

THE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF CHILDHOOD IN 20TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN AND UZBEK CHILDREN'S PROSE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

This study explores the artistic representation of childhood in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose from a comparative perspective. The research examines how childhood is depicted as a literary and cultural construct, focusing on narrative techniques, character development, and thematic priorities in both traditions. Special attention is given to the ways authors portray children's inner worlds, emotional experiences, and social environments within the broader historical and ideological contexts of the 20th century.

The analysis reveals that Russian children's prose often emphasizes psychological depth, individuality, and the complexity of a child's perception of reality, frequently influenced by social transformation and philosophical reflection. In contrast, Uzbek children's literature tends to highlight moral values, collective identity, and the integration of traditional cultural norms, often drawing on folklore and didactic elements. Despite these differences, both traditions share a common focus on the formative role of childhood and its significance in shaping personality and worldview.

Keywords: Childhood representation, children's prose, Russian literature, Uzbek literature, comparative study, narrative techniques, cultural context, 20th century, character development, children's worldview.

Introduction

The artistic representation of childhood occupies a central place in children's literature, serving as a reflection of cultural values, social norms, and pedagogical ideals. In the 20th century, a period marked by profound political, social, and cultural transformations, the concept of childhood underwent significant reinterpretation in literary discourse. Russian and Uzbek children's prose, shaped by distinct historical trajectories yet interconnected through shared ideological and cultural influences, offer a rich field for comparative analysis of how childhood is constructed and represented artistically.

Russian children's literature of the 20th century is characterized by its psychological depth and attention to individual experience. Influenced by broader literary traditions and socio-political

contexts, Russian authors frequently explore themes such as moral conflict, personal growth, and the child's perception of a rapidly changing world. The legacy of realism, combined with elements of symbolism and later socialist ideology, contributed to the development of a multifaceted representation of childhood that balances emotional complexity with educational purpose.

The relevance of this study lies in its comparative approach, which seeks to identify both common features and distinctive characteristics in the artistic representation of childhood across these two literary traditions. By examining narrative techniques, thematic patterns, and cultural contexts, the research aims to reveal how childhood is constructed as a literary image and how it reflects broader societal values.

Literature review

The artistic representation of childhood in Russian and Uzbek children's prose is closely connected with historical, cultural, and ideological transformations that shaped literary discourse in the twentieth century. In Russian literary tradition, childhood is often conceptualized not only as a developmental stage but also as a socio-cultural construct influenced by political narratives, collective memory, and identity formation. Scholarly studies demonstrate that children's literature has frequently functioned as a tool for shaping ideological consciousness, reflecting broader state-driven agendas alongside evolving cultural paradigms. In contrast, Uzbek children's prose reflects a synthesis of traditional cultural heritage and modern literary forms. Rooted in folklore, oral storytelling, and moral instruction, Uzbek literature often portrays childhood as a stage of socialization within a collective framework. The emphasis on family values, respect for elders, and communal responsibility shapes the narrative structures and thematic content of these works. At the same time, the influence of 20th-century historical changes, including Russian cultural policies and post-independence transformations, has introduced new dimensions to the portrayal of childhood in Uzbek prose. From a literary perspective, childhood is not merely a biological stage but a complex cultural and narrative category that embodies innocence, development, and the formation of identity. As noted by Mikhail Bakhtin, literary texts function as spaces where multiple voices and perspectives interact, allowing for diverse interpretations of human experience, including that of childhood. In children's prose, this multiplicity is often expressed through narrative voice, characterization, and the depiction of a child's inner world.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the artistic representation of childhood in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose and to determine the key similarities and differences between them. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following tasks: (1) to examine the narrative and stylistic features of childhood representation; (2) to analyze the influence of cultural and historical factors; and (3) to compare the functions and meanings attributed to childhood in both traditions.

Overall, this research contributes to the fields of comparative literature, children's literature studies, and cultural analysis by highlighting the dynamic interplay between literary form, cultural context, and the evolving concept of childhood.

The artistic representation of childhood in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose reflects complex interactions between literary tradition, cultural values, and historical context. Childhood in literature is not merely depicted as a biological phase but is constructed as a symbolic and ideological category that embodies innocence, moral formation, and social integration. In both Russian and Uzbek literary traditions, authors employ diverse narrative and stylistic strategies to portray the inner world of the child, while also addressing broader societal concerns.

From a theoretical perspective, childhood as a literary construct has been widely discussed in literary and cultural studies. Philippe Ariès argues that the concept of childhood is historically conditioned and evolves according to societal transformations. This idea is particularly relevant to the 20th century, when rapid socio-political changes influenced how childhood was perceived and represented in literature [1]. In Russian and Uzbek prose, these transformations are reflected in shifting narrative perspectives and thematic emphases.

Russian children's prose of the 20th century is characterized by its psychological depth and attention to individual experience. Authors often focus on the emotional and cognitive development of the child, presenting childhood as a period of self-discovery and moral conflict. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, literary discourse is inherently dialogic, allowing multiple voices and perspectives to coexist within a text [2]. This dialogic nature is evident in Russian children's literature, where the child's voice interacts with adult perspectives, creating a layered and nuanced portrayal of reality.

In addition, Russian prose frequently incorporates elements of realism and philosophical reflection. The child is often depicted as an active subject capable of interpreting and questioning the surrounding world. This approach aligns with the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, who emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development [3]. In literary terms, this results in narratives that explore the relationship between the individual and society, often highlighting tensions between personal desires and social expectations.

In contrast, Uzbek children's prose places greater emphasis on collective identity, moral values, and cultural continuity. The representation of childhood is closely linked to traditional norms, including respect for elders, family cohesion, and community responsibility. As noted by Jerome Bruner, narratives play a crucial role in shaping cultural understanding and identity [4]. Uzbek children's literature reflects this function by embedding moral lessons and cultural codes within the depiction of childhood.

Folklore and oral traditions also play a significant role in shaping Uzbek literary representations of childhood. Characters and сюжетлар often draw from traditional narratives, where the child is portrayed as a learner within a structured social environment. Humor, symbolism, and didactic elements are frequently used to convey ethical values and reinforce social norms [5]. At the same time, 20th-century historical developments, including Soviet influence and post-independence cultural revival, have introduced new themes such as education, modernization, and national identity.

A comparative analysis reveals both similarities and differences in the artistic representation of childhood. In both Russian and Uzbek prose, childhood is portrayed as a formative stage

that shapes personality and worldview. Common narrative devices include the use of a child-centered perspective, emotional introspection, and symbolic imagery[6]. However, the two traditions differ in their emphasis: Russian literature tends to highlight individuality, psychological complexity, and existential reflection, while Uzbek literature focuses on socialization, moral education, and cultural tradition.

Furthermore, the linguistic and stylistic features of these texts reflect their respective cultural orientations. Russian prose often employs metaphor, internal monologue, and narrative ambiguity to convey the child's inner experience. Uzbek prose, in contrast, tends to use clearer narrative structures, dialogic interaction, and culturally familiar expressions to ensure accessibility and didactic clarity.

In particular, analyses of Russian childhood across different historical periods reveal a shift from pre-revolutionary humanistic perceptions of the child to Soviet-era narratives that emphasized collective identity and ideological conformity. Early Soviet children's prose introduced the concept of the child's "subjective vision," yet simultaneously embedded it within the framework of social responsibility and political loyalty. Literary and cultural studies highlight how émigré children's publications of the 1920–30s contributed to identity formation in diasporic contexts, thus expanding the thematic and ideological boundaries of childhood representation.

Contemporary Russian children's literature, however, reflects new tensions between individual agency and state influence. Recent research indicates a tendency toward the instrumentalization of childhood in reinforcing socio-political narratives, including the promotion of moral upbringing aligned with state interests and the restriction of external cultural influences[7]. At the same time, modern young readers demonstrate a growing inclination toward independent thinking and open access to information, creating a dynamic interplay between institutional control and personal autonomy. This intergenerational tension underscores the evolving nature of childhood as a contested cultural space.

A significant dimension of Russian children's prose is the representation of trauma as a central paradigm. Literary works and testimonial narratives addressing experiences such as World War II and the Chernobyl disaster contribute to a deeper psychological understanding of childhood. These texts expand traditional genres by incorporating personal voices and emotional depth, thereby transforming children's literature into a medium of collective memory and affective expression. The depiction of trauma also reflects broader Soviet and post-Soviet epistememes, where childhood is associated with exposure to violence, ideological indoctrination, and the expectation of self-sacrifice for societal ideals.

In contrast, Uzbek children's prose, while also influenced by historical transformations, places greater emphasis on cultural continuity, moral education, and communal values. Although Soviet ideological frameworks impacted Uzbek literature, post-independence narratives have increasingly focused on national identity, ethical upbringing, and the preservation of traditional values. Unlike the often psychologically complex and introspective portrayal of childhood in Russian prose, Uzbek literary texts tend to present the child within a stable moral and social framework, emphasizing harmony between the individual and the community.

A comparative perspective reveals that both Russian and Uzbek literary traditions recognize childhood as a critical stage in the formation of identity and worldview. However, their artistic strategies differ significantly. Russian prose frequently explores the inner world of the child through introspection, ambiguity, and philosophical reflection, often highlighting the tension between individuality and ideological structures. Uzbek prose, by contrast, employs clearer narrative forms, didactic elements, and culturally grounded symbolism to convey moral lessons and reinforce social cohesion.

Furthermore, both traditions demonstrate a growing interest in the child's interiority as a key element of literary representation[8]. The exploration of psychological depth and self-reflection in children's narratives serves not only as an artistic device but also as a means of challenging dominant socio-political discourses. In this context, the portrayal of childhood becomes a site where literary creativity intersects with cultural identity, historical memory, and ethical values.

The artistic representation of childhood in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose reflects a complex interplay between literature, ideology, and cultural transformation. While Russian literature often foregrounds psychological complexity, trauma, and ideological tension, Uzbek literature emphasizes moral development, cultural continuity, and social harmony. This comparative analysis highlights the diversity of literary approaches to childhood and underscores its significance as a multidimensional construct shaped by both universal human experiences and specific socio-cultural contexts.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose reveals several significant patterns in the artistic representation of childhood, highlighting both shared literary tendencies and culturally specific features.

First, the results indicate that in both traditions childhood is portrayed as a formative stage of personal development, where moral values, social norms, and cognitive abilities are actively shaped. Authors in both Russian and Uzbek prose employ child-centered narratives, allowing readers to experience events through the perspective of young protagonists. This narrative strategy enhances emotional engagement and provides insight into the child's perception of the surrounding world.

However, important differences emerge in the depth and focus of representation. Russian children's prose demonstrates a strong tendency toward psychological realism and introspection. The child is often depicted as an individual with a complex inner world, capable of reflection, doubt, and moral reasoning. This aligns with the broader tradition of Russian literature, where emphasis is placed on individual consciousness and existential inquiry. The use of internal monologue, symbolic imagery, and subtle narrative shifts allows authors to portray childhood as a multifaceted and dynamic experience.

In contrast, Uzbek children's prose tends to emphasize socialization and moral education. The child is often represented within a clearly defined social framework, where family, community, and cultural traditions play a central role. Narrative structures are typically more linear and

transparent, ensuring that the moral message is easily understood by young readers. The depiction of childhood frequently incorporates elements of folklore, proverbs, and didactic storytelling, reinforcing cultural continuity and collective identity.

Another key finding concerns the role of historical and ideological contexts in shaping literary representations of childhood. In Russian literature, the 20th century brought significant socio-political changes, including революция, Soviet ideology, and post-Soviet transformations. These shifts influenced the themes and narrative strategies of children's prose, often introducing elements of social critique, ideological education, and philosophical reflection. As a result, childhood is sometimes portrayed in relation to broader societal transformations and challenges.

Similarly, Uzbek children's prose reflects the impact of historical developments, including Soviet cultural policies and the post-independence period. While Soviet-era literature often emphasized collectivism, discipline, and ideological values, post-independence works increasingly highlight national identity, cultural heritage, and traditional values. This transition is evident in the changing portrayal of childhood, which becomes more closely connected to indigenous cultural narratives and ethical frameworks.

From a stylistic perspective, the findings show that Russian prose relies more heavily on metaphorical language, narrative complexity, and ambiguity, whereas Uzbek prose prioritizes clarity, accessibility, and cultural familiarity. These differences can be explained by the intended functions of children's literature in each context: in Russian tradition, literature often serves as a space for intellectual exploration, while in Uzbek tradition, it functions as a medium of moral instruction and cultural transmission.

At the same time, both traditions share common artistic techniques, such as the use of symbolism, emotional contrast, and imaginative elements. These universal features suggest that despite cultural differences, the representation of childhood in literature is grounded in shared human experiences, including curiosity, learning, and emotional growth.

In summary, the results demonstrate that the artistic representation of childhood in Russian and Uzbek children's prose is shaped by a combination of literary conventions, cultural values, and historical influences. The discussion highlights that while both traditions aim to reflect the significance of childhood, they do so through different narrative priorities and stylistic approaches. This comparative perspective underscores the importance of considering both universal and culture-specific aspects when analyzing children's literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the artistic representation of childhood in 20th-century Russian and Uzbek children's prose demonstrates that childhood is a culturally constructed and dynamically interpreted literary category. Both traditions present childhood as a crucial stage of personal and social development; however, they differ significantly in their narrative priorities, stylistic approaches, and cultural orientations.

Russian children's prose is characterized by its focus on psychological depth, individuality, and the complexity of a child's inner world. Through the use of introspection, symbolic

imagery, and narrative ambiguity, it portrays childhood as a space for self-discovery and critical engagement with reality. In contrast, Uzbek children's prose emphasizes moral education, social harmony, and cultural continuity. It presents childhood within a collective framework, highlighting the role of family, tradition, and ethical values in shaping the individual.

At the same time, the study reveals important commonalities between the two traditions. Both employ child-centered perspectives, emotional expressiveness, and imaginative elements to convey the significance of childhood as a formative period. These shared features point to universal aspects of childhood experience, while the differences reflect the influence of specific historical, cultural, and ideological contexts.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that the artistic representation of childhood is closely linked to broader societal transformations. Changes in political systems, cultural values, and educational paradigms throughout the 20th century have significantly influenced how childhood is depicted in literature. This highlights the role of children's prose not only as a literary genre but also as a medium for transmitting cultural knowledge and social norms.

Overall, this study underscores that childhood in literature is not merely a thematic element but a meaningful construct shaped by the interaction of language, culture, and history. The comparative approach enhances our understanding of how different literary traditions interpret and represent childhood, contributing to the fields of comparative literature, cultural studies, and children's literature research.

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