ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

ARTISTIC THINKING AND STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE SHORT STORIES OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND NAZAR ESHONQUL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

JDPU Filologiya fakulteti
Fakultetlararo xorijiy tillar kafedrasi o‘qituvchisi
Safarova Fotima Ne’matulla qizi
Tel: +99897-793-19-94
E-mail: fotimanematullaevna@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-2462-1720

Annotation. This article investigates the convergence of artistic thinking and stream-of-consciousness technique in the short fiction of William Faulkner, one of the foremost American modernists, and Nazar Eshonqul, a prominent contemporary Uzbek prose writer. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of modernist poetics and cognitive narratology, the study conducts a close comparative analysis of selected short stories to examine how both authors deploy interior monologue, temporal fragmentation, non-linear narrative, sensory layering, and psychological depth to construct subjective realities. While Faulkner channels the traumatic memory of the American South through Freudian-inflected consciousness, Eshonqul employs philosophical introspection rooted in Eastern thought, mysticism, and the existential tensions of post-Soviet Uzbek identity. Despite the geographical and cultural distance between these two literary traditions, the article identifies remarkable structural and aesthetic parallels in their treatment of consciousness as a narrative medium. The findings contribute to ongoing cross-cultural dialogue between Western modernism and contemporary Uzbek literature, demonstrating that the stream-of-consciousness technique transcends its Euro-American origins to function as a universal vehicle for artistic thinking.

Keywords: stream of consciousness, artistic thinking, William Faulkner, Nazar Eshonqul, comparative literature, modernist fiction, interior monologue, Uzbek literature, narrative technique, temporal fragmentation

INTRODUCTION. The relationship between literary form and the representation of human consciousness has been central to modernist aesthetics since the early twentieth century. William Faulkner (1897–1962), awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949, elevated the stream-of-consciousness technique to new levels of formal complexity in his treatment of the American Southern experience. Across the Atlantic and decades later, Nazar Eshonqul (born 1962), one of Uzbekistan's most philosophically engaged contemporary prose writers, developed an aesthetics of interiority that draws on Eastern philosophical traditions while engaging with the legacy of Russian literary modernism absorbed during the Soviet era.

Although these two writers inhabit vastly different cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts, their short stories share a striking preoccupation with the architecture of the human mind: its non-linear temporality, its capacity for layered simultaneous perception, and its resistance to the logic of conventional realist narrative. This article proposes that a comparative examination of their narrative strategies not only illuminates the specific aesthetic choices of each author but also reveals stream of consciousness as a genuinely transnational aesthetic phenomenon rooted in the universal structures of artistic thinking.

The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do Faulkner and Eshonqul deploy stream-of-consciousness technique in their respective short fiction? (2) What role does artistic thinking play in shaping the narrative logic and stylistic texture of their prose? (3) What cross-cultural parallels and divergences emerge from a comparative reading of their works? These questions are addressed through close textual analysis grounded in modernist narratology and comparative poetics.

LITERATURE REVIEW. The term "stream of consciousness" was first used in psychology by William James (1890) to describe the continuous, flowing nature of mental experience. Its adoption in literary criticism - most prominently by scholars such as Robert Humphrey (1954) and Dorrit Cohn (1978) - designated a cluster of narrative techniques aimed at reproducing the inner life of characters with immediacy and psychological authenticity. Key devices include free indirect discourse, interior monologue, temporal dislocation, and the subordination of external event to subjective perception.

Recent scholarship has expanded the theoretical frameworks for understanding consciousness in fiction. Caracciolo (2021) foregrounds the role of embodied experience in narrative minds, arguing that literary representations of consciousness are inseparable from sensory and affective dimensions. Similarly, Zunshine (2022) approaches narrative consciousness through the lens of Theory of Mind, examining how fiction trains readers in cognitive empathy. These cognitive-narratological perspectives offer productive tools for analyzing both Faulkner's and Eshonqul's fiction.

Faulkner scholarship has long foregrounded the relationship between his formal innovations and the thematic concerns of memory, guilt, and regional identity. Polk and Watson (2020) provide an exhaustive account of Faulkner's compositional strategies, emphasizing the role of trauma in structuring his fragmented narratives. More recently, Gorra (2020) situates Faulkner's consciousness-centered prose within the broader history of racial violence in the American South, arguing that the stream of consciousness in his work is not merely a formal device but a moral epistemology - a means of implicating the reader in the psychic costs of historical injustice.

Atkinson (2021) examines Faulkner's short fiction as a laboratory for the techniques later expanded in his novels, noting that the compressed form of the story intensifies the disorienting effects of non-linear time and multiperspectival narration. These analyses inform the present study's approach to Faulkner's shorter prose.

Eshonqul's place within Uzbek literary history has received growing critical attention in the post-independence period. Yusupova (2021) identifies Eshonqul as a pivotal figure in the emergence of a distinctly Uzbek literary modernism, one that synthesizes the influence of Russian and Western literary models with indigenous philosophical and mystical traditions, particularly Sufism and classical Eastern thought.

Nazarov (2022) analyzes Eshonqul's narrative prose in terms of its engagement with existential and ontological questions, tracing the influence of thinkers such as Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and Camus alongside echoes of the ghazal tradition and Sufi poetry. Toshmatov (2023) examines the representation of psychological states in Eshonqul's fiction, arguing that his use of interior monologue constitutes an Uzbek adaptation of the stream-of-consciousness tradition, reconfigured through the lens of Eastern philosophical introspection. These studies collectively establish the theoretical and literary-historical context for the comparative analysis pursued in this article.

Comparative studies of modernism across cultural boundaries have gained renewed momentum in recent scholarship. Walkowitz (2022) proposes the concept of "born-translated" literature to account for works that circulate across linguistic and cultural contexts without losing their formal integrity. Casanova's (2021) world-literature paradigm, as developed by subsequent scholars, posits that literary forms achieve global circulation precisely because they are capable of articulating local experience in universally resonant aesthetic terms. These frameworks underpin the present article's assumption that comparing Faulkner and Eshonqul is not merely an exercise in literary tourism but a contribution to the ongoing theoretical project of understanding modernist aesthetics as a global phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY. This study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis informed by modernist narratology and comparative poetics. The primary texts selected for analysis are Faulkner's short stories "That Evening Sun" (1931), "A Rose for Emily" (1930), and "Barn Burning" (1939), chosen for their sustained deployment of stream-of-consciousness and interior focalization. From Eshonqul's oeuvre, the stories "Laylak" ("The Stork"), "Bir bema'ni kechaning hikoyasi" ("The Story of a Meaningless Night"), and "Qorong'i xonalar" ("Dark Rooms") have been selected on the basis of their comparable formal features and their critical reception as exemplary instances of his interior prose.

The analytical framework draws on Dorrit Cohn's (1978) typology of consciousness representation - psycho-narration, quoted monologue, and narrated monologue - as well as Genette's (1980) concepts of narrative time (order, duration, frequency). These classical tools are supplemented by the more recent cognitive-narratological approaches of Caracciolo (2021) and Fludernik (2020), which attend to the experiential and embodied dimensions of narrative consciousness.

Textual analysis proceeds at three levels: (1) narrative structure and temporal organization; (2) the representation of interiority through linguistic and stylistic choices; and (3) the relationship between subjective consciousness and the socio-cultural context foregrounded in each text. Comparisons between Faulkner and Eshonqul are conducted with attention to both convergences and divergences, resisting the reductive assimilation of the Uzbek author's practice to a derivative version of the Western modernist model.

RESULTS. Both Faulkner and Eshonqul systematically disrupt chronological sequence in their short fiction, using temporal fragmentation as a formal correlate of the mind's non-linear experience of time. In "That Evening Sun," the adult narrator Quentin Compson recalls events from childhood through a series of consciousness-inflected analepses that collapse the distance between past and present, making the remembered moment vivid and psychologically immediate even as its meaning remains elusive. The oscillation between narrative frames enacts the very process of traumatic recollection, in which the past is not merely remembered but re-experienced.

Eshonqul achieves comparable effects in "Bir bema'ni kechaning hikoyasi," where the narrator's consciousness moves fluidly between immediate sensory experience and layers of memory, philosophical reflection, and anticipatory imagination. Unlike the trauma-driven anachronies of Faulkner, Eshonqul's temporal disruptions often carry a meditative, almost lyrical quality, closer in spirit to the Sufi concept of hal - the spontaneous, time-dissolving spiritual state - than to the Freudian mechanisms that scholars have identified in Faulkner's fiction.

What unites both authors is the structural principle that external time is subordinated to psychological time: the duration of consciousness, not the clock, governs narrative movement. This finding aligns with Fludernik's (2020) observation that experiential narratives privilege what she terms "the now of consciousness" over the chronological sequence of events.

The use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse constitutes perhaps the most direct point of formal convergence between Faulkner and Eshonqul. In Faulkner's "Barn Burning," the restricted third-person narration of the child Sarty Snopes slides repeatedly into free indirect discourse, creating a narrative voice that hovers between the boy's limited but intense perception and the narrator's retrospective irony. This technique produces what Cohn (1978) calls "consonant psycho-narration" - a mode in which narrator and character consciousness temporarily merge, generating both intimacy and ambiguity.

Eshonqul employs a structurally analogous technique in "Laylak," where the narrator's voice and the protagonist's inner speech become difficult to disentangle. Sentences that begin as third-person description modulate imperceptibly into the character's interior discourse, a technique that Nazarov (2022) has described as "transparent narration" (shaffof hikoya). The philosophical register of Eshonqul's interior monologue - marked by references to silence, impermanence, and

the ineffability of inner states - reflects the influence of classical Uzbek-Persian literary aesthetics, particularly the poetic tradition of Navoi and Bedil, in which interiority is consistently figured through images of water, light, and shadow.

The comparative analysis thus reveals that while both authors employ formally similar techniques, the semantic and cultural content of their interior monologues diverges significantly: Faulkner's consciousness is constitutively historical, shaped by the weight of collective Southern memory, while Eshonqul's is constitutively philosophical, oriented toward universal questions of being and nothingness.

Both writers demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of the role of sensory experience in structuring conscious life. In Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the narration moves through registers of smell, touch, and sound in ways that ground the abstract horror of Emily's story in immediate physical experience. The recurring imagery of dust, decay, and silence functions not merely as Gothic atmosphere but as a precise phenomenological notation of consciousness in the grip of time-denial.

Eshonqul's "Qorong'i xonalar" similarly deploys sensory layering - particularly tactile and auditory imagery - to render the texture of his protagonist's inner states. The darkness that gives the story its title is figured not only visually but as a tactile pressure, a weight on the skin of consciousness. Caracciolo (2021) argues that literary consciousness is always embodied consciousness, and both Faulkner and Eshonqul exemplify this principle: their characters think not only with their minds but with their entire perceptual apparatus.

This convergence is particularly significant given the different cultural scripts through which bodily experience is understood in American Southern Gothic fiction and in contemporary Uzbek prose. That both writers arrive at comparable formal solutions - the grounding of interiority in sensory concreteness - from such different cultural starting points strengthens the case for stream of consciousness as a technique with genuinely transnational aesthetic validity.

Beyond the specific formal devices examined above, both Faulkner and Eshonqul exhibit what may be termed an aesthetic of "artistic thinking" - a mode of composition in which the work's formal organization enacts the processes of the mind it describes. In Faulkner, this is most evident in the recursive, self-referential quality of his sentences, which seem to perform the very act of cognition - circling, qualifying, revising - that they narrate. The famous Faulknerian sentence, with its nested subordinate clauses and suspended syntactic resolutions, is not merely a stylistic signature but a cognitive model.

Eshonqul's artistic thinking manifests differently but with analogous structural logic. His sentences tend toward a poetic compression and elliptical suggestiveness that enact the Eastern philosophical principle that truth cannot be fully articulated but only approximated through image and allusion. Where Faulkner prolongs, Eshonqul condenses; where Faulkner accumulates, Eshonqul distills. Yet both strategies produce narrative texts in which form and content are inseparable - in which the how of the telling is itself a meditation on the what of consciousness.

Toshmatov (2023) has noted that Eshonqul's prose achieves its effects through a kind of aesthetic restraint that paradoxically intensifies rather than diminishes psychological depth. This observation finds a counterpart in Atkinson's (2021) analysis of Faulkner's shorter fiction, where compression produces a heightened density of meaning. In both cases, artistic thinking functions as a meta-aesthetic strategy: the author's consciousness shapes the text in ways that mirror the structures of the characters' consciousness within it.

DISCUSSION. The comparative analysis conducted in this study reveals both the breadth and the limits of the formal parallels between Faulkner and Eshonqul. At the level of technique - temporal fragmentation, interior monologue, sensory layering - the convergences are striking enough to support the claim that both authors are engaged in a common aesthetic project: the literary representation of consciousness as the primary site of human meaning-making.

At the same time, the divergences are equally instructive. Faulkner's stream of consciousness is embedded in a specific historical trauma - the legacies of slavery, defeat, and social stratification in the American South - and his formal choices are inseparable from this thematic engagement. The fragmentation of his narratives mirrors the fragmentation of the social world his characters inhabit. Eshonqul's interiority, by contrast, is more philosophical and less historically specific, concerned with universal questions of existence, the nature of knowledge, and the limits of language that reflect both the Eastern intellectual tradition and the post-Soviet condition of Uzbek culture.

These differences do not undermine the comparative project but enrich it. As Walkowitz (2022) argues, cross-cultural literary comparison is most productive when it attends to the specific cultural work that formally similar texts perform in their respective contexts. The stream-of-consciousness technique, this analysis suggests, is sufficiently flexible as a formal system to accommodate radically different cultural contents while maintaining its core function: the immersive representation of subjective experience.

The findings also have implications for the positioning of Uzbek literature within global literary studies. The conventional narrative of modernism as a primarily Euro-American phenomenon, whose techniques were subsequently adopted and adapted by non-Western writers, is challenged by the recognition that Eshonqul's interior prose draws on indigenous aesthetic traditions - Sufi poetry, classical ghazal, and the philosophical essays of the Eastern Renaissance - that have their own long history of attending to the life of the mind. Eshonqul's stream of consciousness is not simply a derivative of Faulkner's but an independent formal solution to a shared aesthetic problem: how to render the fullness of inner life in literary language.

CONCLUSION. This study has demonstrated that the short fiction of William Faulkner and Nazar Eshonqul exhibits significant formal convergences in the representation of consciousness, despite the profound cultural, historical, and linguistic differences that separate them. Both authors deploy temporal fragmentation, interior monologue, free indirect discourse, and sensory layering as coordinated elements of a broader aesthetic strategy in which artistic thinking - the formal enactment of cognitive process - constitutes the organizing principle of their narrative art.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that these formal convergences are embedded in divergent cultural logics: Faulkner's fragmented consciousness bears the weight of Southern historical trauma, while Eshonqul's meditative interiority is shaped by Eastern philosophical and mystical traditions. This interplay of formal similarity and thematic difference constitutes the most productive dimension of the comparison, revealing that stream of consciousness is not a fixed technique with a single cultural meaning but a flexible aesthetic resource capable of serving widely different literary purposes.

These findings carry implications for the study of world literature and for the critical reassessment of Uzbek literary modernism. Future research might extend this comparison to other Uzbek writers engaged with interiority - such as Xurshid Davron or Ulmas Umarbekov - or examine the specific mediation of Russian literary modernism, particularly Andrey Bely and Mikhail Bulgakov, in the formation of Eshonqul's narrative technique. The present study offers a methodological foundation for such investigations by demonstrating that close comparative textual analysis, grounded in narratological theory and attentive to cultural context, can yield productive insights into the global dimensions of literary modernism.

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