

THE FATHER IN CRISIS: A COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF PATERNAL IDENTITY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERATURE

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Sanjar Kurbanov Saliyevich
s.kurbanov@buxdpi.uz
Bukhara State Pedagogical Institute

Abstract: This article examines the crisis of paternal identity in English/American and Uzbek literature through a comparative literary approach. The father is treated not only as a family member, but also as a cultural symbol connected with authority, memory, moral continuity and social order. The analysis draws on Shakespeare, Dickens, Hardy, Faulkner, Miller and Hemingway in the Anglophone tradition, and on Alisher Navoi, Abdulla Qodiriy, Abdurauf Fitrat, Shukur Kholmirezayev, Ulmas Umarbekov and Nazar Eshonqul in Uzbek literature. The study combines close reading with psychoanalytic, postcolonial and masculinity-oriented interpretation. It argues that the English and American literary father usually enters crisis through industrial capitalism, individualism and the collapse of personal authenticity, whereas the Uzbek literary father is destabilized by colonial pressure, Soviet ideological transformation and rapid modernization. Despite these differences, both traditions repeatedly imagine the father as a figure who cannot fully protect, provide or transmit meaning to the next generation. The comparative perspective therefore reveals a shared literary structure: paternal authority becomes most visible precisely at the moment of its weakness.

Keywords: father figure, paternal identity, comparative literature, Uzbek literature, English literature, masculinity studies, postcolonial criticism, family and society

Introduction

The father occupies a special position in literary imagination because he is rarely limited to private family life. In many literary systems he represents law, ancestry, social responsibility, moral order and the continuity of a household. At the same time, writers are often more interested in the father who cannot perform these roles than in the father who performs them successfully. The father becomes a dramatic figure when the promises attached to him are larger than his human capacity. This contradiction explains why the father in literature is so frequently old, wounded, absent, silent, self-deceived or morally uncertain.

The present article studies this contradiction in two traditions that are rarely discussed together: English/American and Uzbek literature. Their historical experiences differ, yet both repeatedly ask what happens when the father can no longer guarantee moral, emotional or social continuity.

The aim of this article is to show that the father-in-crisis is not merely a local theme of one national literature. It is a comparative literary structure through which societies imagine the breakdown of authority, responsibility and intergenerational transmission. The article does not claim that English/American and Uzbek fathers fail for the same reasons. On the contrary, their crises have distinct historical causes. The value of comparison lies in seeing how different cultural histories can produce analogous literary forms. The analysis therefore focuses on both convergence and difference: the shared figure of the weakened father and the culturally specific forces that weaken him.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in treating paternal identity as a comparative category rather than as an isolated motif. The article does not merely list fathers in different works; it examines how each literary culture uses the father to register broader changes in social authority. This approach is useful for comparative literature, because it keeps the specificity of national history while also identifying shared artistic mechanisms. The practical value of the analysis is connected with literary pedagogy: the selected texts can be taught together to develop students' understanding of intercultural similarity, historical difference and the symbolic function of family images in fiction.

Materials and methods

The research uses a qualitative comparative-literary method. The primary material consists of selected canonical and critically significant texts in which the father figure is structurally important. In the English/American tradition, the article refers to William Shakespeare's "King Lear", Charles Dickens's "Dombey and Son", Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury", Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" and Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea". In the Uzbek tradition, the analysis includes Alisher Navoi's "Hayrat ul-Abror", Abdulla Qodiriy's "O'tkan kunlar", Abdurauf Fitrat's "Chin muhabbat", Shukur Kholmirezayev's "Qiyomat", Ulmas Umarbekov's "Mening o'g'rigina bolam" and Nazar Eshonqul's "Baxtsiz ota".

The texts were selected according to three criteria. First, the father or father-like figure must have thematic or structural significance. Second, the work must belong to a period that is important for the historical development of its literary tradition. Third, the work must allow the father to be read not only psychologically, but also culturally, as a symbol of social order and its disturbance. This selection makes it

possible to trace paternal identity from the classical and early modern periods to the modern and post-Soviet/post-war contexts.

Table 1. Primary corpus selected for comparative analysis

Tradition	Work	Author	Analytical focus
English/American	King Lear	W. Shakespeare	patriarchal pride and collapse
English/American	Dombey and Son	C. Dickens	commercialized fatherhood
English/American	Jude the Obscure	T. Hardy	social failure and family tragedy
English/American	The Sound and the Fury	W. Faulkner	collapsed Southern patriarchy
English/American	Death of a Salesman	A. Miller	provider myth and self-deception
English/American	The Old Man and the Sea	E. Hemingway	surrogate fatherhood and moral endurance
Uzbek	Hayrat ul-Abror	A. Navoi	wise elder and ethical guidance
Uzbek	O'tkan kunlar	A. Qodiriy	fatherhood and historical displacement
Uzbek	Chin muhabbat	A. Fitrat	tradition, reform and authority
Uzbek	Qiyomat	Sh. Kholmirzayev	Soviet silence and compromised authority
Uzbek	Mening o'g'rigina bolam	U. Umarbekov	late Soviet generational rupture
Uzbek	Baxtsiz ota	N. Eshonqul	post-Soviet paternal loss

The comparative procedure follows a parallel model. Each theme is first examined within its own literary-historical context, and then compared across traditions. This is important because similar images do not always have the same causes. A failed American father formed by the mythology of success and a silent Uzbek father formed by ideological pressure may look similar emotionally, but they belong to different histories. The analysis therefore avoids simple equivalence and instead asks how distinct cultural conditions produce comparable literary anxieties.

Theoretical background: paternal identity as a literary problem

The father figure links private family experience with public order. Psychoanalytic criticism associates the father with law and identity formation, while social criticism treats him as a bearer of class, gender and historical values. In

literature, however, the symbolic expectation of fatherhood is almost always separated from the imperfect man who must embody it.

Analysis and discussion

Both traditions begin with the idea that paternal authority should be stable, but both immediately show that it is fragile. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare fuses the father and the king. Lear's family decision is also a political act, and his political division is also a family wound. The demand that daughters publicly measure their love exposes the weakness of an authority that needs theatrical confirmation. Lear's tragedy begins not when his daughters betray him, but when he misunderstands love as obedience and power as proof of affection. The father is destroyed because he tries to convert emotional life into public ceremony.

In Navoi's didactic and ethical universe, the elder-father figure is different from Lear. His authority does not primarily come from property or state power; it comes from wisdom, moral discipline and the ability to guide others toward justice. Such a figure is closer to the ideal of the *ustoz*, *pir* or enlightened elder. Yet this ideal also contains fragility. A moral father can guide only if society still recognizes the value of moral speech. When greed, pride and political corruption dominate, the wise father remains ethically superior but socially vulnerable. Thus, the classical Uzbek model already contains the possibility of crisis: the father is strong in meaning, but not always strong in worldly power.

The nineteenth century gives the English father a new social mask: the provider formed by property, industry and class ambition. Dickens's *Dombey and Son* is one of the clearest examples. Mr. Dombey imagines his son not as a child with a separate inner life, but as the future continuation of a firm. The title itself turns family into business and business into family. Dombey's emotional failure is inseparable from the economic logic that shapes him. He does not merely neglect affection; he has learned to understand value through ownership, inheritance and public status. His paternal crisis is therefore a crisis of a society in which commercial identity has invaded domestic feeling.

In the Uzbek tradition, the early twentieth century produces an analogous but historically distinct transformation. Jadid literature questioned old forms of authority that prevented education and social renewal. Fitrat's dramatic world often places tradition and reform in conflict. The father who refuses enlightenment may believe he is protecting family honour, but he can also become an obstacle to the very future he wants to preserve. The crisis is not simply that the father is weak; it is that inherited authority must be reinterpreted under new historical conditions.

Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* presents a more balanced and emotionally complex father image. Yusufbek Hoji is not a caricature of backwardness. He carries dignity, social experience and ethical seriousness. Yet the novel's historical world is unstable:

personal love, political conflict, generational desire and social convention collide. The father can advise and embody moral order, but he cannot fully protect the younger generation from the violence of history. This makes the Uzbek father tragic in a specific sense: he may possess genuine value, yet still fail to secure continuity.

The twentieth century radicalizes paternal crisis. In American literature, Arthur Miller's Willy Loman becomes the emblem of the father destroyed by a false promise of success. Willy wants to provide for his sons, but he has confused provision with popularity, money and the dream of being well liked. His tragedy is that he loves his children through an ideology that damages them. He teaches them to desire recognition without discipline and success without truthful self-knowledge. His suicide for insurance money is therefore a terrible distortion of the provider role: he can give materially only by disappearing physically.

Soviet-era Uzbek literature produces a different form of absence. The father is often silent not because he lacks feeling, but because speech itself has become dangerous or ideologically controlled. Traditional sources of paternal legitimacy - religion, national memory, household authority and local custom - were pressured by Soviet modernization and state ideology. The result is a father who may protect the family through caution, silence or compromise, but whose silence also prevents full emotional and cultural transmission. In such texts, paternal defeat is not always spectacular. It is quiet, domestic and historically heavy.

After independence, Uzbek literature gained new possibilities for returning to silenced histories and wounded family memories. The contemporary father is therefore often read not as an unquestioned patriarch, but as a figure of loss, recovery and moral inquiry. Nazar Eshonqul's prose is especially important because it frequently treats memory, guilt and alienation as central experiences of the modern subject. The unhappy or defeated father in such writing is not merely a private failure. He is a sign that the connection between generations has been interrupted and now has to be reconsidered.

The two traditions converge here in an important way. Neither returns to the father as absolute ruler. Both search for more fragile forms of paternal meaning: guidance without domination, memory without coercion, responsibility without authoritarianism. This shift is significant for comparative literature because it shows that the decline of patriarchy does not eliminate the literary need for fatherhood. Instead, it forces literature to imagine what forms of paternal care remain possible after the old structures have lost legitimacy.

Comparative results

The analysis leads to three main results. First, the father-in-crisis is a stable literary pattern in both English/American and Uzbek literature. It appears in classical or early modern forms, becomes sharper under modernity, and continues into

contemporary writing. This means that paternal crisis is not only a modern accident. Literature has always been aware that the father is asked to embody more authority than an individual can safely carry.

The first result is especially important for the interpretation of family imagery. The father-in-crisis does not simply mean a bad or irresponsible father. It means that literature reveals a gap between the social ideal of fatherhood and the real conditions in which that ideal must function. When this gap becomes visible, the plot often turns toward conflict, misunderstanding, silence, sacrifice or moral defeat.

Second, the causes of crisis differ. In the English and American texts, the father is most often damaged by false roles created within the society itself: ownership, success, emotional pride, commercial logic, heroic individualism or class ambition. These fathers are not only victims; they often participate in the values that destroy them. Their crisis is therefore frequently a crisis of authenticity. They cannot be truthful fathers because they are trapped inside social performances.

In the Uzbek texts, the father is more often connected with the problem of transmission. He may possess ethical, religious, cultural or national value, but the historical conditions of transmission are broken. Colonial rule, the pressure of reform, Soviet ideology and post-Soviet uncertainty interrupt the movement of meaning from one generation to another. The Uzbek father therefore appears not only as a failed authority, but also as a wounded carrier of memory. His tragedy is that he cannot always deliver what he still represents.

Third, both traditions show that children suffer not only from excessive paternal authority, but also from its collapse. The absence of a meaningful father does not automatically produce freedom. It can produce confusion, resentment, nostalgia or moral homelessness. Lear's daughters, Dombey's children, Biff Loman, Faulkner's Compsons, Qodiriy's younger generation and contemporary Uzbek protagonists all show that the family becomes unstable when authority loses ethical content. Literature therefore criticizes patriarchy, but it also mourns the loss of responsible paternal guidance.

Conclusion

The findings of the article have significance for the study of comparative literature because they show how a single family image can carry different historical meanings in different cultural systems. In English and American texts, paternal crisis often reveals the weakness of social myths built around success, property and individual achievement. In Uzbek texts, the same crisis more often reveals the difficulty of preserving cultural memory under colonial, Soviet and post-Soviet transformations. The father image therefore becomes a compact artistic form through which literature expresses the condition of an entire society.

The topic is also useful for teaching literature and intercultural communication. When students compare Lear, Dombey, Willy Loman, Yusufbek Hoji or the silent fathers of Soviet-era Uzbek prose, they learn to distinguish universal emotional experience from historically specific meaning. Such comparison prevents superficial reading. It teaches that the same motif can express pride in one context, economic pressure in another, and cultural interruption in a third. For this reason, the father-in-crisis can serve as a productive classroom category for courses in comparative literature, translation studies, cultural studies and the history of national literatures.

This article has argued that the father figure in English/American and Uzbek literature is fundamentally marked by crisis. Across the selected corpus, the father is expected to protect the family, provide material and moral stability, represent continuity and transmit meaning to the next generation. Yet literature repeatedly shows that these expectations exceed the capacity of any single figure, especially when society itself is undergoing deep transformation.

The comparison finally suggests that the father-in-crisis is a literary site where authority, love and social rupture meet. His failure exposes the values that society expected him to carry. Reading English/American and Uzbek texts together shows that paternal crisis is culturally specific in cause, yet broadly human in emotional consequence.

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