

Article

Genealogies of Memory and Inherited Dislocation in Nazar Eshonqul's *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam*

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Abstract

Scholarship on Nazar Eshonqul has primarily interpreted his fiction through the frameworks of absurdism, symbolism, and postmodern alienation. In this article, I make a different claim: that his title story, *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* (“The Man Led by a Monkey”), and the stories that cluster around it in the 2008 collection can best be read as a sustained meditation on genealogical rupture: what happens to a family and a community when the lines along which memory, value, and identity are supposed to pass are broken. The study is based on memory studies (Halbwachs, the Assmanns), postmemory theory (Hirsch), cultural trauma theory (Alexander, Caruth), and theories of narrative identity and habitus (Ricoeur, Bourdieu, Hall) and reads these in conjunction with recent work on post-Soviet narrative and inherited trauma in similar literary works in order to interpret the painter, his monkey-led-man canvases and his estranged son in close detail. The study argues that the monkey functions as a symbol of inheritance detached from its origin, a transmission that lives on mechanically, without meaning. The narrative fictionalises the violent social changes that were part of twentieth-century Central Asian life and which emptied the spaces of familial and cultural continuity, resulting in alienation, social amnesia and an identity that no longer knows how to tell itself. This reading situates Uzbek modernist fiction within broader debates on genealogy and memory, showing how literary narrative can more effectively illuminate disruptions in cultural inheritance than discursive analysis alone.

Keywords: genealogy; intergenerational memory; postmemory; cultural inheritance; generational trauma; post-Soviet identity; Central Asian literature; Nazar Eshonqul



Received: 5 June 2026

Revised: 7 July 2026

Accepted: 13 July 2026

Published: 15 July 2026

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1. Introduction

Nazar Eshonqul is one of the most significant prose writers of the late Soviet and independence period in Uzbekistan. He was deeply influenced by the European modernists

and was a translator of Kafka, Camus, and Onetti. His short stories, such as *Momoqo'shiq*, and novellas made him one of the leading figures of Uzbek literary modernism. The 2008 collection, titled after *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam*, gathers stories with a familiar setting: crumbling homes, forgotten gardens, fathers who refuse to die, sons who cannot recall, and towns that have lost their history. This atmosphere has generally been interpreted through the lenses of absurdism, symbolism, and postmodernism. These labels are not inaccurate, but they refer to the surface texture of the prose, not to the underlying concern that structures the prose.

Eshonqul is not widely studied outside Uzbekistan, but scholarship on his work has followed a few established lines of interpretation. He is widely regarded by Uzbek critics as one of the most prominent modernist writers in Uzbekistan, highlighting the absurdist, existential, and symbolist aspects of his fiction. His work has been compared more recently to magical realism and moral philosophy, with a focus on the breakdown of moral certainty in his most famous story and on his supernatural imagination in relation to other writers like Stephen King (Ochilov 2026a, 2026b). Far less attention has been paid to how his fiction explores inheritance itself—the passing on, transformation, or loss of memory, values, and identity from one generation to the next. The present article explores this overlooked aspect.

This article argues that the recurring concern is fundamentally genealogical. In the collection, Eshonqul relentlessly asks how—or even whether—things are passed from one generation to the next: a house constructed by a grandfather, a craft, a grudge, a faith, a name, a way of seeing. His characters are almost never shown to receive an intact inheritance. They inherit fragments, remnants, and ruins; they are handed over the husk of a thing, its substance having passed away. This concern is made explicit in the central image of the title story. An ageing painter has spent a lifetime producing a series of paintings, and the first and last of them depict a young man with confidence leading a chained monkey out of a forest, but in the last canvas, the roles are reversed, and it is the monkey that leads a broken old man into the dark. In between these two paintings are four decades of work, during which colour slowly bleaches to black and the human figure is completely eliminated. The painter dies, and his son, a gambler and convict who beats him for money, cannot be found to bury him.

As a standalone story, it is a sad tale of a life of art that has been squandered. Read through a genealogical lens, however, the story becomes an inquiry into inheritance detached from its source. The monkey represents an inheritance that survives after its original meaning has disappeared. A genealogical reading also invites an ethical one. The same image that shows that the line of descent is broken also points to a break in the transmission of values: what remains is an inherited moral vocabulary, detached from the beliefs that gave it meaning (Ochilov 2025). Read in this way, the story speaks directly to questions central to the study of genealogies and kinship, such as the transmission of families, the inheritance of cultures, the reproduction of values, and the changing boundaries of belonging. In this wider sense, the article engages directly with the concerns of Genealogy and adds to the recent work in the journal that has sought to connect literary analysis with genealogical inquiry, such as the work on Stephen King (Ochilov et al. 2026).

The relevance of such an approach is not parochial. In the post-Soviet sphere, writers have been grappling with the implications of inheriting a century in which the normal processes of cultural transmission have been disrupted again and again by violence, displacement, and ideological disjuncture. Recent scholarship has shown that the literature of the region consistently explores issues of identity, memory, and cultural change (Huseynova 2025; Silantev 2024). As in the case of Iraqi, Palestinian, Partition, and diasporic fiction, literary texts are one of the key sites where broken historical transmission is registered and contested (Hammood 2024; Nafees 2025). Memory studies have also learned in parallel that

memory is never just individual but is transmitted through social frameworks, families, and institutions, and can fail at the collective as well as the personal level (Halbwachs in [Krawatzek 2020](#); [Williamson 2019](#)).

In this broader context, Eshonqul has been virtually ignored in international scholarship, and when he has been discussed, it has been in the light of magical realism and moral philosophy, rather than genealogy ([Ochilov 2026a, 2026b](#)). The present reading is guided by one question and one subsidiary question: How can a dense allegorical story be read as an anatomy of the collapse of familial and cultural descent and, below it, what the figure of the monkey, an inheritance loosed from its origin, reveals about the way cultural memory is passed on or lost, from one generation to the next?

The argument that follows is that Eshonqul's story is not just an absurdist or symbolic narrative but also a literary anatomy of genealogical rupture, where the loss of inherited value, the disruption of intergenerational continuity, and the loss of collective memory all contribute to the identity crisis, alienation, and social disorientation. Read in this way, the story makes Uzbek modernist fiction the subject of global discussions on genealogy and memory.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Genealogy, Kinship and the Literary Text

Genealogy, as used in this journal, is not just the tracing of descent but the study of the reproduction of identity, belonging and value within kin and community. Literary texts are a particularly rich archive for this study because they can contain, in a single image, both the form of transmission and its content, and can reveal the separation between the two. In recent years, the study of diaspora literature has increasingly focused on how novels and short stories serve as spaces where hybrid and inherited identities are negotiated, reshaped and reimagined in the context of displacement and cultural pressure ([Ahmed et al. 2025](#); [Güven and Aldemir 2025](#); [John 2024](#)). In cases where the family line is disrupted due to migration, war or political separation, fiction is a medium through which the disruption is experienced and considered ([Ishtiaq et al. 2024](#); [Jan et al. 2025](#)).

2.2. Collective and Intergenerational Memory

One of the key findings of memory research is that memory is not only individual but also social. Halbwachs first argued that memory is socially framed, a concept later refined by Jan and Aleida Assmann through their distinction between communicative and cultural memory ([Krawatzek 2020](#)). This separation is important as a frame of reference for the analysis that follows, in which the painter's canvases represent the place where cultural memory is preserved as an object but without the interpretive context that once provided meaning. The neuroscientific and cognitive literature converges on a compatible point from the other direction: memory is not stored as discrete items but as structured, networked events, so that when the connecting structure is damaged, recall itself becomes unreliable ([Camina and Güell 2017](#); [Lee and Chen 2022](#); [Williamson 2019](#)). Eshonqul's towns, in which the dead are misremembered as folktales and the living forget why they hate, are literary dramatizations of the collapse of the connective tissue of memory.

2.3. Postmemory and the Inheritance of Trauma

Postmemory, as Hirsch calls it, is the connection a later generation has to the suffering of the previous generation, a suffering it has not experienced but has inherited nonetheless, with a profound impact on its identity. Recent empirical and theoretical studies have expanded and nuanced this concept, exploring how trauma can be passed on across two and three generations in Kurdish, Alevi and diasporic communities and how this

happens, whether through narrative, behaviour or even epigenetics (Başer and Toivanen 2023; de Almeida and Wimplinger 2022; El-Khalil et al. 2025; Kizilhan et al. 2021). From the perspective of clinical psychiatry, Yehuda and Lehrner (2018) reach a similar conclusion. Their work is cited here not as proof of the biological aspects of Eshonqul's fiction but as an interdisciplinary point of comparison to strengthen the story's exploration of inherited emotional and psychological experience. What this body of work shares with Eshonqul is the understanding that a wound can be passed on even if the story that explains it is not—that descendants can carry the effect of a catastrophe without the story.

2.4. Cultural Trauma and the Failure of the Story

While postmemory is concerned with inheritance within the family, Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and Caruth's account of trauma's belatedness are concerned with the collective level: a trauma becomes cultural when a community comes to understand an event as having marked its identity. Literary scholarship on Partition, Palestinian, and other histories of catastrophic violence has shown how short fiction, in particular, works to constitute, preserve, or resist collective trauma (Ali et al. 2025; Khan and Khan 2025; Nafees 2025; Rai and Bhat 2025; Sibitha and Amutha 2025; Singh and Kumar 2025). The important corollary for our purposes is that cultural trauma can also be unprocessed: a community may be unable or unwilling to tell itself the story of what has happened to it, and that failure does not lead to catharsis but to amnesia and disorientation.

2.5. Habitus, Narrative Identity and the Self That Is Handed Down

Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to the dispositions that a person carries with them from their social location, which are passed on below the level of conscious choice; Hall's theory of cultural identity emphasizes that identity is not an essence but a process of continuous production in representation and history; and Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity suggests that a self exists only insofar as it can tell a coherent story about itself over time. Together, these roles suggest that disruptions in the channels of transmission put the ability to become a coherent self at stake. This is the situation of the characters in Eshonqul, who can no longer put together the inherited materials of selfhood into a story, which recent post-Soviet narratology has identified as a feature of the literature of the region (Silantev 2024; Huseynova 2025).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Post-Soviet Memory, Spatial Inheritance and the Field

Post-Soviet cultural studies have noted the disintegration of collective memory in the post-socialist era, the contested nature of inherited languages and identities, and how communities find anchorage in faith, place and ritual when other anchors have failed (Cheskin and Kachuyevski 2018; Derviş 2026; Ellis 2023). The study of the spatial dimension of memory has demonstrated that the destruction of built environments that are part of the community's heritage is a form of severed transmission, which dislocates the communities whose identity these spaces carried (Al-Daffaie and Abdelmonem 2023). That recurrent image of the demolished ancestral house is one of Eshonqul's as well. As rich as this comparative field is, it has rarely been brought into dialogue with his fiction; it is in the organization of his signature story that the genealogical logic has not been read against him, and it is there that the present essay is located.

3.2. Short Fiction and the Comparative Study of Ruptured Transmission

Eshonqul's fiction can be situated within a broader comparative discussion of short fiction and disrupted inheritance. Research on the Partition literature has revealed that

the short story captures experiences of trauma, memory and nostalgia which are not always captured in historical accounts (Ali et al. 2025; Rai and Bhat 2025; Singh and Kumar 2025). Studies on Palestinian and Iraqi fictions have also focused on the short story as a medium that registers and challenges collective trauma in the context of occupation and war (Hammood 2024; Khan and Khan 2025; Nafees 2025), and on the diaspora literature, the short story has been explored as a medium that refashions hybrid identities through migration and displacement (Ahmed et al. 2025; Güven and Aldemir 2025; Ishtiaq et al. 2024; John 2024). While these studies focus on different historical and cultural settings, they have in common an interest in the ways in which compressed narratives represent fractured transmission across generations. Eshonqul fits into this larger discussion, but his fiction introduces a distinctive variation. While many of these literary works are about lost or disrupted inheritances, *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* is about an inheritance that lives on after its meaning has been lost. It is this paradox of transmission without meaning that the following analysis examines.

4. Materials and Methods

The following is a close reading, sensitive to the images and structure of the story and disciplined throughout by a body of theory. The main text is the short story *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* ("The Man Led by a Monkey") from the 2008 collection of the same name. The other stories collected there, "Shamolni Tutib Bo'lmaydi" ("You Cannot Catch the Wind"), "Ajr" ("Recompense") and "Qaytish" ("The Return"), constitute a supporting corpus: they share the genealogical concerns of the title story and help make its compressed logic legible. The critical perspectives to which the reading is oriented and which guide the interpretation are named in advance: the social-frameworks theory of memory (Halbwachs), Jan and Aleida Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, Hirsch's postmemory, the cultural-trauma theory of Alexander and Caruth, and the theories of transmission and selfhood in Bourdieu's habitus, Hall's cultural identity, and Ricoeur's narrative identity.

Two complementary methods are appropriate for this analysis. The dated order of the canvases, the monkey and the man reversed, the demolished house repeated, are all literary devices by which the genealogical argument is carried, and therefore, the appropriate method to recover these is close reading. Thematic analysis is the most suitable complement, as the same concerns are repeated throughout the collection, and grouping them makes the pattern more apparent than asserted. The supporting stories were not chosen for convenience: they were selected because each restages the title story's central problem—a father who cannot be laid to rest, a grandfather decayed into rumour, an ancestor who never returns—so that the reading of the monkey is checked against independent instances rather than resting on one image. Interpretation was built from the text outward. Every claim began with a specific detail, was named a theme, and was then held against the theory and the other stories; where a reading could not be anchored in the language of the page, it was set aside. The procedure is systematic in this sense, and its conclusions follow from textual evidence rather than from one reader's impression.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, I mapped the title story, charting its temporal structure, the images that repeat themselves and the relationships between the three main characters: the narrator, who rents a house next door; the old painter; and the painter's son. Second, I read carefully the passages in which inheritance, transmission and memory are explicitly thematized, paying attention to image, syntax and the flow of colour, particularly the description of the gallery of canvases, the painter's monologue on good and evil and the discovery of the final painting. Third, I collated the resulting readings under the recurring concerns listed above (genealogical rupture, transmission failure, social amnesia,

intergenerational trauma, and identity fragmentation) and considered each interpretation in light of the language of the text.

The reading was limited to two pledges. The first one is evidential discipline: every interpretive move is based on a text detail, not an impression. The second literature is not a substitute for the reading; it is located, a straightforward awareness of what such a reading cannot do. A close reading of a single story is not a basis for making empirical claims about actual reading communities or about the historical reception of the story; it is not a basis for generalization. The validity of the reading depends on the uniformity of the genealogical structure in explaining the details of the story and on the convergence of the title story with the other stories.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1. *Genealogical Rupture and the Collapse of Cultural Continuity*

The first image in the collection, which precedes the title story, depicts demolition and sets the tone for all that follows. In “Shamolni Tutib Bo’lmaydi”, the bulldozers demolish the house of Bayna momo, the first house built in the village by her grandfather, Shukur oqsoqol, a century ago for children who had not yet been born and for herds that increased every year. The narration is clear that it is not just masonry that is being destroyed; it is memory: the house is compared to a memory doomed to be forgotten and erased, and the villagers watching the machines feel that they are destroying something of themselves as well. At the very beginning of the collection, Eshonqul performs the severing of spatial inheritance, a mode of cultural dislocation recently identified by scholarship ([Al-Daffaie and Abdelmonem 2023](#)). The continuity of the ancestral structure that once represented a lineage and community is destroyed, and its identity is lost.

The scene is genealogical, not because it evokes nostalgia, but because it dramatizes the process of generational forgetting. The young people who began constructing their arched houses of fired brick were born after the death of Rayim polvon and had only heard folktales about him, which they had since forgotten. The line of transmission is illustrated in real time: a heroic grandfather becomes a rumour, the rumour becomes a folktale, and the folktale is forgotten. This is precisely the decay of communicative memory into cultural memory, and then of cultural memory into nothing, that the Assmannian tradition describes ([Krawatzek 2020](#)). The narrator observes that the villagers “now talked of aeroplanes”—they are caught up in the events of the time and unable to assimilate the new things that happen to them. Modernity does not come as an addition but as an erasure.

The title story transposes this fall from the village to the city, from the communal to the individual level, but the structure is the same. The old painter lives in a former mansion now in disrepair, with crumbling columns and window frames, and a courtyard filled with trash. He appears to be the last meaningful representative of a family line whose only remaining heir despises him. The continuity that the house was designed to ensure has broken at its most basic level: the child.

Two aspects of the description are worth considering in detail, as they contain the genealogical logic prior to the paintings’ explicit expression. The first is the persistent odour rising from the courtyard. The narrator lingers on the smell that comes up from the painter’s courtyard, from the rubbish pit, and suddenly thinks that the old man must have been collecting rubbish for his whole life—the thought strikes him that “the old man must have been hoarding the rubbish in that pit his whole life”. This detail is not incidental. A life that should have been a life of value and should have passed on value is instead a life of waste, and the waste is what fills the ancestral space. The house is now a place of decay and not of inheritance. The second detail is the relationship of the narrator to the place. He is a stranger, a translator passing through; he has only rented the neighbouring house. The

narrator of the story, who is the only one who can witness the failure of the transmission, is himself outside the transmission. The inheritance the story traces has no proper heir, and it is up to a tenant to discover that it is missing.

5.2. *The Monkey as a Figure for Disrupted Inheritance*

The interpretive centre of the story is the series of paintings that the painter has lined up along his veranda in chronological order, starting in 1921, so that the narrator feels as if he is walking up the painter's veranda to the locked keep of the old man's life. The oldest canvas, from 1921, depicts a strong young man, with a taut chain around the monkey's neck, leading the animal out of a thick forest; the young man's eyes are full of determination: "the young man's eyes shone sharp and full of belief and the chain around the monkey's neck was pulled taut". The narrator, who does not know a thing about painting, is nevertheless impressed by the certainty in that face. The first canvas in the context of this article is an inheritance at its confident origin: a human agent, eyes full of belief, leads the animal—the not-yet-human, the merely instinctual—out of the dark and into history. The chain is a line of transmission that is tight and controlled.

As the sequence progresses, the painter's vision gradually unravels. The painter's hand becomes more adept, the colours more diverse, but a haziness starts to take over, and the narrator observes black gradually replacing the other colours until, in the paintings of the 1930s, black dominates everything. It is a genealogy of darkening, and the dated sequence is, in effect, a genealogy set to a timeline. The reader who is familiar with the historical referents of those dates will see what the canvases register but do not refer to explicitly: it is the decade in which the painter occupied "responsible positions", and that is the decade in which his colour dies. The pictures are filled with emptied villages and abandoned houses, beckoning graveyards, weapons smelling of death, weeping women and children, carrion crows over open fields, carts loaded with corpses, and barred cells. Transmission continues—the painter never stops painting—but what is transmitted is no longer hope or purpose; it is catastrophe.

The last canvas is used to finish and reverse the figure. It is hastily painted, the colours barely put on; it is the same forest as the first picture, but now a monkey is leading a stooped old man, whose eyes are hopelessly turned towards the monkey, into the forest—"a monkey was leading a stooped old man, grief settled in his hopeless eyes, off into the forest". Everything the 1921 canvas asserted is now inverted. The man who used to lead the monkey with conviction is now led by the monkey, the inheritor by the inheritance. This image offers the story's clearest expression of genealogical rupture. What is handed down—the monkey, the chained thing the young man thinks he is mastering—outlasts the meaning of the handing down and turns to lead its former master into darkness. After it has ceased to be significant, inheritance continues as a mechanism. The monkey symbolizes an inherited value that has become detached from its historical foundations, a transmission that has lost its belief. The figure earns that reading from within the sequence itself. The monkey is the one element that survives every canvas unchanged, while the human agent weakens, darkens, and finally stoops: it is precisely what is transmitted across the forty years, and precisely what empties of meaning as it travels. The same forest framing the first and last paintings makes the point structural rather than incidental—the ground of inheritance is constant, and only the direction of mastery has reversed. The animal is a fitting vehicle for the idea because it can carry a form without understanding it: the monkey performs the walk out of the forest and then back into it with equal indifference, which is exactly the condition of an inheritance that continues as a gesture after its content has died. What the young man thought he was leading turns out to have been leading him all along.

This is reinforced by three aspects of close reading. First, the narrator's answer to the first canvas is a little allegory of transmission: he admits that he knows nothing about painting, but the young man's eyes are so full of conviction that he feels he could take off with him on a nameless, rebellious journey, dragging his own ancestors out of superstition into the storm of a new life. That is, the first painting is still able to recruit an heir, to make a viewer want to follow. The power of the final painting is gone; it can only be viewed with dread. The power of the image to convey a calling has leached out of the two canvases, just as the colour has. Second, the narrator twice remarks that the middle paintings appear to be made "without aim or purpose", just to keep the hand moving, which is a very apt description of the transmission of a meaningless form: the form is repeated, the hand moves, but nothing is transmitted. Third, the chain. The chain around the monkey's neck is taut in the first canvas but disappears in the final canvas, as does any notion of control. It is still a line between man and monkey, but the line is no longer from the will of man outwards. Now the heir is bound to what he has inherited rather than mastering it.

Also, the medium is painting and not speech. The painter refuses to explain the significance of his canvases to the narrator, who asks him, and the painter waves him away, as if he were a pile of trash; and the narrator cannot remember them, either: within two days, all the paintings except the first have slipped from his mind, "like birds from the branches of a tree". The inheritance the gallery represents can no longer be read by those who come after it. The Assmannian distinction suggests that the loss of the institutional backing of cultural memory is the state into which the objects fall when cultural memory is lost: the objects remain, but the framework that created their legibility has disappeared, leaving the objects with their own opacity (Krawatzek 2020). The paintings are an ideal symbol of inheritance after meaning, present, dated, arranged, and illegible.

5.3. *Family Memory and Social Amnesia*

If the paintings give rupture as an image, the human relationships give it its social texture. This is the painter's explicit theory of broken inheritance, a monologue on good and evil. He tells of a conscientious friend who—when ordered from above to commit the impossible in order to meet production quotas that would have ruined thousands of workers—chose to falsify the paperwork instead of destroying his people, was stoned in his grave by the very people he had saved, and was replaced by a successor who committed such impossible literally and ruined them. The painter realizes that he has been unable to distinguish good from evil all his life, since each action is divided into two parts: "one of them, thinking of the people, abused the law; the other, thinking of the law, ruined the people. I cannot tell which was evil and which was good—I never could, my whole life long". This is not only moral confusion but also a sign of a disrupted transmission of value: the dispositions which would enable a person to read an act correctly (Bourdieu's *habitus*) have been scrambled by a social order which inverted the relation between protecting people and obeying power.

This leads to his rejection of the word "faith". The painter says that if you believed and burned for a faith for a lifetime and then found out that what you thought was good was bad, you would not say that; he has not used the word for more than 40 years, and it makes him sick to hear it. The word, he says, is "so ornate, so gilded, so false and high-flown that hearing it turns my stomach". Here, the collapse of inherited values is expressed most directly. The painter is a man whose whole attitude—whose conviction, in the first canvas's sense—has been shown to him to be empty and who has nothing to give but emptiness. After a quarter of an hour of conversation, the narrator is poisoned by the old man's lack of belief and has to read cheerful stories for a long time to dispose of

the painter's figure; even the failed transmission is contagious, infecting the person who receives it with disorientation.

Social amnesia is in effect at the communal level, as in the first story. In "Shamolni Tutib Bo'lmaydi", the villagers never discover, even at the end of their lives, what sin they have committed to deserve the old woman's curse; they have forgotten the night her husband and son were shot; they have forgotten their own complicity. The forgetting is what keeps the cycle going. The community has not told itself the story of what happened to it; in Alexander's terms, it has not made its catastrophe a cultural trauma. Therefore, it is not healed but rather permanently disoriented; a town that grows weaker and more frightened with each passing year. The failure to remember collectively is a wound.

The counterfigure is Bayna Momo, who resists the amnesia, and her resistance illuminates what the village has lost. The others forget, but she cleans the grave of her husband and son almost every week, so that it is distinguished from the others and emits, as the narrator puts it, a destitute grief; she hangs their wrestler's tunics on the wall of the courtyard at the end of each month, in full view, until the cloth becomes rags suitable for draping over graves. Her whole life turns into an unwanted commemoration in a community that is dedicated to forgetting. The villagers hate her because she will not let the past become folktales, and their hatred of her is the measure of their need to forget. The one person who held the line of memory is finally overcome, and her defeat is the community's completed amnesia: when she dies, the students hang her unwashed, grief-soaked dresses on the line, "like the captured standards of a defeated army". What Eshonqul demonstrates, in opposition to the trauma literature's focus on remembering, is the social role of the refusal to remember—and the lonely, punished figure who has to pay the price of remembering.

5.4. *Intergenerational Trauma and the Fragmentation of Identity*

The painter's son is the most obvious example of a dislocation being passed on. He is a gambler, a former pickpocket, and a convict who has served time for murder and lives off cards; he visits his father only to demand money, and, when refused, threatens to burn the house down with the old man inside. "If you won't hand it over, I'll set fire to the house with you inside it," he shouts in a scraping-metal voice, and he has beaten the painter twice. He is the heir who has received nothing that can be handed on—no craft, no value, and no usable past—and whose self has narrowed accordingly to appetite and violence. What was tight in the first canvas has now loosened: the son is now the monkey that leads. The narrator points out that his coldness is even colder than his father's coldness.

Here, intergenerational trauma becomes literal in exactly the way described by the postmemory theory and the transmission literature: the son carries the emotional residue of a catastrophe—the same emotional coldness and loss of belief—without possessing the narrative that explains it (Başer and Toivanen 2023; El-Khalil et al. 2025; Yehuda and Lehrner 2018). The father's own verdict on his generation—"we lived incomprehensibly; every step we took became suspect and dark to others"—is the disorientation the son receives in place of an inheritance. The same structure is apparent in the companion stories, but from different perspectives. The inheritance here is literally a dead weight, a guilt that cannot be laid down and the blind shepherd girl who appears in the story, killed by her own father for bearing an illegitimate child, doubles the theme of a lineage that kills itself off: In "Ajr", a son carries his dead father on his back down a long road through a burning plain, where the father has spent forty years repeating the one charge against the son: that he killed him to clear his own path to power. In "Qaytish", a man wakes to find his city overnight overrun by faceless, eyebrowless, corpse-smelling people, and at the end, he realizes that the man who shoots him is wearing the same cap as the man in the photograph of his father that was taken away one night and never returned. The recurring shapes of a

fiction of transmission gone wrong are the dead father, the unreturned ancestor, and the inheritance that comes as persecution.

Particularly noteworthy is “Ajr”, which literalizes the central metaphor. The son does not just recall his father; he physically bears him down a road that never ends, and the father will not cease talking. The charge is forty years old and is repeated until the son pleads, “Enough, I’m also a human being”. The story sets up the intolerable physical reality of an inheritance that cannot be laid down: the past is not behind this son; it is on top of him, riding him, telling him where to go—the cave, “the door of that desert” where he will wander forever—while he is unable even to ask himself why he lived. The father’s complaint is that the son’s generation “stole the trust” out of people—that they took away the ordinary trust of neighbours in neighbours, parents in children—so that no one believes in anything, “not even in their own child”. This is a very exact description of the social level of severed transmission: it was the confidence that allows one generation to transmit anything to another that was stolen. These stories are indirect, a trait that has been identified as a characteristic of post-Soviet narration (Silantev 2024): they circle the deportation without naming it, in the recurring carts of “Qaytish” loaded with people and driven first towards the rising and then the setting sun, an image that belongs at once to the memory of the father and the blind girl.

All these figures have in common the loss of narrative identity in the sense of Ricoeur. None of them can put together the elements of selfhood into a story over time: the painter cannot end his life even from the perspective of his solitude; the son has no self beyond his hunger; and the man in “Qaytish” cannot say if he is dreaming or awake or which world he is in. Identity, cut off from its inheritance, disintegrates into affect and disorientation—the very situation that post-Soviet narratology has singled out as the hallmark of the literature of the region (Silantev 2024; Huseynova 2025).

5.5. Narrative Genealogies of Post-Soviet Dislocation

The formal device of the dated chronology of the canvases enables Eshonqul to link personal identity with historical transformation. The life of the painter and the century are painted on the same canvas, and the figure he draws at the end of the line is the man led by the monkey. This is genealogy in its entirety: the individual and collective lines are revealed as one line, darkening together. To the narrator, the sequence finally reads as one ruined life-map—the canvases “piled up like the abandoned garrisons of a life that its armies of hope had deserted”. The historical referent is almost explicit in the companion story “Qaytish”, where the deported people are transported in carts towards the rising and then the setting sun and where arrests are made at night, without the presence of any faces of authority, all of which point unmistakably towards the deportations and repressions of the Soviet century without ever naming them, in the manner that post-Soviet narrative strategy has been shown to favour (Silantev 2024).

The objective is not allegorical decoding but recognition of the narrative’s underlying structure. This means that the historical transmission, of which Eshonqul is the terminus, is repeatedly disrupted: the house of the ancestors is torn down, the heroic grandfather is forgotten, the generation that witnesses is killed or deported, and the children who survive are left with rumour and appetite. Their personal disorientation is the subjective side of a collective rupture, and this is what comparative studies of the post-Soviet and post-conflict literary works have made the focus of the field (Huseynova 2025; Hammood 2024; Cheskin and Kachuyevski 2018). While other communities have found a way to hold on to such a rupture through faith, ritual or place (Derviş 2026; Ellis 2023), Eshonqul’s towns have lost even those anchors: the house is rubble, the faith is the word the painter can no longer say, the place itself, in “Qaytish” and “Tobut”, has become a coffin or a city of the dead.

6. Discussion

Genealogically reading *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* opens three lines of interpretation. The first concerns genealogy and kinship. The story provides a very compact model of what we might call inheritance after meaning, that is, a transmission that remains a form when its content has passed away. The image of the monkey leading the man represents not the absence of inheritance but its corruption: the line goes on, the chain still links the generations, but it is no longer value or identity that passes down it but a darkened, agentless residue of the past. This is a more disturbing image than the familiar image of lost or interrupted transmission, for it implies that the machinery of descent may continue to function after the object of descent has been removed and that it may be passed on to the next generation, as its emptiness. The human form of this residue is the son who receives no useful inheritance from his father but rather his father's coldness.

A second reaches Central Asian literature studies. Eshonqul has been read as an absurdist and a moralist (Ochilov 2026a, 2026b); the genealogical reading shows that behind the absurdist surface runs a rigorously consistent concern with family and cultural transmission and that his recurring images—the demolished house, the dead father who will not be set down, the forgotten grandfather, the emptied town—compose a single sustained meditation on broken descent. This reframing puts his work in the wider context of the international debate on post-Soviet memory and identity, in which the disintegration of collective memory following socialism and the efforts to reconstruct identity are key issues (Huseynova 2025; Silantev 2024; Cheskin and Kachuyevski 2018). It also places him among other writers of aftermath—Iraqi, Palestinian, Partition, diasporic—who have used short fiction to record ruptured historical transmission (Hammood 2024; Nafees 2025; Vicera 2021).

A third opens onto the connection between family memory and cultural inheritance. The story is adamant that these two levels cannot be separated. The painter's private failure to pass on anything to his son and the village's collective failure to remember its dead are the same failure on different scales: the demolished house is a broken line, both for the family and for the village. This aligns with the spatial-memory scholarship, which views the destruction of inherited environments as a displacement of the communities whose identity they represent (Al-Daffaie and Abdelmonem 2023), and the trauma-transmission literature, which sees the family as the main vehicle for the transmission of collective catastrophe to future generations (Başer and Toivanen 2023; Kizilhan et al. 2021; Yehuda and Lehrner 2018). The literary text can present both levels simultaneously in a single image, revealing their underlying connection in ways discursive analysis often cannot.

The literary form is not a vessel for the genealogical argument; it is the place where the argument is made. A discursive narrative of inherited trauma must break up the family, the community, and the built environment and address each in turn. It is Eshonqul's success that he has combined these elements. The house that was torn down is a building, a family, a community, and a memory; the monkey is an animal, a craft, a value, a son, and a century. This condensation is not a vagueness but a sort of analytic precision that can only be given by the image itself. These literary devices are not just used to illustrate the argument but to create it. Allegory makes the chained monkey a symbol of inheritance itself and the dated series of paintings a documentation of cultural erosion over time, not just time passing. Colour fades from canvas to canvas, meaning drains from what is being passed on, leaving transmission to continue as an empty habit. The images of odour and rubbish, which are repeated throughout the narrative, also help ground the abstract concept of broken inheritance in the material world of the story, as does the locked house. These images do not simplify complex ideas; rather, they allow Eshonqul to bring together historical, familial and psychological loss within a single symbolic structure. In the final

canvas, the monkey leading the man is a highly economical statement that the relationship between a generation and what it receives may be reversed, and that the man is ruled by an inheritance over which he has no control and cannot reject. In this context, the literary text is not merely illustrative of genealogy theory but is also an instrument of it, which can contain the contradictions that discursive analysis is supposed to overcome and that can capture the lived texture of rupture, albeit in an unusual way (cf. Nafees 2025; Khan and Khan 2025).

The broader implication for post-Soviet societies is that the consequences of interrupted cultural transmission extend far beyond the generation that experienced the original rupture. Eshonqul's son, his men bearing dead fathers, and his sleepers waking in occupied cities are all late-generation characters; they are victims of a catastrophe they never saw and cannot tell about. Their disorientation is the long aftertaste of the break, as the work of cultural memory, of making the past something that can be narrated and thus inherited as meaning and not as a wound, has yet to be accomplished. The theoretical implication, finally, is that the categories of postmemory, cultural trauma, habitus and narrative identity, which have been developed mostly on the basis of Western and diasporic material, are not only applicable to Central Asian modernist fiction without any loss of force but that the traffic can run the other way: Eshonqul's image of the monkey-led man is a contribution to the theory of inheritance, not only an illustration of it.

7. Conclusions

This article has argued that *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* should be understood primarily as a narrative of genealogical rupture rather than simply as an example of absurdism or symbolism. This reframing is aided by a close reading. The painter's dated sequence of paintings depicts a genealogy of darkening, a fading of colour, a vanishing of the human figure, until the founding image is inverted: the man who once led the monkey is now led by the monkey. This turnaround is Eshonqul's definition of broken inheritance, a transmission that lives on as a form after its meaning has passed away. The story and its companions put together the whole machinery of severed descent, the demolished ancestral house, the forgotten grandfather, the witnessing generation killed or deported, the social amnesia of communities unable to tell their own story of catastrophe, the later generation inheritors—most of all the painter's son—who bear the wound without the story and who fragment into appetite, alienation and violence.

The reading here brings together a number of threads. The story depicts genealogical rupture through the breakdown of inherited values and the disappearance of the witnessing generation; it traces the failure of the transmission of memory, the decay of a heroic ancestor into rumour, folktale and oblivion; the construction of inherited identity through the allegory of the monkey, the figure of inheritance loosed from its source; family memory and collective forgetting as a single failure seen at two scales; and, finally, an interrupted cultural inheritance whose force extends well beyond its immediate setting.

What the reading finally shows is that the four theories (genealogy, postmemory, cultural trauma, and narrative identity) developed elsewhere have not been strained to read Central Asian modernist fiction. Furthermore, the monkey-led man of Eshonqul offers genealogy studies with a precise image of a condition that the discursive literature only struggles to name: the persistence of transmission after the death of its meaning. It is this genealogical importance that is the subject of the work: it is the moment when a line of descent no longer carries identity but its own emptiness.

The implications are not just for one story but for the whole post-Soviet Central Asian experience. The century in which Eshonqul writes ruptured many of the 'natural' processes of cultural memory: the ancestral home, the remembered grandfather, the trusted

neighbour and even the inherited language of faith. His characters are of the generations that are left to rebuild an identity from the remains. Their uncertainty is symptomatic of a more general historical situation. The witnessing generation is killed, displaced, or silenced, and memory is no longer transmitted as lived experience but rather as a rumour, silence, and emotional residue. When read in this manner, *Maymun Yetaklagan Odam* is a statement on the ongoing struggle to restore cultural memory and historical continuity throughout the region. There is no simple solution to Eshonqul; the monkey still leads the man, but by providing a symbolic form for broken inheritance, he makes visible the point at which transmission no longer carries meaning but is only the repetition of its empty forms.

Future studies may expand the genealogical reading to Eshonqul's entire oeuvre and compare it with that of other post-Soviet Central Asian writers to determine whether the structure found here is unique or typical of a poetics of broken descent in the region. Comparative studies with post-conflict literary works evoked in this writing—Partition, Palestinian, Iraqi, diasporic—can determine the extent to which the inheritance-after-meaning image travels, and an empirical reception study could investigate the ways in which such communities read these works, having experienced such rupture themselves. This study is a beginning: Eshonqul's best-known tale is, first of all, a literary dissection of the remains of a culture whose lines of transmission have been ruptured.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov) and U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov); methodology, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov), U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov) and S.K.; software, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov); validation, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov), U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov), B.A. and G.K.; formal analysis, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov) and S.K.; investigation, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov), U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov), S.K., B.A., G.K., F.K., B.G., A.I. and S.M.; resources, B.A., G.K., F.K., B.G., A.I. and S.M.; data curation, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov) and U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov); writing—original draft preparation, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov); writing—review and editing, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov), U.O. (Utkirbek Ochilov), S.K., B.A., G.K., F.K., B.G., A.I. and S.M.; visualization, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov); supervision, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov); project administration, U.O. (Ulugbek Ochilov); funding acquisition, none. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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