WOMAN AND SUN: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF ZULFIYA QUROLBOY QIZI'S STORY "AYOL"



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Abstract

This paper offers an ecofeminist reading of "Ayol" ("Woman"), a short story by the contemporary Uzbek writer Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi, centered on a woman's final days as she faces a terminal illness. Drawing on the theoretical framework developed by Warren, Plumwood, Merchant, and Shiva, the paper argues that the story builds its meaning through a sustained parallel between the female protagonist and the natural world, most visibly through the recurring image of sunlight. The narrative opens with the protagonist greeting the sun as an intimate companion and closes with a reversed version of the same image: after her death, the light can no longer be reflected in her eyes, only in the facets of her ring, while the sun itself lingers in the room, indifferent to human mortality yet strangely tender toward it. The analysis further identifies a contrast between the clinical vocabulary used to describe the woman's declining body and the lyrical register reserved for nature, a contrast that mirrors the "logic of domination" identified in ecofeminist theory as structuring both the subordination of women and the instrumentalization of nature. At the same time, the paper shows that the protagonist retains a degree of agency over her own body and image until the end, through small but deliberate acts – asking that her husband be kept out of the room, bargaining with the doctor over her treatment, and applying make-up moments before her death. These acts are read as quiet forms of resistance to the medical-institutional gaze. The paper concludes that "Ayol" offers a rich, previously unexamined case for ecofeminist literary analysis within contemporary Uzbek prose, and proposes directions for extending this approach to the writer's other stories.

Keywords: ecofeminism; sun symbolism; female body and control; nature motifs; Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi.

Introduction

Ecofeminist theory, which took shape in literary scholarship over the final decades of the twentieth century, reads the historical association between women and nature as more than a poetic convention: it treats this association as evidence of a shared structure of subordination, in which both woman and nature are cast as objects to be controlled by patriarchal and institutional power [7].

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Contemporary Uzbek prose, with its sustained attention to women's inner lives and to the rhythms of the natural world, offers fertile ground for this kind of reading, yet it remains largely untapped in local literary criticism. The stories of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi, in particular, are notable for the psychological depth of their female protagonists and for the symbolic weight their narratives place on nature imagery [1].

This paper focuses on one story in particular, "Ayol" ("Woman"), which follows a woman's final days in a hospital as she confronts a terminal illness. The story has not previously been examined through an ecofeminist lens, despite offering unusually rich material for such a reading: its composition is built around the image of the sun, and its central tension turns on the question of who controls the protagonist's body and the account of her own decline. The aim of this paper is to show how these two elements – the sun-woman parallel and the contest over bodily control – structure the story's meaning, and to situate this reading within the broader framework of ecofeminist theory.

Theoretical framework

The central concept guiding this analysis is what Plumwood calls the "logic of domination": a structure of thought in which paired oppositions – culture and nature, mind and body, man and woman – are organized so that the first term is treated as superior and entitled to govern the second [5]. Merchant traces one historical source of this structure to the scientific revolution, which reimagined nature as a mechanism to be controlled rather than a living entity to be respected, a shift that carried direct consequences for how women's bodies were understood and governed [4]. Shiva's work complicates this picture by showing that women's close, embodied relationship with the natural world can also function as a form of knowledge, one that resists the authority of purely institutional or technical expertise [6]. Warren brings these strands together, arguing that ecofeminist criticism has two tasks: to expose the mechanisms of subordination, and to recognize the often understated forms of resistance that women mount against them [7].

Sun imagery and the circular composition of the story

"Ayol" opens with its protagonist greeting the morning sunlight with evident joy: "Another dawn of life has broken" [9], and addressing it directly, "How much I love you, sun!.." [9]. This direct address sets the sun apart from every other relationship in the story: unlike her exchanges with doctors, nurses, and even her husband, her relationship with the sun is unmediated and entirely her own. As the narrative moves toward its close, this relationship is inverted rather than simply repeated. Sunlight again fills the room, but it can no longer animate her – it "could only be reflected in the diamond facets of the ring that had appeared on the woman's fingers" [9], and even after her death the sun lingers, "unwilling to leave this place" [9]. Read ecofeminist-ly, this reversal does not suggest that nature is indifferent to the protagonist's death; rather, it positions nature as a form of continuity that outlasts and exceeds any single human life – an echo of the regenerative, cyclical quality that Shiva associates with the woman-nature bond, here rendered in a minor key [6].

The body under control: clinical language and quiet resistance

A second pattern emerges in how the story's language shifts depending on what it describes. When the narrative turns to the protagonist's body, its vocabulary becomes clinical and detached – "swelling," "fluid," "abdominal cavity" – in contrast to the tender, lyrical register reserved for the sun and sky. This split in language enacts, at the level of style, the very opposition Merchant identifies between a mechanized body and an animated nature [4].

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Yet the protagonist is not simply a passive object of this clinical gaze. She negotiates small but consequential acts of control over her own body and image: she pays the nurse to keep her husband out of the room for a time [9]; she persuades the doctor to drain the fluid from her abdomen entirely, against his medical caution, offering her gold ring in exchange [9]; and in her last moments she reaches for powder and lipstick kept under her pillow [9]. Each of these acts asserts a kind of authorship over her own condition and appearance that the institutional language surrounding her denies. Her insistence – "Look closely – do I look like someone who is going to die soon?" [9] – appeals not to medical judgment but to her visible connection with the outside world and the sun, treating that connection as a more trustworthy measure of her state than any clinical diagnosis. These moments correspond closely to what Warren identifies as the second task of ecofeminist criticism: recognizing resistance where it is easy to see only subordination [7].

Conclusion

Read through an ecofeminist lens, "Ayol" turns out to be organized around exactly the tension that theorists such as Plumwood, Merchant, and Warren describe: a body treated as an object of clinical management, set against a nature that remains animate, tender, and continuous. The story's circular structure, beginning and ending with sunlight, gives this tension its clearest shape, while the protagonist's small acts of control over her body and image supply its quiet counter-movement. This reading suggests that Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's prose offers substantial, largely unexamined material for ecofeminist criticism, and that a similar approach could usefully be extended to her other stories.

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