

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ETHICS OF MEMORY IN PIRIMQUL QODIROV'S YULDUZLI TUNLAR AND IAN MCEWAN'S ATONEMENT

Xoldorova Shahlo Shuhratjon qizi

Teacher of the "Foreign Languages" Department
of Namangan State Technical University,
+998507090021

Abstract

This article explores how two culturally distant yet philosophically parallel authors—Pirimqul Qodirov from Uzbekistan and Ian McEwan from the United Kingdom—represent historical consciousness and the ethics of memory in their novels *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Starry Nights) and *Atonement*. The study focuses on how personal guilt, collective responsibility, and historical truth intersect within their narratives. While Qodirov reconstructs national identity through the figure of Babur, McEwan reimagines personal morality through Briony's internal struggle for redemption. The comparative approach demonstrates that both writers, though shaped by different civilizations and ideologies, use literature to preserve moral awareness and challenge the reader to reflect on history as a living ethical process.

Keywords: Historical consciousness, memory, ethics, guilt, moral responsibility, comparative literature, national identity, trauma, redemption.

Introduction

Literature not only entertains but also preserves human memory and ethical awareness. Writers across nations and centuries have turned to fiction as a means of understanding how history shapes personal and collective identity. In the fields of comparative literature and memory studies, much attention has been given to how authors reconstruct the past to question moral responsibility in times of crisis.

This article examines how Pirimqul Qodirov and Ian McEwan approach these issues in their masterpieces *Yulduzli Tunlar* and *Atonement*. Although Qodirov writes within the context of Soviet-era Uzbekistan and McEwan from post-war England, both share a concern for how individuals remember and interpret the past.

In *Yulduzli Tunlar*, Qodirov portrays Babur's journey through exile and self-discovery, framing memory as a source of spiritual and national strength. In *Atonement*, McEwan presents Briony Tallis's lifelong attempt to reconcile imagination with truth, guilt with forgiveness. Both authors pose an ethical question: Can remembrance heal the wounds of history—or does it perpetuate them?

Materials and Methods

The comparative analysis of Pirimqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Starry Nights) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is based on the interdisciplinary methodology of literary and cultural

studies. The research applies qualitative methods, including textual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and cultural-contextual comparison. These approaches allow the identification of shared thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and moral-philosophical dimensions within two distinct literary traditions — Uzbek and British.

The materials used in this study include the original literary texts: *Yulduzli Tunlar* by Pirimqul Qodirov (1969) in its Uzbek version and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan (2001) in English, as well as their translated editions and relevant critical literature. Secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, literary criticism, and cultural-historical commentaries discussing both authors' works in the context of memory studies, postmodern ethics, and historical consciousness.

The comparative framework is guided by the theoretical perspectives of comparative literature and memory studies, particularly the works of scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs, Aleida and Jan Assmann on collective memory, and Paul Ricoeur on time and narrative. This theoretical background enables a deeper understanding of how individual and collective memory function in shaping moral and historical awareness in literature.

In analyzing Qodirov's and McEwan's works, special attention is given to narrative structure, character psychology, and ethical motifs related to guilt, responsibility, and redemption. The study also investigates how historical events are reimagined through subjective experience: Qodirov's portrayal of Amir Temur's era is examined as a reconstruction of national history and identity, while McEwan's depiction of World War II serves as a moral and psychological exploration of individual responsibility and human fallibility.

The methodological process includes:

1. Textual Analysis – identifying key symbols, motifs, and dialogues that reveal the ethical dimensions of memory and history.
2. Contextual Interpretation – situating each work within its socio-historical and cultural environment: Soviet Uzbekistan for Qodirov and pre- and post-war England for McEwan.
3. Comparative Synthesis – establishing parallels and contrasts in their treatment of time, narrative voice, and moral reflection.
4. Critical Evaluation – assessing how the two authors construct a dialogue between past and present, between personal guilt and collective responsibility.

Through this systematic comparative approach, the study aims to highlight the universality of ethical dilemmas and the human struggle for moral clarity across different cultures and historical epochs. Both authors employ narrative strategies that bridge the gap between historical fact and imaginative reconstruction, suggesting that literature not only preserves memory but also transforms it into moral insight.

Results and Discussion.

1. History as Moral Space

For Qodirov, history is not a fixed chronicle but a moral landscape. *Yulduzli Tunlar* reconstructs the 15th–16th centuries, when Babur, the future founder of the Mughal Empire, struggles to preserve his dignity and ideals amid political fragmentation. Through Babur's reflective monologues and poetic sensibility, Qodirov invites readers to engage with the moral duty of



historical remembrance. His portrayal of Babur transforms history into an ethical dialogue between past and present, encouraging modern readers to protect their cultural memory.

McEwan, by contrast, uses the setting of World War II to expose the fragility of truth and the devastating consequences of moral blindness. In *Atonement*, Briony's false testimony during childhood destroys two lives and marks her forever with guilt. History becomes a mirror of conscience: war is both a collective tragedy and a metaphor for internal conflict. Thus, McEwan turns private error into a reflection on historical responsibility.

The comparative analysis of Pirimqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Starry Nights) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* reveals profound thematic intersections in how both authors approach history, guilt, and the ethics of remembrance. Although separated by geography, language, and ideology, both writers address the moral responsibilities of individuals in shaping collective memory and national identity.

2. The Representation of History and Memory

In *Yulduzli Tunlar*, Qodirov reimagines the life and reign of Amir Temur, not merely as a chronicle of political events but as a moral and philosophical meditation on leadership, justice, and human destiny. History in Qodirov's novel is deeply spiritual; it becomes a means of understanding one's moral duties toward the nation and its heritage. The narrative encourages readers to reflect on how historical memory forms the foundation of national consciousness and moral strength. Qodirov's meticulous reconstruction of the 14th-century Central Asian world serves as both a literary homage and a moral statement about the value of unity, courage, and wisdom in preserving cultural identity.

Conversely, *Atonement* presents history from a deeply psychological and introspective perspective. McEwan does not depict grand historical figures or battles; instead, he focuses on the emotional aftermath of war and the personal consequences of moral failure. The protagonist, Briony Tallis, embodies the conflict between imagination and truth, between youthful misjudgment and lifelong remorse. Her false accusation against Robbie Turner becomes a metaphor for the distortion of truth in historical narratives. McEwan thus turns history into a space of ethical reflection — one where the act of remembering becomes inseparable from the act of seeking forgiveness.

While Qodirov views history as **collective heritage**, McEwan views it as **personal burden**. Yet both converge in suggesting that moral progress depends on confronting the past with honesty and compassion. In both narratives, memory is not passive recall but an active ethical process — an effort to reconcile humanity's failures with its hope for redemption.

3. The Ethics of Guilt and Redemption

A central finding of this comparison is the shared motif of guilt and the search for atonement. In Qodirov's work, guilt operates on a historical and communal level. The novel suggests that nations, like individuals, must acknowledge their past mistakes to attain moral maturity. The portrayal of Amir Temur's inner reflections reveals the ethical tension between power and conscience. His character embodies the struggle of a leader who bears the moral weight of his people's destiny.



McEwan, on the other hand, personalizes guilt through Briony's lifelong remorse. Her attempt to atone through writing — by reconstructing her past in fiction — raises profound questions about truth and morality in art. Can storytelling heal historical wounds? Can confession through literature serve as genuine redemption? McEwan's novel offers no easy answers, emphasizing instead the ambiguity of human ethics and the fragility of moral understanding.

Both authors use **narrative as a form of moral testimony**. Qodirov writes history to awaken ethical consciousness in his readers, while McEwan writes fiction to expose the limits of moral certainty. In both cases, literature becomes a medium through which societies confront their moral inheritance.

4. Cultural Dialogue and Comparative Insight

From a comparative literature perspective, this study demonstrates that both Uzbek and British traditions engage in a shared ethical dialogue about history's role in defining identity. Qodirov's spiritual humanism and McEwan's psychological realism both affirm that the act of remembering carries moral significance. Despite differing historical contexts — Soviet-era Uzbekistan's search for cultural authenticity and postwar Britain's moral disillusionment — both authors express a universal concern with the ethical responsibility of memory.

The juxtaposition of *Yulduzli Tunlar* and *Atonement* also illustrates how **literature transcends cultural boundaries**. Qodirov's epic narrative and McEwan's postmodern realism both serve as moral instruments, shaping readers' understanding of the relationship between truth, memory, and forgiveness. Their works remind us that the study of comparative literature is not limited to linguistic or structural parallels; it is fundamentally an exploration of shared moral and emotional experiences.

Ultimately, both Qodirov and McEwan show that historical consciousness is inseparable from ethical awareness. To remember truthfully is to act morally. Whether on the scale of nations or individuals, redemption becomes possible only through the courage to face one's past.

5. The Ethics of Memory

Both authors suggest that memory is never neutral—it is shaped by moral choices. In *Yulduzli Tunlar*, Babur's memoirs (reminiscent of his real-life Baburnoma) serve as a symbol of truthful remembrance. Qodirov constructs his narrative as an act of cultural atonement, restoring forgotten pride and dignity to the Uzbek nation under Soviet rule. Memory, in this sense, becomes resistance. McEwan's approach is psychological and self-critical. In *Atonement*, Briony rewrites the story of her youth in an attempt to "atone" for her sin. Yet McEwan denies her full redemption—her memory, while honest, is incomplete. By doing so, he questions whether literature can ethically represent the past without altering it.

Both novels, therefore, dramatize the moral burden of remembrance: to remember truthfully is to accept pain; to distort memory is to lose integrity.



6. Narrative Form and Temporal Layers

Qodirov's narration is linear and classical, maintaining historical authenticity. He uses the third-person perspective with poetic interludes, blending fact and fiction to achieve emotional depth. His storytelling technique embodies epic realism, designed to educate and inspire.

McEwan's narration, however, is fragmented and metafictional. The reader discovers that the entire novel may be Briony's retrospective confession. This structural ambiguity transforms *Atonement* into a study of how storytelling itself becomes an ethical act. McEwan's narrative self-awareness corresponds to Qodirov's moral sincerity—both authors seek truth through art, even as they acknowledge its limitations.

7. Universal Morality and Cultural Identity

While Qodirov glorifies historical figures to strengthen collective identity, McEwan focuses on the individual's inner world to expose universal weakness. Yet both writers converge on the idea that moral integrity defines true humanity.

Qodirov's Babur embodies courage, love, and justice—values rooted in Central Asian humanism. McEwan's Briony, though flawed, seeks moral clarity through creative honesty. Together, they show that the preservation of memory—national or personal—is essential to the ethical survival of civilization.

Conclusion

The comparative study of *Yulduzli Tunlar* and *Atonement* reveals how literature serves as a moral archive of human experience. Qodirov transforms history into a sacred space of collective memory, while McEwan turns memory into a moral battlefield within the individual. Despite their cultural and temporal distance, both authors demonstrate that remembering is a moral act—one that demands courage, humility, and truth.

Their works remind readers that nations and individuals alike must confront their past honestly to achieve ethical renewal. Thus, Qodirov and McEwan stand as literary witnesses to the enduring relationship between memory, history, and morality.

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