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**THANATOGRAPHY OF “EASTERN ROMANTICISM”  
(BASED ON THE WORKS OF B. MASHRAB)**

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**Abstract**

This article justifies the use of romanticist concepts in the artistic thinking of Boborakhim Mashrab, a medieval Uzbek poet. We attempt to reconstruct specific aspects of the author's worldview through the analysis of his imagery. Names of romantic concepts play a special role in the artistic thinking of the author. They become the means the poet used to transmit his world-view constants. The research shows that among the stylistic devices used by B. Mashrab to express his thanatographic introspection there are many figures and devices related to the romanticist models of structuring poetic speech typical of the Middle Ages. The names of romantic concepts in the author's world view play a special role. They help him transmit his world-view constants and perform different functions at different stages of his creative life. The foregrounding of natural elements within the thanatography of “Eastern Romanticism” and the formation of an axiological world-view based on them become a way of communication between the persona and the world. The poet achieves the heavenly, the divine through aestheticizing suffering and torments of love, as well as sacralizing thanatographic themes. The individual style of Mashrab features a synthesis of philosophy and lyrics, the emotional and the intellectual.

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*Keywords:* Ghazal, author's image, persona, thanatography, polyphony



## **1. Introduction**

Literary works in Turkic languages feature numerous texts of varying sizes and genres that were written during different periods of its development. The poetry of Boborakhim Mashrab features unique imagery and a system of semantic oppositions. Mashrab (1990) uses the universal semantic oppositions to express his interest in a wide range of phenomena related to the meaning and essence of human life. This signifies a stable mythological structure that captured radical contrasts between various concepts that are traditionally kept in a poetic mind.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The medieval Turkic literature of all genres attracts scholars from different countries. However, there are no works dealing with the diversity of the imagery.

## **3. Research Questions**

- Studying and identifying the romanticist dominant in the artistic thinking of the Turkic-speaking poets in the Middle Ages;
- Demonstrating the two-plane principle of the poetic image (typical of romanticism) in the heritage of B. Mashrab;
- Establishing the motivation behind the poet's emotional thanatologism.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Analyzing the specific features of B. Mashrab's thanatological introspections based on his poetry works.

## **5. Research Methods**

This research employs the methods of description and hermeneutics.

## **6. Findings**

The interest in the phenomena associated with the mutual influence and interrelatedness of national cultures has a long history. Only nowadays it has become something deep and typical because the importance of the relationship between literature and the future person has increased dramatically. As a result, the importance of the studies that cover this problem and rely on the understanding of the overall spiritual history of the nation represented by its brightest artists has grown as well. Among these rare artists is an Uzbek poet of XVII –XVIII centuries, Boborakhim Mashrab (1657 (1640?) – 1711). He wrote lyrical poems and moral tales and is distinguished by his hyper-sensitive inner world. By destiny, the poet lived at a crossroads of many cultures. We must note that the cultures that had the greatest influence on the rebellious poet are subject to certain argumentation. His works can be reviewed in the

context of Eastern Romanticism thanatography. From the point of view of psychological analysis, thanatos stands for the destructive force that is based on the affinity for death (Freud, 2005).

The various interpretations of thanatological introspections are made possible with a special poetic logic, which does not see the monistic interval or truth as a limit. According to Kristeva (1995), “the only type of linguistic practices that can pull back from this dogma is the poetic discourse” (p. 118). The degree of its polyphony, however, may vary. True polyphony is necessarily associated with “the pluralism principle, which stipulates anti-dogmatism and indeterminisms and its key parameters” (Bovsunivska, 2004, p. 52). The polyphony in B. Mashrab’s lyrics is a valuable source for studying the history of the establishment and development of medieval Turkic literature. The heterogeneity of the emotional sphere of thanatological introspections in Mashrab's poetic discourse stipulates the pluralist approach to the polyphonic organization of the poetic discourse. Thanatos is present in the grotesque images of the spiritual passivity of laymen. It exposes their hypocrisy, deceitfulness, and critical attitude to some of the religious dogmas. Sometimes his criticism turns into the direct sarcastic mocking: “*Prudes and devotees have prayed since long ago. They meetly thread their beads. Yet what they do is shameful, deception is their right and joy*” (Mashrab, 1990, p. 28).

Mashrab puts the human, their fate and feelings in the center of his ethical and philosophical framework. The acute feeling of extreme pain leads to the search for poetic devices that would provoke understanding rather than visual perceptions. In his ghazal, the poet creates an image of a suffering wanderer. All of its style, intonations, and rhythms are employed to recreate the profoundly sad world of an eastern singer: “*Among the foliage, I'm like a nightingale, deprived of his own nest. I'm sad and homeless, like an owl, I have no shelter*”... (Mashrab, 1990, p. 34). In this excerpt, we can see that the repetition brings forth the vocalic features of the language, as well as its phonetic opulence. Together with the harmonious melodics, it turns the object described into something poetic. “The main reason for using poetic repetitions in wordsmiths’ works that brought the clarity and naturality of the folk speech into poetry, is the artful transformation of poetic images”, as noted by Guseynov (2010). “When the same word or a related word repeat over and over again, it creates a clear esthetic expression for life factors and statement models due to the sensual character of the content and the monumentality of the ideas” (Guseynov, 2010, p. 256). The poet’s works in various lyrical genres feature unique artistic devices. These features of poetic style imply both the deep social and philosophical themes and the increased importance of authors’ biographies in lyrics. The individual style of Mashrab features a synthesis of philosophy and lyrics, the emotional and the intellectual. He stresses the beauty and authenticity of his ideas: “*I am a drop swallowed by the ocean, I have become a pearl in his depths...*” (Mashrab, 1990, p. 43).

The analysis of the principles of Mashrab's imagery shows that the images in his ghazals were based on objects, phenomena, and nature concepts that he compared to the personal traits of his characters. Fire is the natural element that symbolizes the romantic Eros. The poet's love drama is pictured via fire and sky. The author's persona is exposed clearly in his works: “*My lightsome spirit is the pre-existent throne, and I myself – the sky. The world is scorched with my flame, and I'm the heat of the flame...*” writes the poet. The artistic world of Mashrab is the entire planet Earth: from Chin to India, from Namangan to Afghanistan.

B. Mashrab's works, like those of other romantic poets, feature the emotional tension of creative thinking leading to a dynamic poetic style, hyperbolized images, an inclination for artistic contrasts, various repetitions, etc. A similar thing was noticed by Gafurov (1988) who underlined the romantic character of Mashrab's thinking that determined the specific attitude of the poet to the words. The researcher concludes that "all of his ghazals shrouded in the mist of romantic passion for elements seem to speak of harmony and the unity of opposites" (Gafurov, 1988, p. 153). Kaganovich (1984) analyzed the features of romanticism in the artistic thinking of medieval poets and noted that "It is believed that romanticists were the first to realize the multiple functions of the poetic word. The Orientalists, however, speak of the special role of words in the poetic style of Eastern Middle Ages and of the urge to "use all of the opportunities provided by the word to identify its concealed hues that rarely manifest themselves in everyday life" (Kaganovich, 1984, p. 225). This feature of Romantic vocabulary – its polysemy – conditions the key property of the style, i.e. the assignment of specific metaphors to the word. Rhetorical repetitions in the lyrical structure of poems and the assignment of specific metaphors to the words (so-called hint-words or signal-words) are among the important features of Mashrab's style:

A rose without thorns, you wouldn't walk through fields,  
For everyone is trapped by your sanguine face and boxwood stature,  
Your braids are hyacinths, your wreath is red,  
Two roses grow on your chest, their petals scarlet, –  
Now are you not a branch, so trembling and thin?

The medieval Sufi poetry often compared people with the decorative properties of plants. These lyrical works refer to homes of the beloved as "gulistan", which means "flower bed" or "rosary", a woman and her face are often compared to the soft divine flower, a man's face with a lily, eyes with springs, a lock of hair with basil, a curly lock with a hyacinth, cheeks with roses, the stature with a cypress (Druzhinin & Abrulvapov, 2009).

Mashrab's lyrics obviously feature typical Sufi poetry plots about the flame and the moth or the nightingale and the rose. In one of the poems, he writes: "*A hermit, don't put me to shame for my face is burning like a scald. – That's how a hapless moth burns in the flames at night...*" (Mashrab, 1990, p. 55). We must quote Kaganovich's (1984) work that exposes a number of well-known elements often employed in the Sufi poetry: «...A moth that burns in the flame of a candle – this is both a lover dying in the fire of love and – in the Sufi poetry – a person looking for the truth and burning in the unity with god... ». In Mashrab's poetry, the love of the Almighty and the love of the human do not deny each other, yet they are kept separate. The love of God is understood as worshipping him as the creator, and the love of humans is a personal feeling which one can dispose of as they will. "Love was proclaimed a theological principle of god's creation and it was the cause of the cosmic materialization. It began and it ended the ascension and descent of the spirit", notes Dzhavelidze (1985). "Love serves as the basis of the birth of the human, his moral improvement, esthetic experiences, and ecstatic visions" (Dzhavelidze, 1985, p. 208). According to the poet, love is intrinsically linked to suffering, love is a misfortune that toys with the human. The deadly weight of non-reciprocal love (which was grounded in the poet's biography) threads through Mashrab's intimate lyrics: "*Tell your true friend what tortures your heart, – Tell it all and don't lie: bitter tears can*

heal...” (Mashrab, 1990, p. 68). The parallels between love, passion, and fate with a stress on the latter are typical for the poet’s lyrics:

“I came from the one that I treasure,  
– I’m deprived of my loved one  
From my support by evil fate  
I am deprived  
From my desire I was,  
like the soul of the kept one, deprived (Mashrab, 1990).

The poet sees his love for a woman as a feeling that depends on the Creator's will. The lyrical persona is helpless in front of this feeling: *“May you not, god, bring me to my sun Teach me, Lord, and teach me well to make Mashrab's way proper”* (Mashrab, 1990, p. 70). Love is ambiguous in his works: it can be the heavenly love to the Creator, and the earthly love to a beautiful girl. The acute feeling of extreme pain leads to the search for poetic devices that would provoke understanding rather than visual perceptions. In one of the poems, he writes: *“A float of bloody-bitter tears engulfs my head, A peak in Yemen's ridges washed away by ruby rain”*. Through estheticizing suffering and love torments and sacralizing the thanatographic themes, the poet reached the divine. Mashrab (1990) either pictures his own experience of sacred heavenly love or pours on dark colors to describe the drama of earthly life through suicidal motifs: *“With a loud and screaming row, calamity arrives, Sheep meet their striking dagger, so shall I”* (p. 72). The image of death rendered from different viewpoints in Mashrab’s poetry receives a special polyphonic interpretation. Death is accepted as inevitable, the ghazals are dominated by the introspections of metaphysical rebellions and hopelessness: *“Evil fate! I got just suffering and worries from heaven because of you”*... (Mashrab, 1990, p. 75).

The poet feels the approaching death lamenting his destiny, his evil fateубогим. He called himself “orphaned”, “broke”, and “crippled”. Overwhelmed by the torments of love, the poet feels that the payback is near: *“The blade of the damask sword gleamed in the headsman's hand. I'll have to pay: the blade is sharp and the reaping's nigh”* (Mashrab, 1990, p. 78).

To overcome emptiness and loneliness, the poet unites with the world and loves. Mashrab puts the human, their drams and happiness in the center of his ethical and philosophical framework. The author believes that humans must know themselves and understand well that luxury and passions only detain the happiness of the soul. In his ghazal, the Mashrab creates an image of a suffering wanderer. All of its style, intonations, and rhythms are employed to recreate the profoundly sad world of an eastern singer: *“Among the foliage, I'm like a nightingale, deprived of his own nest. I'm sad and homeless, like an owl, I have no shelter. Where is my harbor, where is my humble nook? I've lost my dear friend”*. Gafurov (1988) noted the unlimited deep and serene meaning in Mashrab's poetry: *“Having been through all the ordeals and torments that can befall a person, having reached the highest enlightenment and Aristotle’s catharsis that helps understand the essence of the world, was it not in Kashgar, thinking about his destiny, that he wrote these verses: I am a drop swallowed by the ocean, I have become a pearl in his depths...?”* (Gafurov

1988). We know that water, springs, or wells symbolize the beginning of life and abundance in Sufi poetry (Druzhining & Abrulvapov, 2009).

We must note that every image in Mashrab's lyrics has a second and a third plane, a specific allegoric or metaphoric reading. The classic Rose and Nightingale always refer to two lovers: *"Like a sad nightingale I cry in the sacred garden, I cry for my woe that tortures my soul"*. It is interesting to see how the poet selects the words, expressions, and intonations to get the exact formula that would manifest the function of the *"sacred garden"*. The image of the garden in the Muslim East always had a religious and philosophical meaning. Researchers claim that palace gardens were designed to model a tetragonal world. The garden represented the perishable earthly life and the eternal life in paradise. The garden symbolized a thriving region and the fountain in it symbolized human life. From the tetragonal stone pool symbolizing the four corners of the world and the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and autumn), water poured into the flower bed or the rosary – the *gulistan*. The *"sacred garden"* in its pristine beauty remains immortal for the poet and he is clearly sad to note that, as this fact invokes in him a feeling that life is fragile and unsteady: *"I am a nightingale, but I shun the roses, wings, and feathers. I am poor, deprived..."*; *"Like a nightingale I sing, my rose, my eternal gulistan..."*; *"Was it not your flames that burned Mashrab, my rose?"*; *"Among the foliage, I'm like a nightingale, deprived of his own nest"*. In his commentary to one of the most popular Sufi plots about the nightingale and the rose, Moskalev (1994) notes: The nightingale sings above the rose all night – is it his ladylove? It is a man who felt and realized love, drunk with this love, he is ready to sing all night long, breathing in the aroma of love. Then what is the rose? The rose is the soul woken by the man's earthly love, but he can grow it to become the heavenly love. What is the nightingale's song? These are the words of prayer, the words of worship that the lover uses to address his sweetheart. What are the rose's petals? They are the clothes that cover the essence of the soul and shape its beauty. But it is life and the rose's stem has thorns. Some will not want to hurt their hand and back off but, as Baba Tahir, the dervish wrote a thousand years ago: *"Who got the fruit of love without suffering?"* (Moskalev 1994).

For Mashrab, his talent is a *"thorny path"*, while the poet's life means wandering and serving. The wanderer is one of the incarnations of the lyrical persona, be it *"the wanderer who cures himself with the fire of separation"*, *"a wanderer, whose destiny, whose fate is bad"*, or *"a drop swallowed by the ocean"*. These incarnations work as generalized symbolic representations of fate in ghazals, yet behind them, one may see the real biography of B. Mashrab, his life's story full of journeys:

I am a wanderer, I cure myself with the fire of separation – it's hotter than hell, I swear,  
But dying, when you love, from these torments is a treat for the lover, I swear.  
Oh, if your lips uttered a single word to the sufferer, –  
This is my only dream, and I don't want any heaven, I swear...

The researchers of B. Mashrab's works drew attention to the features typical of the Eastern Middle Ages poets: the *"emotional tension"* or artistic thinking resulting in the dynamic poetic style, hyperbolized images, the inclination to artistic contrasts, the use of repetitions, etc. Gafurov (1988) underlines that *"all of these ghazals are shrouded in the mist of romantic passion for elements seem to speak of harmony and the unity of opposites"* (p. 159). According to the scholarly classification,

B. Mashrab's worldview represented in his lyrics is a classical one because it comprises the perceptions of the eternal dynamics of the universe and its intrinsic discordances, as well as the stability and orderliness of existence and the harmonic powers (Khalizev, 2002). The esthetic value of this poetry is not in obeying the existing standards but in their expansion and refinement. While keeping the key parameters of the genre that did not contradict his purpose, Mashrab introduces new structural elements that helped reach that poetic purpose. The structural elements of the worldview include the imagery structure, plot, the subjective, and the space-time continuum.

When we analyze the poet's works, we come across not only the conventional techniques exposing the psychology of the lyrical persona but also the complex form of internal monologue in many of its types (imagined pictures, dreams, perceptions, desires, etc.).

Boborakhim Mashrab, a popular Sufi literature representative, a rebellious wanderer poet roamed the world for forty years: "*Tramping by strangers' gates I asked about you – Don't believe that "he who's searching shall find". Alas, I lose it all*", he writes later. In his travels, he visited Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Khojend, and countries of the Middle East, India, and stopped in Balkh. Soon, the aristocrats of Balkh who had all the economic and political powers became hostile towards B. Mashrab's works. The age turned down the poet. The ruler of Balkh, Makhmud Katagan, sentenced him to die through hanging in 1711 when the poet was over 70. B. Mashrab was buried in the Ishkashala village, near Khanabad in Afghanistan.

The complex and controversial, magnificent and tragic wandering poet B. Mashrab is a man of the feudal age, which was experienced by many nations except the Uzbek. The lyrics of B. Mashrab feature traditional images with specific second and third planes, along with specific allegoric readings. Through estheticizing suffering and love torments and sacralizing the thanatographic themes, the poet reached the divine. The research of thanatological introspections in the romantic poetry of B. Mashrab helps expose the complexity of the style, which makes it a great material for further scholarly research.

## 7. Conclusion

Boborakhim Mashrab is one of the most talented medieval Turkic poets. The study of the subjective aspects of B. Mashrab's lyrics allows us to identify the poetic polyphony of the poet's thanatological introspections. Analyzing the poetic heritage of B. Mashrab through the lens of the thanatology of Eastern Romanticism, we must note that the poet demonstrates a love torment estheticization model.

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