



## The Artistic Interpretation of Personal Identity in Contemporary Uzbek Poetry (Based on an Analysis of Usmon Azim's Poem "Iqrorlik")

Kodirov Abdulazizbek Luqmonjon o'g'li

Associate Professor, PhD, Andijan Branch of Kokand University,  
Uzbekistan

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of personal identity in Usmon Azim's poem "Iqrorlik" through the central metaphor of the world as a theatre. The analysis focuses on the lyrical hero's struggle to preserve an authentic self while confronting social expectations, criticism, fear, and externally imposed roles. The poem interprets identity not as imitation or adaptation, but as loyalty to conscience, faith, destiny, and inner truth. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach is used to explain the relation between social performance and self-presentation[1:15], while Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity clarifies how the self is formed through choices, trials, and continuity[2:113]. Charles Taylor's moral concept of identity[3:5] and Anthony Giddens's idea of the reflexive project of the self further illuminate the hero's ethical position[4:52]. The study concludes that "Iqrorlik" presents a dramatic-existential model of personal identity grounded in resistance, responsibility, self-recognition, and fidelity to one's authentic role in contemporary Uzbek poetic philosophical thought.

**KEYWORDS:** Personal identity, lyrical hero, selfhood, theatre metaphor, authentic self, narrative identity, dramaturgical approach, moral identity, reflexive self, existentialism, Usmon Azim, contemporary Uzbek poetry.

### INTRODUCTION

The poem "Iqrorlik" ("Confession") by the People's Poet of Uzbekistan Usmon Azim is one of the most accomplished poetic works in contemporary Uzbek poetry to offer a vivid representation of the complex, dramatic, and philosophical nature of personal identity. As the lyrical hero strives towards self-understanding, he interprets this process not merely as a collection of emotional experiences, but as a phenomenon connected with his true purpose in life, inner convictions, destiny, and responsibility before his conscience – an uncompromising judge.

(Uzbek)

Dunyomi?

Teatr!

Iqorman, iqror.

Xudoga topshirib jonimni ammo –

Sahnaga otilib chiqsam necha bor

Dunyo tushinsin deb, takror-u takror

O'zimning rolimni etaman ijro[8:143].

(English)

The world?



A theatre!

I confess – yes, I confess.

Yet, entrusting my soul to God,

However many times I rush onto the stage,

Again and again, so that the world may understand,

I perform my own role.

A dramatic atmosphere emerges from the very opening lines of the poem. The abrupt question and answer, “The world? A theatre!”, likens human life to a stage and the process of living to the performance of a particular role. The theatrical image, however, is not limited to suggesting that the external world is false or that life has been reduced to a simple game. It develops into an integrated artistic model representing the individual’s struggle to preserve their inner conscience and authentic selfhood even while confronting the demands of society.

The image of the “role” occupies the conceptual and compositional centre of the poem. Through recurrent expressions such as “I perform my own role” and “I play only my own role,” the lyrical hero firmly declares his position in life. These repetitions do not merely serve as poetic emphasis; rather, they function as an inner declaration confirming the stability of the poet’s personal identity. Through these lines, the reader hears the deepest voice of the poet’s heart and approaches his authentic personal image.

While emphasizing his loyalty to his inner truths, the lyrical hero does not perceive the “role” as a social mask imposed upon him by society. In his understanding, the role performed on the stage of life represents a person’s inner essence, their choice before conscience, and the meaning of their existence. Consequently, identity in the poem is realized not through imitating others or living according to their expectations, but through remaining faithful to one’s own inner truth.

This interpretation of identity in Usmon Azim’s poem shares certain features with Erving Goffman’s theory of social life as a dramaturgical process. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman compares everyday social behaviour to a theatrical performance and argues that individuals frequently present a particular image of themselves before others[1:15]. In “Iqrorlik,” however, this model acquires a new poetic meaning. Although the lyrical hero performs a role on the social stage, he does not attempt to create the impression expected by the audience. On the contrary, he strives to fulfil his authentic role independently of the judgements of observers, critics, directors, and reproachers. Thus, the “role” in the poem is not a means of adapting to the social environment, but a way of preserving personal truth and firmly demonstrating it before others.

(Uzbek)

Birovning aytgani menga qilmas kor:

Boshimga tushsa ham necha malomat –

Sahnaga otilib chiqsam necha bor,

Birovning yozgani bo’ladi bekor –

O’zimning rolimni o’ynayman faqat[8:143].

(English)

What others say has no effect on me:

Though countless reproaches fall upon my head –

However many times I rush onto the stage,

What another has written comes to nothing –  
I play only my own role.

The images of “what others say,” “what another has written,” the “director,” and the “critic” represent external forces that exert pressure upon the lyrical hero’s identity, seeking to change him and force him into alien patterns. Through these images, the poet reveals the conflict between the individual and society, personal will and external demands, the authentic “I” and the mask forcibly imposed upon it.

The line “What another has written comes to nothing” particularly indicates that identity refuses to submit to predetermined models and that rigid patterns prevent an individual’s true essence from being revealed. The lyrical hero therefore presents himself not as a passive performer in a script written by another person, but as an active subject who understands his destiny and strives to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to him.

These ideas recall Paul Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity. According to Ricoeur, individuals understand their identity through the story of their lives, which is shaped by events, choices, trials, and memories unfolding over time. The answer to the question “Who is a person?” is found not only in permanent characteristics, but also in the path they have followed and the meaning they have attributed to that path.

In “Iqrorlik,” the lyrical hero similarly presents himself not as a fully formed being existing within a single moment, but as a personality shaped through continuous performance, decisions, and trials. His repeated appearances on the stage and his passage through reproach, threat, and sacrifice demonstrate that identity is not given in a finished form; rather, it is tempered and strengthened through resistance encountered in life.

(Uzbek)

Ko'ksin changallaydi qancha rejissyor –

Qo'rqoq miyasiga qoni quyilgan –

Ammo menda yo'qdir zarra ixtiyor,

Rolimni yozmishdir azaldan jabbor,

Menga, “adashma” deb, faqat buyrilgan[8:143].

(English)

How many directors clutch their chests –

Blood rushing to their cowardly brains –

Yet I possess not the slightest choice:

My role was written from eternity by the Almighty;

I was commanded only: “Do not stray.”

The relationship between destiny and human will also emerges as one of the poem’s central issues. The line “My role was written from eternity by the Almighty” indicates that a person cannot control every circumstance of life according to their own wishes. The Almighty, who created the eighteen thousand worlds, determines the destiny of every human being while also granting each person a distinctive character and spiritual capacity.

Some individuals may depart from the path ordained by God because of worldly interests or fear, whereas others live according to their true essence by means of the reason and conscience bestowed upon them by the Creator. By refusing to submit to the demands of the “cowardly director,” the lyrical hero demonstrates that his personality is stronger than external influence. However severe the pressure may be, he does not abandon the divine command: “Do not stray.”

This idea suggests that it is morally unacceptable for a person trapped by self-interest, fear, and worldly desire to disregard the command of the Creator while placing the demands of other human beings above it. The lyrical hero does not use destiny as an excuse for withdrawal; instead, he regards the complete fulfilment of the role entrusted to him as a moral duty.

Personal identity in the poem is therefore defined not by absolute freedom of will, but by the capacity to preserve one's selfhood even within the boundaries determined by destiny. It is precisely this quality that deepens the poem's existential meaning.

(Uzbek)

Dunyo nodon emas, sezib turibdi:

Qancha baxtu taxtim sahnada qurbon.

Taqdir qirmiz qonday izib turibdi,

Garchi tahdid bag'rim ezib turibdi,

Rolimni o'ynashga topaman imkon[8:143].

(English)

The world is not foolish; it understands:

How much happiness and how many thrones

I have sacrificed upon the stage.

Fate leaves its trace like crimson blood;

Though threat is crushing my heart,

I still find a way to play my role.

In this stanza, the qualities and moral position of the lyrical hero discussed earlier are once again firmly confirmed. At every step upon the stage, he senses the presence of danger. His performance has never been received favourably by the world because, as the poet emphasizes, the world is neither a naïve nor an indifferent spectator. It does not wish the performer on its stage to cross established boundaries and act independently.

Nevertheless, although the hero has sacrificed much happiness and social position upon this stage and devoted his entire life to his performance, he continues to find a way to fulfil his authentic role even when crushed by pressure. This possibility, obtained between opposing forces, further increases his moral value in the eyes of the reader.

A reader who is unable to listen to the desires of the heart because of external demands, who conceals inner rebellion and lives by restricting personal aspirations, involuntarily feels respect for an individual who does not retreat even a single step from their selfhood while destiny leaves traces like crimson blood.

(Uzbek)

Qiziqchi emasman va yo taqlidchi –

Turfa qiyofadan yo'q menda rohat.

Ha, dunyo – teatr!

Haqsan, tanqidchi!

Garchi hayotimga bu hol tahdidchi –

O'zimning rolimni o'ynayman faqat![8:144]

(English)

I am neither a jester nor an imitator –

I take no delight in changing faces.

Yes, the world is a theatre!

You are right, critic!

Though this condition threatens my life –

I play only my own role!

In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor emphasizes that individuals understand their identity through moral foundations, values, and beliefs[3:5]. The lyrical hero of “Iqrorlik” likewise presents himself not merely as a person performing a specific social role, but as an individual who possesses definite moral and normative principles and has become conscious of his own essence.

He regards himself as neither a “jester” nor an “imitator.” Through these negations, the hero establishes the boundaries of his identity. Assuming different appearances, changing external faces, or adapting himself to the evaluations of others brings him no satisfaction. For him, the principal criterion of selfhood is faithfulness to inner truth.

Identity is therefore interpreted in the poem not as an aesthetic mask but as a moral and ethical choice. The lyrical hero recognizes himself as a human being and profoundly understands the meaning of his creation. This understanding encourages him not to oppose the commands of his heart because of the opinions of others, not to suppress his emotions, and to live in a manner worthy of his true name and essence. On this foundation, personal identity develops within him as a complete awareness of himself as an integrated and independent person.

Anthony Giddens, who devoted particular attention to personal identity, defines the self under modern conditions as a reflexive project that is continually reconsidered and constructed by the individual through internal monitoring[4:53]. The lyrical hero of Usmon Azim’s poem similarly does not surrender his life entirely to the control of external forces. He constantly reflects upon his role, accepts it, defends it, and repeatedly reaffirms it.

The title “Iqrorlik” is meaningful in this respect. Here, confession does not signify mere acknowledgement; it means the conscious acceptance of one’s own existential truth. Thus, in the process of self-understanding, the hero subjects his personality and actions to the judgement of conscience and once again affirms his “I” in the face of external judgements.

The dramatic essence of the work is skilfully revealed through the systematic relationship of opposing forces. The world is compared to a theatre, the individual to a performer, destiny to a script, society to an audience, the director to a controlling force, and the critic to an evaluating subject. Within this system, however, the lyrical hero does not appear as an entirely submissive and powerless being. He enters the stage called the world and performs the role entrusted to him. He senses external pressure and threat with his entire being, yet he does not lose his identity amid this turmoil.

Personal identity in the poem is therefore interpreted not as a passive condition, but as an active spiritual process formed through resistance, endurance, willpower, and loyalty to inner feelings. The poet’s principal artistic achievement lies in transforming the problem of identity from an abstract theoretical concept into an artistic and philosophical phenomenon through the metaphor of theatre.

The image of the “role” simultaneously represents the individual’s social position, existential mission, creative responsibility, and spiritual selfhood. The lyrical hero’s final decision – “I play only my own role” – artistically generalizes one of the most significant features of personal identity in contemporary Uzbek poetry: the idea that an individual must remain faithful to their inner truth.

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