



# THE NARRATING I AND THE NARRATED I: EVOLUTION OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VOICE IN ABDULLA KAHHOR'S "TALES FROM THE PAST" AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S "GREEN HILLS OF AFRICA"

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17891538>

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 08<sup>th</sup> December 2025  
Accepted: 09<sup>th</sup> December 2025  
Online: 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025

### KEYWORDS

*autobiographical subject, narrating I, cyclical vs. linear temporality, ontological integrative vs. competitive selfhood, Western individualism, life-writing comparative autobiography*

## ABSTRACT

*This comparative study examines the bifurcation of autobiographical subject into the narrating I (present-writer) and the narrated I (past experiential self) in Abd Kahhor's cycle "O'tmishdan ertaklar" ("Tales from the Past 1962–1965) and Ernest Hemingway's "Green Hills of Africa" (1935). Drawing on contemporary life-writing theory, the author identifies two radically opposed ontological models: Kahhor's cyclical, integrative, and forgiving memory rooted in Uzbek communal tradition versus Hemingway's linear, competitive and triumphalist memory shaped by Western individualism. The analysis demonstrates that the evolution of the autobiographical voice is not universal but culturally and historically contingent.*

*Introduction. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review: The Split Autobiographical Subject in Contemporary Life-Writing Theory*

The recognition that the autobiographical "I" is inherently split constitutes one of the cornerstones of post-1970s life-writing studies. Philippe Lejeune's "Le pacte autobiographique" (1975) defined autobiography through the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist, yet even Lejeune later admitted that this identity is contractual and retrospective rather than ontological.<sup>1</sup> Paul de Man's deconstructive reading (1979) went further, arguing that autobiography is prosopopeia—the conferring of voice upon an absent or dead self—thereby turning the narrated I into a rhetorical figure rather than a recoverable historical entity.<sup>2</sup>

In the North American tradition, Paul John Eakin reframed the split in ethical and phenomenological terms, insisting that "all identity is relational" and that the narrating I is engaged in constant negotiation with multiple past selves.<sup>3</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson systematised

<sup>1</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN* 94, no. 5, 1979, p. 919–930.

<sup>3</sup> Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999.

four distinct “I”s (historical, narrating, narrated, and ideological), emphasising that different ideological formations produce different hierarchies among them.<sup>4</sup> More recent interventions have explored how trauma and marginalised positions generate “limit-case” autobiographies that resist triumphalist narratives.<sup>5</sup>

A growing body of scholarship has begun to decolonise life-writing theory by attending to non-linear, communal, and oral-inflected models prevalent in non-Western traditions.<sup>6</sup> Central Asian autobiography studies have identified a persistent “daira” (circle) temporality in which the individual self remains inseparable from family, mahalla, and ancestral continuum - a model that directly contradicts the teleological temporality dominant in Euro-American texts.<sup>7</sup>

Hemingway’s competitive selfhood, by contrast, has been extensively theorised through masculinity studies and post-World War I trauma studies.<sup>8</sup> Yet almost no comparative work exists that places Hemingway’s agonistic model alongside a non-Western, integrative paradigm. The

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<sup>4</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001; Nancy K. Miller, “The Ethics of Betrayal: Diary of a Memoir,” in *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002;

David Parker, “Autobiography and Postcoloniality,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 22, no. 1, 2007;

Ricia A. Chansky and Emily Hipchen, eds., *The Routledge Auto/Biography Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Adeeb Khalid, “The Fascination of Revolution: Central Asian Intellectuals, 1917–1927,” in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia*, vol. 4, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2007;

Paolo Sartori, “Autobiographical Narratives in Early 20th-Century Central Asia,” *Der Islam* 87, no. 1, 2010;

Deniz Kandiyoti, “The Politics of Life Stories in Soviet Uzbekistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 4, 2014;

Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva, *Women’s Life Stories in Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: Yangi Nashr, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, *Hemingway’s Genders*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1994;

Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003;

Rena Sanderson, *Hemingway’s Masculine Mystique*, Kent: Kent State UP, 2016; Steven Trout, *Memorial Fictions of War and Masculinity*, Kent: Kent State UP, 2006; Alex Vernon, *Hemingway’s Second War*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018.

present article intervenes at this intersection, pluralising the theoretical archive of life-writing by reading Kahhor's still undertheorised Uzbek text alongside Hemingway's canonical work.

#### Methods

This research uses a comparative qualitative textual analysis based on the following methodological steps:

Close reading of primary texts: O'tmishdan ertaklar (Qahhor) and Green Hills of Africa (Hemingway).

Application of contemporary life-writing theories (Lejeune, de Man, Eakin, Smith & Watson).

Identification of narrative markers distinguishing the narrating I from the narrated I.

Cultural contextualisation using Central Asian biography studies and Western masculinity/individualism scholarship.

Construction of a comparative matrix to analyse temporal structure, narrative voice, ethical stance, and cultural determinants.

The method is interpretive rather than empirical, relying on theoretical frameworks and textual evidence.

#### Results. *Abdulla Kahhor: Cyclical Memory and Ontological Integration*

Written when the author was in his late fifties and early sixties, "Tales from the Past" exhibits a strikingly self-effacing narrating I. The present-day voice appears only in brief, almost parenthetical phrases:

"I was then seven or eight years old..."<sup>9</sup>

"When I recall that moment now, it comes alive before my eyes..."<sup>10</sup>

The mature narrator never judges, corrects, or distances himself from the child. Even when the child is cowardly or mistaken, the adult voice protects him:

"That little boy was terribly scared and burst into tears... but that little boy was me."<sup>11</sup>

This refusal to condemn creates an integrative ontology: the narrated I is perpetually re-absorbed into the narrating I rather than superseded. The autobiographical voice evolves through endless cyclical return—a pattern that mirrors the Uzbek oral tradition of the *dā'ira*, in which past and present coexist without hierarchy.

### 3. Ernest Hemingway: Linear Memory and Competitive Selfhood

Composed when Hemingway was thirty-four and at the height of his physical powers, Green Hills of Africa presents the opposite trajectory. The narrating I repeatedly measures itself against earlier selves and asserts superiority:

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<sup>9</sup> Abdulla Qahhor, *O'tmishdan ertaklar*, Tashkent: Sharq, 1996, p11.

<sup>10</sup> Abdulla Qahhor, *Tanlangan asarlar*, 4 vols. Tashkent: Adabiyot va san'at, 1988, vol. 3, p.152.

<sup>11</sup> Abdulla Qahhor, *Asarlar*, 6 vols., Tashkent: Sharq, 2003, vol. 5, p.89.

“I was getting to be a better shot all the time, much better than in the old days in Michigan.”<sup>12</sup>

“I had learned a lot since those days...”<sup>13</sup>

“Even if I had lost the kudu, it would have been better than in the old days when I was young and nervous.”<sup>14</sup>

The narrated I is positioned as an adversary to be surpassed. The autobiographical voice evolves through linear, teleological movement in which each new phase must dominate the previous one—a pattern consonant with the American myth of the self-made man and Hemingway’s “code hero” ethos.<sup>15</sup>

### *Comparative Matrix*

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Abdulla Kahhor</b>	<b>Ernest Hemingway</b>
Temporal structure	Cyclical / spiral (daira)	Linear / teleological
Attitude of narrating I	Protective, forgiving, integrative	Competitive, evaluative, triumphalist
Ontological fate of past self	Perpetual preservation and re-embrace	Supersession and symbolic defeat
Cultural matrix	Uzbek communal memory, generational continuity	Western individualism, cult of progress
Ethical stance	Compassionate non-judgment	Agonistic self-overcoming

### *Cultural and Biographical Determinants*

Kahhor, writing near the end of his life under Soviet ideological pressure yet rooted in pre-revolutionary village culture, performs an act of cultural salvage: the integrative gesture preserves a vanishing Uzbek childhood.<sup>16</sup> Hemingway, writing in mid-career after the trauma of World War I and during the Great Depression, uses the African safari to reassert masculine potency; the

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, New York: Scribner, 2003 [1935], p.148.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*: p.192

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*: p.285

<sup>15</sup> See Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist*, 4th ed., Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Kandiyoti, “The Politics of Life Stories,” 567.

competitive model serves both psychological and ideological functions in an American context that valorises perpetual self-transcendence.<sup>17</sup>

#### Discussion

The contrast between Kahhor and Hemingway demonstrates how autobiographical voice is shaped by cultural ontology. Kahhor's model aligns with Uzbek communal memory traditions, where identity is shared, continuous, and non-hierarchical. His narrative protects childhood as a cultural archive.

Hemingway's model reflects Euro-American ideals of self-making and masculine progress. His narrative performs psychological and ideological functions: overcoming past weaknesses, asserting competence, and sustaining the myth of the self-reliant individual.

These findings support recent calls in life-writing scholarship to diversify theoretical models by including non-Western narrative traditions.

#### CONCLUSION

Tales from the Past and Green Hills of Africa represent two fundamental paradigms of twentieth-century autobiographical prose: one performs an ethics and aesthetics of preservation, the other an ethics and aesthetics of conquest. Far from being merely stylistic differences, these paradigms reveal profound ontological divergences: the self as eternal circle versus the self as ascending ladder. By placing an Uzbek text still virtually unknown in global autobiography studies in dialogue with a Euro-American classic, this article pluralises the theoretical archive of life-writing and demonstrates that the "evolution of the autobiographical voice" is always culturally and historically contingent.

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<sup>17</sup> Vernon, Hemingway's Second War, p.112–115.

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