absence of completion matters: fidelity retains meaning without producing a reward that would convert it into a successful transaction. Such a reading also leaves room to ask how a community might support a commitment that has become physically burdensome.

Care and Recollection in Mehr

Mehr links an observed act of care to a narrator’s memory of rescue. Watching an elderly caretaker return a young bird to its nest recalls wartime devastation and the narrator’s own vulnerability as a child. The possibility that the old man is the rescuer remains a question rather than a confirmed identification. Emotional recognition develops through an analogy between acts, not through proof of personal identity (Umarbekov, 2013c).

This distinction gives the narrative its ethical reach. Gratitude need not remain restricted to locating and repaying one known benefactor; it can become sensitivity to a recognizable kind of conduct. Nevertheless, resemblance should not be turned into historical certainty. The reader’s task is to preserve the emotional truth of the association while respecting the limits of what the narrator knows. Care becomes

intelligible through remembered vulnerability, even where knowledge remains incomplete.

Dignity and Continuing Loss in Husn

In Husn, a mother retrospectively recounts Ma’pirat’s humiliation over her disability, bereavement, and work as a collective-farm leader. Her daughter’s insistence on returning collectively owned hay obtained by the mother places fairness above family advantage. Yet public achievement coexists with grief and exhaustion; the mother’s concern about her health prevents a wholly triumphant portrait (Umarbekov, 2013b).

The retrospective voice makes dignity a matter of revised judgment. The mother has to understand a person whose commitments do not always coincide with her own wishes. Recognition is therefore demanding even within affection. The account also invites a limit on the celebration of service: a person’s need for rest and care should remain visible when that person is praised for helping others. Achievement cannot be treated as compensation that cancels bereavement or as the condition upon which human worth depends.

Comparative Findings

Table 1 organizes the readings around a common question: how does an earlier relationship shape a present ethical demand? Each row identifies a dominant tendency rather than an exhaustive account of its story. The final column preserves a critical question so that comparison does not reduce complex characters to exemplary moral types.

Table 1. Memory and responsibility in the selected short stories

Story	Carrier of memory	Present demand	Critical question
Boboyong‘oq	Walnut tree and its history	Recognition during change	Can practical benefit justify disregarding attachment?
Qiyomat qarz	Entrusted flock	Faithfulness to an absent person	How can enduring duty be sustained?
Mehr	Witnessed rescue of a bird	Attention to vulnerability	Where does recognition exceed certain knowledge?
Husn	A mother’s retrospective account	Fairness alongside family affection	Does admiration leave room for care?

Source: Authors’ qualitative comparison of Umarbekov (2013a–d).

The matrix separates preservation, fulfilment, recognition, and fair conduct. These are related ethical responses, but they should not be collapsed into a single instruction to remain loyal. A remembered relationship may require protecting something, continuing an activity, revising perception, or limiting a claim of privilege. The analytical gain lies in identifying which response a particular narrative makes necessary and what remains difficult about that response.

Discussion

A temporal account of responsibility begins with a distinction between the end of an event and the end of its consequences. An episode may be finished in chronological terms while continuing to organize expectation, judgment, or obligation. Literary analysis should therefore examine not only what a character recalls but also what the recollection authorizes. Does it explain a present decision, expose a misunderstanding, or prevent an easy resolution? Answering these questions connects narrative arrangement to moral reasoning without turning fictional experience into a universal rule.

Memory also raises the problem of unequal access to meaning. The person attached to a place or commitment may possess a history that others do not know. An observer can consequently misunderstand conduct while accurately perceiving its outward form. This possibility gives disclosure a moral function: additional narrative information may require a judgment to be revised. The critic should nevertheless distinguish a persuasive interpretation from a demonstrated authorial intention. The present argument concerns effects made available by textual organization, not an unrecorded declaration of what the author meant.

The concept of dignity sharpens this distinction. To recognize someone is to allow that person’s experience to count, but recognition does not entail approving every decision. Respect can coexist with concern about exhaustion, rigidity, or unequal power. Equally, the offer of assistance may become reductive if it treats a commitment as an irrational obstacle to be removed. Ethical reading requires attention both to the value of a relationship and to the conditions under which a person can continue carrying its demands.

Reader response remains a separate question. Keen (2013) cautions against assuming that narrative empathy produces predictable moral improvement. For this reason, the article describes opportunities for reconsideration, not proven changes in readers’ behaviour. A classroom or reception study could investigate whether readers revise their judgments after encountering retrospective information, but such a claim would require participant data. No such experiment is asserted here.

The sample and method impose further limits. Four stories cannot establish the prevalence of a device throughout an author’s career. Online transcriptions should eventually be collated with authoritative print editions before making claims about textual variants, punctuation, or publication history. Comparative work with other writers would also require explicit selection criteria. The present contribution is narrower: it offers a usable set of questions for analysing how narrated time and remembered relationships participate in the construction of moral character.

CONCLUSION

Memory provides a productive point of entry into the ethics of characterization because it connects earlier relationships with present decisions. The comparison identifies several ways that connection can operate, while preserving the differences between safeguarding an attachment, honouring entrustment, recognizing care, and acting fairly. The principal methodological conclusion is that moral responsibility

should be read as a temporal and relational difficulty rather than as a static label attached to a protagonist. Human dignity becomes visible when narrative interpretation allows private meanings and continuing vulnerabilities to matter.

Future research can test the reach of this approach through a larger textual sample, print-edition comparison, and carefully designed studies of readers' judgments.

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