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AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-LITERARY CONFLICT IN THE SHORT STORIES OF W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND SAID AHMAD¹³

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a comparative-typological analysis of social-artistic conflict in the short prose of the English writer William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) and the Uzbek writer Said Ahmad (1920-2007). Although the two authors belong to divergent literary traditions English critical realism and Uzbek psychological prose and cons are separated by imperial contexts, language and worldview, their short stories reveal significant typological correspondences in the construction of conflict. The study examines three interrelated dimensions: autobiographism as the experiential foundation of conflict; interpersonal clash as a vehicle for exposing moral essence; and the escape phenomenon as a model of character transformation under social pressure. Drawing on the methodology of comparative literary studies and on the theories of Bakhtin, Lukács, Bourdieu and Foucault, the article demonstrates that in both writers' conflict operates not merely as a plot mechanism but as an ontological instrument that discloses the relationship between the individual and society. The findings establish that a shared human problematic is realised through distinct national-aesthetic strategies: Maugham's intellectual-ironic realism and Said Ahmad's lyrical-tragic psychologism, which illuminate the same human question in different yet mutually enriching ways.

KEYWORDS

Comparative literature, social-artistic conflict, autobiographism, interpersonal conflict, escape phenomenon, William Somerset Maugham, Said Ahmad, typological analysis, English realism, Uzbek psychological prose.

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U. SOMERSET MOEM VA SAID AHMAD HIKOYALARIDA IJTIMOIY-BADIIY KONFLIKT TAHLILI

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ANNOTATSIYA	KALIT SO'ZLAR
Ushbu maqolada ingliz yozuvchisi Uilyam Somerset Moem (1874–1965) va o'zbek yozuvchisi Said Ahmad (1920–2007) hikoyalaridagi ijtimoiy-badiiy konflikt qiyosiy-tipologik jihatdan tahlil qilinadi. Har ikki adib turli adabiy an'analarga ingliz tanqidiy realizmi va o'zbek psixologik nasriga mansub bo'lib, imperiya konteksti, til va dunyoqarash jihatidan bir-biridan farqlansa-da, ularning hikoyalarida konflikt qurilishi bo'yicha muhim tipologik mushtaraklik namoyon bo'ladi. Tadqiqotda konfliktning uch o'zaro bog'liq qirrasi o'rganiladi: konfliktning tajribaviy asosi sifatidagi avtobiografizm; insonning axloqiy mohiyatini ochuvchi shaxslararo to'qnashuv; hamda ijtimoiy bosim ostidagi xarakter transformatsiyasi modeli sifatidagi qochqinlik fenomeni. Qiyosiy adabiyotshunoslik metodologiyasi hamda Baxtin, Lukács, Bourdieu va Foucault nazariyalariga tayangan holda, maqolada har ikki yozuvchida konflikt shunchaki syujet mexanizmi emas, balki shaxs va jamiyat munosabatini ochib beruvchi ontologik vosita ekanligi asoslanadi. Xulosalar umumiy insoniy muammoning turli milliy-estetik strategiyalar Moemning intellektual–ironik realizmi va Said Ahmadning lirik-fojiaviy psixologizmi orqali ifodalanishini ko'rsatadi.	Qiyosiy adabiyotshunoslik, ijtimoiy-badiiy konflikt, avtobiografizm, shaxslararo konflikt, qochqinlik fenomeni, Uilyam Somerset Moem, Said Ahmad, tipologik tahlil, ingliz realizmi, o'zbek psixologik nasri.

АНАЛИЗ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОГО КОНФЛИКТА В РАССКАЗАХ УИЛЬЯМА СОМЕРСЕТА МОЭМА И САИДА АХМАДА

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АННОТАЦИЯ	КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА
В статье представлен сравнительно–типологический анализ социально–художественного конфликта в рассказах английского писателя Уильяма Сомерсета Моэма (1874-1965) и узбекского писателя Саида Ахмада (1920-2007). Хотя оба автора принадлежат к различным литературным традициям – английскому критическому реализму и узбекской психологической прозе – и разделены имперским контекстом, языком и мировоззрением, их рассказы обнаруживают существенные типологические сходства в построении конфликта. В исследовании рассматриваются три взаимосвязанных аспекта: автобиографизм как эмпирическая основа конфликта; межличностное столкновение как средство раскрытия нравственной сущности; феномен бегства как модель трансформации характера под воздействием социального давления. Опираясь на методологию сравнительного литературоведения и на теории М. Бахтина, Д. Лукача, П. Бурдьё и М. Фуко, автор статьи доказывает, что у обоих писателей конфликт функционирует не только как сюжетный механизм, но и как онтологический инструмент, раскрывающий отношения личности и общества. Выводы показывают, что общечеловеческая проблематика реализуется посредством различных национально–эстетических стратегий: интеллектуально-иронического реализма (У.С. Моэм) и лирико-трагического психологизма (С. Ахмад).	Сравнительное литературоведение, социально-художественный конфликт, автобиографизм, межличностный конфликт, феномен бегства, Уильям Сомерсет Моэм, Саид Ахмад, типологический анализ, английский реализм, узбекская психологическая проза.

INTRODUCTION

The comparative study of literary conflict across national traditions is one of the central problems of contemporary comparative literary scholarship. Conflict is not merely the engine that moves a plot forward; it is the structural and semiotic node through which a literary work articulates the relationship between the individual and society. When the same fundamental human problematic surfaces independently in two writers who share no direct contact, the resulting typological convergence constitutes literary evidence more compelling than any relationship of direct influence (Wellek R., Warren A., 1956, 49).

The English writer William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) and the Uzbek writer Said Ahmad (1920-2007) belong to sharply contrasting literary traditions. Maugham matured within the social-cultural milieu of the British Empire and gave voice to the hypocrisy, class stratification and moral dualism of colonial capitalism; Said Ahmad formed his artistic worldview within the Soviet order and drew the deepest conflicts of his prose from the tragedy of political repression. Notwithstanding this distance, both writers place the collision of the individual with the social environment at the centre of their short prose, and both transform personal biographical experience into the driving force of artistic conflict.

The relevance of such a comparison rests on an observation developed in the author's earlier work on recurrent motifs in world and Uzbek fabulist prose: identical artistic structures recur across culturally remote literatures and can be productively read against one another. The comparative interpretation of motif and authorial style demonstrated in studies of Ray Bradbury and Edgar Allan Poe (Yuldoshova Sh., 2025, 43; Yuldoshova Sh., 2026, 56) further supports the methodological premise that an author's biography and stylistic signature constitute a legitimate object of cross-cultural literary analysis.

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative-typological analysis of social-artistic conflict in the short prose of Maugham and Said Ahmad along three axes: first, autobiographism as the experiential foundation of conflict; second, interpersonal clash as a mechanism for exposing moral essence; and third, the escape

phenomenon as a model of character transformation under social pressure. The novelty of the article lies in bringing English critical realism and Uzbek psychological prose into a single analytical field and in showing that a shared human problematic is realised through distinct, yet mutually enriching, national–aesthetic strategies.

MAIN PART

The primary material of the study comprises six short stories. From Maugham's oeuvre these are "The Luncheon" (1924), "A Friend in Need" (1925) and "The Escape" (1925, from the collection *The Casuarina Tree*, 1926); from Said Ahmad's oeuvre they are "The Lion" (Sher), "The Stranger" (Begona) and "Mirage" (Sarob, 1999). These texts were selected because each pair foregrounds one of the three dimensions of conflict under examination and because, despite the absence of any direct contact between the authors, the pairs display a striking structural symmetry.

The methodological foundation of the analysis is the comparative–typological method, according to which works produced in different cultural contexts may be juxtaposed in order to reveal both their universal poetic regularities and their national particularity (Wellek R., Warren A., 1949, 47; Zhirmunsky V., 1979, 210). This framework is supplemented by several theoretical instruments: Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and of carnival inversion (Bakhtin M., 1981, 293; Bakhtin M., 1965); Lukács's conception of the "problematic individual" (Lukács G., 1971, 62); Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu P., 1984, 170); Foucault's theory of the panopticon (Foucault M., 1977, 201); and Frankl's account of the "last human freedom" (Frankl V., 1992, 75). For the analysis of the comic and the satiric, the study draws on Bergson (Bergson H., 1900, 29) and Frye (Frye N., 1957, 223); for narrative construction, on Booth's theory of the reliable and unreliable narrator (Booth W., 1961, 158) and Genette's theory of the paratext (Genette G., 1997). The distinction between autobiography as a genre and autobiographism as an artistic device follows Lejeune (Lejeune Ph., 1988, 52) and Boldyreva (Boldyreva E., 2017, 242).

In contemporary literary theory autobiographism is understood not as the mechanical transfer of empirical fact into the text, but as the artistic transformation of the writer's existential experience, emotional complex and mode of perceiving the world (Boldyreva E., 2017, 242). Whereas autobiography is a bounded documentary genre, autobiographism is a stylistically marked principle capable of appearing in any genre, one that endows a work's conflicts with documentary reliability without being obliged to prove their factual accuracy (Ginzburg L., 1977, 188). Lejeune's theory of the "autobiographical pact" locates the starting point of such writing in the problem of identity among author, narrator and hero (Lejeune Ph., 1988, 52), while Bakhtin shows how a writer's life-position, absorbed into the character of the hero, determines the nature of the polyphony and the conflicts of the work (Bakhtin M., 1979, 45).

For Maugham, the experiential ground of conflict is threefold: early orphanhood, the social isolation caused by his stammer, and his five years as a medical student at St Thomas's Hospital, where he observed the tragic and degraded sides of human nature in the London slums without any romantic veil (Meyers J., 2004, 78). This experience produced the cold, ironic, quasi-clinical authorial stance characteristic of his prose. The autobiographical peak of his work is the semi-autobiographical novel *Of Human Bondage* (1915), in which the physical deformity of the protagonist Philip Carey functions as a psychological metaphor for the writer's own stammer and social isolation. Crucially, Maugham embeds his experience in his characters at a distance, so that his conflicts unfold chiefly in the collapse of social and moral stereotypes.

In Said Ahmad's work autobiographism assumes an entirely different social-political scale. His imprisonment on fabricated charges in the 1950s and his years of exile in the Karlag labour camp generate the sharpest social-psychological conflict of his stories. Here the collision is not the ironic exposure of hypocrisy but a life-and-death struggle between human dignity and the merciless machinery of a totalitarian regime. Said Ahmad brings his empirical tragedy directly to the centre of the text, so that autobiographical detail generalises the tragedy of an entire people

and generation. As Uzbek criticism has emphasised, his heroes do not descend from the sky: they are ordinary people the writer has seen and lived among (Normatov U., 1971, 45; Normatov U., 2008, 21). Comparative analysis thus confirms an important typological conclusion: for both writers the pivot of social conflict is personal tragedy and lived reality, and it is precisely autobiographism that rescues that conflict from bare schematism and grants it documentary reliability and deep emotional persuasiveness (Zhirmunsky V., 1979, 210).

Interpersonal conflict the direct collision of two or more characters is the most widespread and universal form of dramatic action, and Aristotelian categories such as peripeteia and anagnorisis are frequently realised precisely through it (Aristotle, 2011). Modern conflict theory distinguishes destructive from constructive conflict (Deutsch M., 1973), and literary conflict often stands on the boundary between the two. The comparison of Maugham's "The Luncheon" with Said Ahmad's "The Lion" reveals a shared satirical structure: an asymmetric relation between an "exploiter" and a "victim" (Frye N., 1957, 223). In "The Luncheon" the guest's declaration that she "never eats anything" followed by an ever-growing order embodies Bergson's formula of the comic as a "mechanical rigidity" imposed on the living (Bergson H., 1900, 29); the character's flaw becomes the single motive force determining the outcome (Lodge D., 1992, 15). Maugham's narrator is a reliable narrator who reports events with full knowledge yet remains powerless during them (Booth W., 1961, 158), and the closing detail the guest's later corpulence realises the classic device of "deferred revenge," in which the writer lets the situation itself pass judgment rather than judging directly.

In "The Lion" the conflict becomes more symbolic: state resources intended for the animal are consumed for private benefit, an artistic reflection of systemic corruption. The final tableau the fattened Qo'zivoy outside the cage and the emaciated lion within is a precise instance of Bakhtin's carnival inversion, the temporary overturning of hierarchies in which the low becomes high and the servant becomes king (Bakhtin M., 1965). Where Maugham realises the inversion through time (twenty years), Said Ahmad realises it through space in a single instant. The

titles themselves participate in the meaning: following Genette, the title is a “threshold” that orients or misleads the reader before entry into the text. “The Luncheon” is a nominatively ironic, deceptively neutral title, whereas “The Lion” is a zoonymic nickname that compresses the whole transformation of the hero into a single word.

The comparison of “A Friend in Need” with “The Stranger” extends the analysis of interpersonal conflict into the sphere of social milieu. Since Taine, the collision of character and environment has been theorised through the triad of “race, milieu, moment” (Taine H., 1863, 11), yet both writers move beyond naturalistic determinism to depict the individual as a complex subject in constant negotiation with the environment. In “A Friend in Need” the outwardly benevolent Edward Burton sends the destitute Lenny to his death, exposing the dehumanising logic of colonial commerce that sees a person only as a “vacancy”; Lenny’s marginal status as a “remittance man” marks him as an individual whom colonial society deems useless (Boehmer E., 1995). In “The Stranger” Said Ahmad transfers the collision to the pressure of a patriarchal order upon a woman: Xayri, a scholar who has defended her dissertation and raises her son alone, refuses the returning Hasan and declares him a “stranger.” Her inner monologue that living without him “restored her selfhood” resonates with Beauvoir’s conception of woman’s socially constructed role (Beauvoir S. de, 1953), even though Said Ahmad reaches this conclusion through artistic intuition rather than theory. As Uzbek criticism observes, the writer never denounces social problems openly; he proves the wrongness of the order through the fate of his heroine, which intensifies the artistic effect (Sharafiddinov O., 2015, 15). In both stories the work does not merely reflect ideology but reworks it and exposes its fissures (Eagleton T., 1976).

The third dimension of conflict is examined through the comparison of Maugham’s “The Escape” (1925) with Said Ahmad’s “Mirage” (1999). Zola’s naturalism had treated the social environment as an almost total determinant of character but both writers exceed this determinism: their heroes are not wholly the product of the milieu but subjects who negotiate with it. Bourdieu’s concept of

habitus the durable, structuring dispositions through which the environment enters the very actions of the individual illuminates why such negotiation often appears “natural” to the character (Bourdieu P., 1984, 170), while Foucault’s panopticon discloses the paradoxical nature of escape: to be visible and identifiable binds the individual to the structure of control.

In “The Escape” the escape is external and successful. Roger Charing frees himself from the institution of marriage not by leaving the social field but by exploiting its own rules: he promises Ruth Barlow a house and then finds a fault with every house they view, so that over two years hundreds of houses are inspected and none is found. He breaks no formal obligation and tells no lie he simply declares that “no suitable house can be found.” This is the intellectualisation of an emotional problem, its recoding as a practical one, and it exemplifies the Western liberal individual who locates and passes through the system’s own loopholes.

In “Mirage” every external route of escape is closed. Olimjon domla, a silent intellectual and collector of rare manuscripts, is physically confined to the camp; his son Kimsanboy, recruited at the age of twelve into the machinery of the secret police, has already fled spiritually from his own identity and family. The only escape that remains is inward. Olimjon domla preserves his selfhood in the space of memory, knowledge and moral life the one region the camp cannot reach which corresponds to Frankl’s account of the last human freedom, the freedom to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstance (Frankl V., 1992, 75). This inner endurance is close to Camus’s absurd hero, who continues to act although he knows the vanity of his condition. Kimsanboy achieves his single genuine escape from Soviet ideology only at the threshold of death, when he begs to have the portrait of Stalin flayed from his chest; yet even this comes too late, and his father denies him a funeral. The following table summarises the comparative analysis of the two stories.

Table 1.

Comparative analysis of “The Escape” and “Mirage”

Criterion	“The Escape” (Maugham, 1925)	“Mirage” / “Sarob” (Said Ahmad, 1999)
Social environment	British aristocratic society (early 20th c.)	Soviet totalitarian order; the Gulag camp system (Stalin era)
Type of escape	External and successful: flight from the institution of marriage	Internal and spiritual: survival through memory, knowledge, moral integrity
Form of control	Social reputation, gender roles, tacit rules of propriety	Total state surveillance, ideological governance, the camp
Individual will	Strong: finds a “loophole” within the system and prevails	Physically constrained, yet morally preserved
Register of irony	Cold, intellectual, distanced authorial observation	Painful, tragic, an expression of national suffering
Role of language	A social mask: truthful word, concealed intention	A weapon of power: ideological language that distorts truth
National-philosophical frame	Western liberalism: the individual analyses and exploits the system	Eastern endurance: resistance preserved in the depths of the soul
Resolution	Victory: Roger is free; Ruth marries a wealthy man	Tragedy: Kimsanboy dies; Olimjon domla renounces his son

The results reveal a set of typological convergences alongside profound national-aesthetic divergences. Four convergences may be identified. First, in both writers personal lived experience serves as the load-bearing point of artistic conflict. Second, the nucleus of substantial conflict in both is the paradox of mask and truth the discrepancy between outward pleasantness and inner inhumanity, embodied in Maugham through character (Burton) and in Said Ahmad through situation (Hasan’s return). Third, in both the social environment is not a passive backdrop but an active

dramatic force that shapes the habitus of the characters from within, even as the strongest of them resist this determinism through personal will. Fourth, irony occupies a central place in both writers' strategies.

The divergences, however, are decisive. Maugham's irony is cold, distanced and intellectual: it lets the situation speak in place of moral judgment, and his conflicts resolve through deferred revenge or the exploitation of a loophole, in the manner of Western liberal individualism. Said Ahmad's irony is inward, painful and tragic laughter "through tears" in which Uzbek humour coexists with the terror of the Soviet order, and conflict resolves through visual inversion and the hero's own voice, with the authority of judgment left to the reader. The comparison of escape is especially instructive: for Maugham escape is possible and successful, an act of Western individual reason; for Said Ahmad every physical route is closed and only the inner, spiritual escape of Eastern endurance remains. These findings extend the comparative premise of the author's earlier work: the same recurrent structures of conflict and motif are realised across remote literatures in culturally specific but mutually illuminating forms.

CONCLUSION

The comparative-typological analysis of the short prose of W. Somerset Maugham and Said Ahmad demonstrates that, despite their divergent cultural, historical and social contexts, the two writers share significant typological affinities in the construction and expression of social-artistic conflict. In both, conflict is a substantial, multi-layered phenomenon that articulates the individual's relationship with society, the dramatic struggle within the space of moral choice, and the effort to preserve one's identity. Autobiographism rescues this conflict from artificial schematism and grants it documentary reliability; interpersonal clash exposes the moral essence of the person; and the escape phenomenon models the transformation of character under social pressure.

At the same time, the artistic resolution of this common problematic reveals clear national-aesthetic differences: Maugham's intellectual-ironic realism and Said Ahmad's lyrical-tragic psychologism discloses the same human question through

different, yet mutually enriching, aesthetic means. The collision of character and social environment thus emerges as a universal literary problem that crosses national and cultural boundaries, and the universal-local dialectic it produces constitutes the principal value of comparative literary study. Further research might extend this typological framework to the novelistic prose of both writers and to a wider corpus of English and Uzbek short fiction.

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