



TRAGICITY AND FEMININE IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK POETRY: A POETIC STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY AND MEMORY

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 11 th March 2025 Accepted: 10 th April 2025	This article investigates the intersection of tragedy and feminine identity in the works of three leading Uzbek women poets: Zebo Mirzo, Halima Ahmad, and Nodira Ofoq. Through close textual analysis and theoretical frameworks including Pospelov's theory of tragic conflict, Butler's gender performativity, Kristeva's abjection, and Camus's absurdism, the study demonstrates how these poets transform personal grief and cultural silence into lyrical resistance. The poetic "I" in their verse is not a passive voice of suffering, but an active, fragmentary subject engaging in aesthetic survival. The study contributes to feminist literary criticism and post-Soviet Uzbek poetics.

Keywords: tragic conflict, feminine identity, lyrical subject, abjection, absurdism, Uzbek women's poetry

1. INTRODUCTION

In the shifting landscape of post-Soviet Central Asian literature, contemporary Uzbek women's poetry has emerged as a dynamic space for the exploration of gendered subjectivity, emotional trauma, and existential conflict. While classical Uzbek poetry often positioned women as passive symbols or secondary voices, modern women poets increasingly write from within lived experience, reclaiming the lyric "I" as a site of resistance, fragmentation, and identity negotiation. This article examines the intersection of tragedy and feminine identity in the poetic works of three prominent contemporary Uzbek poets: Zebo Mirzo, Halima Ahmad, and Nodira Ofoq. Their verse not only articulates individual suffering but also engages with broader metaphysical and social tensions, portraying women as ethically conscious subjects navigating systems of silence, cultural repression, and psychological fracture. Through images of confinement, voicelessness, self-alienation, and metaphysical loss, their poetry reveals the tragic condition as both an aesthetic stance and an ontological dilemma. The study builds on G.N. Pospelov's conception of tragic conflict, which defines tragedy as an unsolvable clash between moral ideal and inescapable reality. It is further informed by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic model of abjection, Albert Camus's philosophy of absurdism, and Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic theory of suffering. These frameworks allow for a multifaceted reading of how poetic subjectivity in Uzbek women's verse becomes a locus of tragic awareness and creative resistance.

By integrating literary analysis with feminist and philosophical theory, the paper seeks to demonstrate that tragedy in Uzbek women's poetry is not merely thematic but structural. The lyric "I" is rendered unstable, yet meaningful — fragmented, yet expressive. This study contributes to the growing field of feminist literary criticism within Central Asian literature and aims to contextualize the poetics of suffering as a medium of ethical and aesthetic agency.

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The investigation of tragedy and feminine identity in contemporary Uzbek women's poetry requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that combines literary poetics, feminist theory, and existential philosophy. This study adopts a qualitative, text-centered methodology rooted in close reading, intertextual analysis, and thematic interpretation. The goal is to illuminate how poetic texts embody tragic consciousness and express female subjectivity under conditions of psychological, cultural, and ontological tension. G.N. Pospelov defines tragedy as a structural conflict between a character's idealistic drive and an objective reality that negates those ideals. According to him, tragic characters are not simply victims, but morally engaged individuals whose inner aspirations are shattered by the resistance of historical, social, or metaphysical forces:

"A true tragic conflict emerges not where one side is right and the other wrong, but where both embody equally powerful values that cannot coexist"
(Pospelov, 1974, p. 314).



This definition frames the poetic subject in Uzbek women's verse as a tragic agent caught between the will to love, speak, and endure, and the forces of cultural suppression, memory loss, or existential despair. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity asserts that gender is not a stable identity but is constituted through repeated acts regulated by societal norms:

"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results"
(Butler, 1990, p. 25).

In the context of Uzbek women's poetry, this view helps understand how female speakers disrupt cultural expectations by articulating forms of longing, silence, or grief that defy normative feminine roles. Their poetry becomes an act of gender resistance and re-signification.

Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection provides a psychoanalytic lens for analyzing how the self is formed through rejection and loss. Abjection marks the boundaries of identity — where the subject is expelled from itself:

"The abject confronts us with those fragile states where meaning collapses. It draws us toward the place where meaning does not exist"
(Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

In the poetry of Halima Ahmad and Nodira Ofoq, abjection manifests in metaphors of bodily rupture, self-alienation, and linguistic breakdown. These motifs signify the collapse of coherent identity and evoke a deeply tragic vision of the female self. Albert Camus's absurdism centers on the disjunction between human desire for meaning and the universe's indifferent silence. Tragic awareness, for Camus, is the recognition of this void — and the refusal to be defeated by it:

"The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world"
(Camus, 1991, p. 28).

Camus's philosophy resonates with the poetic voices that lament spiritual muteness and failed transcendence. In poems where the moon turns away or shadows refuse to follow, Camus's absurd is poetically encoded.

Friedrich Nietzsche redefines tragedy as not only the recognition of suffering, but its transformation into artistic affirmation. For him, art is the only response to the chaos of existence:

"It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified"
(Nietzsche, 2003, p. 39).

This aesthetic ethos guides the poets in this study. Even when narrating despair, their verse achieves form, beauty, and insight. Tragedy thus becomes not a failure of meaning, but its poetic intensification.

3. RESULTS

The poetic works of Zebo Mirzo, Halima Ahmad, and Nodira Ofoq embody various forms of tragic conflict as they engage with existential dilemmas, gendered constraints, and fragmented selfhood. Each poet constructs a lyrical "I" that is both vulnerable and resistant — destabilized by pain, but capable of artistic assertion. This section analyzes three representative poems from each poet through the lens of theoretical concepts outlined earlier.

3.1 Zebo Mirzo: Tragic Vision and Ethical Idealism

Poem 1: "Dor"

*Sen – bo'g'zimga atalgan dorsan,
Peshonamga bitilgan qismat...*

(Z. Mirzo, Hayot meni aldagan, 2011, p. 63)

This poem metaphorizes love as a noose, symbolizing both intimacy and destruction. The beloved becomes "qiyomatda ochilguvchi xat," suggesting divine mystery and inaccessible destiny. The speaker's submission to a "written" fate represents Pospelov's tragic conflict: a moral ideal (love) is crushed by metaphysical fatalism. Simultaneously, Kristeva's abjection appears in the disintegration of bodily imagery (bo'g'iz, ko'z, yurak), indicating a split subjectivity.

Poem 2: "Kel..."

*Na umrimda bahor, na bag'rimda yoz...
Kimnidir jim kutdim, bilmam – kim o'zi...*
(Ibid., p. 85)

Time and selfhood are suspended. The speaker exists in a liminal state — waiting for a presence that lacks identity. This portrays a deeply Butlerian performativity: she performs the cultural script of waiting, yet the absence of object renders the act void. The tragedy here lies in the emptiness of form — waiting becomes self-erasure.

Poem 3: "Osmon"

Bunchalar pastsan, osmon...
(Ibid., p. 91)

Traditionally a symbol of hope, the "sky" here is degraded. The poet's address becomes accusation: the heavens have failed her. This reflects Camus's absurd: expectation meets silence. Her "head bowed" position affirms submission, yet the lament becomes form — a Nietzschean transformation of suffering into aesthetic defiance.

3.2 Halima Ahmad: Silence, Confinement, and Embodied Grief

Poem 1: "Darvoza"



Temir darvoza yana to'sildi yo'limda...

(H. Ahmad, Erk darichasi, 2019, p. 23)

The "iron gate" separates the speaker from life, visually encoding gendered spatiality. Butler's theory of constructed gender roles is evident: women are interiorized, excluded from agency. The poem's climax — "Men yashashni istardim, ular esa – jimlik" — stages tragedy as silencing: the desire for life meets collective repression.

Poem 2: "Seni sog'inaman"

Ikkiga bo'lingan qontalash yaproq...

(Ibid., p. 33)

Love here is injurious. The lips, symbols of expression, are torn — a graphic image of abjection and voiceless desire. The poetic body collapses under yearning. Yet this collapse is aestheticized; the pain becomes elegy. In Pospelov's terms, tragedy arises from the tension between emotional devotion and social mutehood.

Poem 3: "Foniylik"

Hayot bir lahza, o'tadi tezda...

(Ibid., p. 47)

The poem's brevity echoes its theme: life is momentary, memory its only residue. This temporal fragility recalls Camus's absurd — the human need for permanence met by transient existence. The speaker writes in resistance: her trace becomes testimony.

3.3 Nodira Ofoq: Identity Crisis and Ontological Abjection

Poem 1: "Soyam ham yurmaydi ortimdan endi"

Ko'zguga boqmayman – u yerda kim bor?

O'zimni tanimasman, so'roqqa to'lib...

(N. Ofoq, Ko'nglimda aylangan tun, 2021, p. 41)

Here, the self is estranged from its own reflection and shadow. Identity is fragmented, displaced. This is quintessential Kristevan abjection: the "I" becomes alien to itself. The poet's refusal to engage the mirror signals not narcissism, but ontological horror — a tragic rupture of subjectivity.

Poem 2: "To'lin tun"

Oy esa menga orqa o'giran...

(Ibid., p. 44)

Even the moon — a symbolic confidante — turns away. The cosmos denies the speaker's pain, dramatizing Camus's indifferent universe. The poem's tone is not passive, but accusatory — thereby enacting a tragic defiance of cosmic injustice.

Poem 3: "Qorong'ilik ichida"

Men o'zimga yotman endi...

(Ibid., p. 53)

Identity dissolves; even language ("so'zlarim ham tanimaydi meni") fails. This is tragedy as linguistic collapse, where the poetic subject is denied even self-

naming. Yet the very act of writing this collapse is Nietzschean affirmation — finding form in disintegration.

These analyses show that the poets construct tragedy not only as thematic grief but as structural breakdown: of language, identity, and space. Tragedy becomes epistemological — not what is lost, but how the loss is borne, named, and resisted.

4. DISCUSSION

The poetic manifestations of tragicity and feminine identity in the works of Zebo Mirzo, Halima Ahmad, and Nodira Ofoq demonstrate a sustained engagement with existential disintegration, social repression, and fragmented subjectivity. Each poet constructs a lyrical persona that is not merely a vehicle of emotional expression, but a philosophical and cultural site where tragedy is transformed into aesthetic articulation.

In Zebo Mirzo's poetry, tragedy emerges as a conflict between spiritual idealism and metaphysical silence. Her lyrical "I" inhabits a liminal space where longing becomes fatal (as in "Dor"), time ceases to provide continuity (as in "Kel..."), and the cosmos is stripped of transcendence (as in "Osmon"). These dynamics echo Pospelov's tragic conflict, where ideals are destroyed by forces beyond human control, as well as Camus's absurdism, which frames the universe as mute in the face of human suffering. Yet, by rendering this silence into poetic form, Mirzo enacts Nietzschean affirmation — an aesthetic confrontation with despair.

Halima Ahmad, by contrast, centers her tragedy in cultural enclosure and the silencing of female agency. In "Darvoza," spatial motifs such as "iron gate" and "window" signify Butlerian performative constraints, in which women are denied access to action and narrative. The speaker in "Seni sog'inaman" embodies Kristevan abjection, as her desire materializes in wounded, violated imagery — torn lips, trembling leaves — suggesting that love itself becomes a site of bodily fragmentation. Ahmad's work underscores that for Uzbek women, suffering is not incidental but structural: a consequence of being born into patriarchal speechlessness.

In Nodira Ofoq's verse, tragedy deepens into ontological breakdown. Her speakers do not simply express sorrow; they experience the loss of self, the failure of memory, and the collapse of language. In poems such as "Soyam ham yurmaydi ortimdan endi" and "Qorong'ilik ichida," the subject is unmoored even from her own reflection and voice — classic symptoms of abjection as theorized by Kristeva. Furthermore, the universe's refusal to console (as in "To'lin tun") repeats Camus's cosmic



indifference, while the refusal to yield to this silence aligns with existential revolt.

The convergence of these poets around themes of voicelessness, estrangement, and disillusionment indicates that tragedy in contemporary Uzbek women's poetry is not anecdotal but structural and epistemological. Their verse constructs new grammars of pain that challenge dominant narratives of feminine virtue, spiritual submission, and emotional repression. Instead of portraying the lyrical subject as a victim, these poets render her as an ethically attuned, aesthetically radical agent whose fractured voice becomes a site of resistance.

This study demonstrates that the tragic mode, far from being outdated, continues to provide a powerful framework for understanding contemporary female subjectivity, especially in literary traditions emerging from postcolonial and post-Soviet contexts. Through the lens of tragic poetics, Uzbek women's verse articulates a deeper truth: that suffering, when rendered into form, becomes not just bearable, but meaningful.

The tragicity portrayed in the selected poems is not a passive reflection of feminine suffering, but an active aesthetic reconfiguration of existential conflict...

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how tragicity and feminine identity are interwoven in the poetic works of three prominent Uzbek women poets — Zebo Mirzo, Halima Ahmad, and Nodira Ofoq — each of whom constructs a distinct lyrical subjectivity marked by fragmentation, existential anxiety, and ethical resistance. The poems analyzed depict suffering not as a private sentiment but as a structural and philosophical condition, shaped by cultural expectations, metaphysical silence, and the crisis of gendered being.

Through the theoretical frameworks of G.N. Pospelov's tragic conflict, Judith Butler's gender performativity, Julia Kristeva's abjection, and Albert Camus's absurdism, the study has demonstrated that the tragic in these texts is not only thematic but formal — it governs the emotional architecture, metaphoric logic, and epistemic tension of the verse. The collapse of time in Mirzo's poetry, the silencing of agency in Ahmad's work, and the dissolution of self in Ofoq's lyric voice all testify to the pervasive and multi-dimensional nature of female tragedy in contemporary Uzbek literature.

Moreover, despite the centrality of loss, disintegration, and futility, these poems are not fatalistic. Rather, they embody what Friedrich Nietzsche terms aesthetic justification — transforming personal despair into meaningful expression. The lyrical "I" in these works is

shattered but eloquent, abject but resistant, silent but still writing.

This research contributes to the field of Central Asian feminist literary criticism by asserting that contemporary Uzbek women's poetry is a space where personal and collective grief becomes poetic language, and where marginal voices articulate central truths about identity, oppression, and survival. The tragic mode, far from being obsolete, provides a vital grammar through which post-Soviet women poets explore — and challenge — the limits of subjectivity and meaning.

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