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## THE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL REALITY IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH HISTORICAL NOVELS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract** This article examines the artistic interpretation of historical reality in Uzbek and English historical novels through a comparative-typological approach. Drawing on works by Oybek, Pirmqul Qodirov and Odil Yoqubov on the one hand, and Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray and Hilary Mantel on the other, the study explores how national historical prose transforms documentary fact into artistic truth. The paper argues that both literary traditions rely on a triad of devices — the fictional protagonist set against a documented historical background, the psychological reconstruction of real historical figures, and the stylization of period language and everyday detail — yet they differ in the degree of authorial intrusion, the treatment of national ideals, and the balance between chronicle and invention. The research employs comparative-historical, hermeneutic and structural-typological methods of literary analysis. The findings show that Uzbek historical prose of the twentieth century tends toward an ethically didactic and monumentalizing interpretation of the past, closely tied to questions of national identity and cultural memory, whereas the English tradition, from Walter Scott's Waverley novels to contemporary neo-historical fiction, moves gradually from romantic idealization toward ironic, revisionist and psychologically ambivalent portrayals of history. The comparative analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how historical fiction functions as a form of cultural self-reflection and offers a methodological basis for further comparative research in world literature.

**Keywords:** historical novel, artistic interpretation, historical reality, national identity, Uzbek literature, English literature, Walter Scott, Oybek, comparative literary studies, chronotope, artistic truth, historical prose.

### Introduction

The historical novel is widely recognized in world literary scholarship as one of the most complex and contested genres, since it must simultaneously satisfy two opposing demands: fidelity to historical truth and freedom of artistic imagination. The problem of the artistic interpretation of historical reality is significant not only for literary studies but also for cultural studies, the philosophy of history, and questions of national self-awareness. Every

nation, in re-interpreting its historical past through artistic language, inevitably reveals its present system of values, its relationship to itself, and its aspirations for the future.

In Uzbek literary studies, the historical novel took shape beginning with Oybek's *Navoiy* and was further developed in the works of Pirimqul Qodirov, Odil Yoqubov, Mirkarim Osim and Muhammad Ali. In English literature, the foundation of the genre is associated with the name of Walter Scott, whose tradition was later continued in various artistic and aesthetic forms by writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Graves and Hilary Mantel. Although there is no direct line of influence between the two literary traditions, typological similarities and national-cultural differences in the principles of artistic interpretation of historical reality make for a compelling subject of comparative analysis.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative-typological analysis of the principles governing the artistic interpretation of historical reality in Uzbek and English historical novels, to identify shared and distinctive features between the two literary traditions, and to shed light on the complex relationship between artistic truth and documentary truth within the historical novel. The objectives of the research are as follows: 1) to outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of the historical novel genre; 2) to analyze the artistic interpretation of historical figures and events in Uzbek historical fiction (using Oybek, P. Qodirov and O. Yoqubov as examples); 3) to examine the resolution of the same problem in English historical fiction (using W. Scott and H. Mantel as examples); and 4) to systematize the common and distinctive features revealed through this comparison.

### **Methods**

The study employs comparative-historical, structural-typological and hermeneutic methods of literary analysis. The comparative-historical method made it possible to compare the stages of formation of the historical novel genre in the two national literatures together with the social and historical conditions that shaped them. The structural-typological method served to systematically analyze the compositional structure, chronotope, system of characters and stylistic features of the works under discussion. The hermeneutic approach was applied to uncover the inner meaning of the texts, authorial intention, and the artistic-philosophical position taken toward historical reality.

The material selected for analysis includes, from Uzbek literature, Oybek's *Navoiy* (1944), Pirimqul Qodirov's *Starry Nights* (*Yulduzli tunlar*, 1978) and Odil Yoqubov's *Ulugbek's Treasure* (*Ulug'bek xazinasi*, 1974); and, from English literature, Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Waverley* (1814), as well as Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy (2009) as an example of contemporary neo-historical fiction. This selection of material was made because these works, taken together, represent different stages in the development of the historical novel genre in each literature — its formation, its consolidation, and its modernization.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **1. The relationship between the historical figure and the artistic image**

A distinctive feature of Uzbek historical fiction is its practice of placing a real historical figure — Alisher Navoiy, Babur, Mirzo Ulugbek — at the center of the narrative as the protagonist, and of revealing that figure's inner world and spiritual quest through deep psychological analysis. In Navoiy, Oybek portrays the great poet's creative and statesmanly activity against the backdrop of the fifteenth-century social and political landscape of Khurasan; while relying on historical documents, the author simultaneously fills in the protagonist's psychology through artistic imagination. In this approach, the historical figure is transformed into an ideal moral archetype: his weaknesses are pushed into the background, while his role as bearer of the nation's spiritual values and statehood traditions is emphasized.

In the English tradition, by contrast, Walter Scott places real historical figures (for example, King Richard the Lionheart in *Ivanhoe*) not at the center but in the background, choosing instead as his protagonist an ordinary, often fictional character (Wilfred of *Ivanhoe*) caught up in the whirlwind of historical events. This is Scott's invention — the so-called "middle hero" device, later widely adopted throughout world historical fiction — through which the author is able to present a conflict between two historical forces (for instance, the Saxons and the Normans) or two eras from a relatively impartial vantage point capable of explaining both sides.

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* represents a further stage in this typology: it places a real historical figure (Thomas Cromwell) at the center of the narrative as protagonist, yet without idealizing him — portraying him instead as a conflicted, multilayered, and even morally ambiguous individual. This demonstrates a shift in contemporary English historical fiction toward psychological realism and a critical, relativistic understanding of history.

## **2. The relationship between historical fact and artistic invention**

In Uzbek historical fiction, and particularly in Odil Yoqubov's *Ulugbek's Treasure*, historical fact serves as the primary anchor: the tragic relationship between Mirzo Ulugbek and Abdal-Latif is grounded in historical sources, yet deepened through the author's philosophical and moral interpretation. Here, artistic invention manifests mainly at the level of elaborating detail, dialogue and inner experience, while the sequence of events and the principal historical outcome remain unaltered.

The same principle can be observed in Pirimqul Qodirov's *Starry Nights*: the historical course of Babur's life is preserved, while the author reconstructs the protagonist's inner world on the basis of Babur's own poetry, the text of the *Baburnama*, and historical endowment deeds (*vaqf* documents). This approach may be conditionally termed "artistic elaboration faithful to the documentary record."

In the English tradition, especially in Scott's work, the scope of artistic invention is considerably wider: fictional characters, invented plotlines, and at times even a free approach to the sequence of historical events can all be observed. In the preface to *Waverley*, Scott himself states that his principal task is to convey the historical "local colour" — the spirit of the age, its customs and its manner of speech — treating strict adherence to fact as a secondary

concern. This defines what might be called the "romantic-stylizing" orientation of the English historical novel.

### **3. National idea and the function of historical memory**

An important feature of Uzbek historical novels is their close connection to national self-awareness and cultural heritage. Works such as *Navoiy*, created in the mid-twentieth century, performed not only an artistic but also an ideological function: through them, the people were able to restore a sense of pride in their historical roots and in the legacy of their great ancestors. For this reason, historical reality in the Uzbek historical novel is often "monumentalized" — that is, both the protagonists and the age itself are perceived as unified and majestic.

In the English historical novel, beginning with Scott, historical memory served primarily as a vehicle for the idea of national unity (for example, the process by which Saxons and Normans gradually became "the English"). At the contemporary stage, however, as seen in Mantel's work, this function acquires a critical and revisionist character: the author regards official historical interpretation with suspicion and seeks to reconsider the "history of the victors." This difference stems from the fact that the two literatures perform fundamentally different social and cultural functions in relation to history.

### **4. Language and style: devices for creating period colour**

In both traditions, the principal means of creating the spirit of the age is stylization of language. In Uzbek historical fiction, this can be seen in the work of Oybek and Qodirov through the use of classical Persian-Arabic phraseology, historical terminology, and courtly forms of address. Here, the author applies what might be called "moderate stylization": the text remains accessible to the contemporary reader while preserving the spirit of the period.

Walter Scott, for his part, clearly foregrounds archaic elements of the English language, feudal-era terminology, and the social and class distinctions marked in his characters' speech, lending the work a strong sense of historical authenticity. Mantel, meanwhile, chooses to narrate largely in the present tense, drawing the reader directly into the unfolding events and making history feel not like a static past but a living, ongoing process — a distinctive artistic innovation of the contemporary neo-historical novel.

### **Conclusion**

The comparative analysis conducted in this study shows that, although Uzbek and English historical novels share a common typological foundation — the search for a balance between historical fact and artistic imagination — the ways in which this balance is achieved differ according to national literary tradition, social and ideological function, and the artistic thinking of the period. Uzbek historical fiction tends to place a real historical figure at the center of the narrative and to interpret that figure as a moral and spiritual ideal, thereby reinforcing national memory and self-awareness. English historical fiction, beginning with Walter Scott, evolved from an impartial treatment of historical conflict through a fictional "middle hero," toward a critical reconsideration of official historical narratives, as exemplified by Mantel's work.

At the same time, a tendency toward convergence between the two traditions can also be observed: contemporary Uzbek historical fiction (particularly in recent years) increasingly seeks psychological complexity and a willingness to expose the contradictory sides of historical figures, in keeping with broader developments in the world historical novel genre. The results of this study may serve as a methodological foundation for further comparative research into the historical novel genre, in particular for investigating typological connections between Uzbek and other European literatures, including French, Russian and German historical fiction.

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