

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Gradual Development of Memoir Writing in Uzbek Literature

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VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue03 2026

PAGE: 27-31

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Abstract

This article reveals the specific reasons behind memoir writing, its roots, the process of its formation in Uzbek literature, and the philosophical–aesthetic foundations of the writer’s (creative person’s) image. In other words, the individual’s anxieties on the path toward self-discovery are identified through the figures of world writers.

KEY WORDS

Memoir, memoir narrative, interpretation, image, era, turning point, style, form.

INTRODUCTION

From the 1990s onward, Sh. Kholmiraev laid the cornerstone for the genre of autobiographical essays about poets and scholar-writers such as O. Yoqubov, M. Qoshjonov, U. Umarbekov, O. Usmonov, R. Choriev, and A. Oripov. Sh. Kholmiraev’s great merit lies in the fact that he could portray reality with striking precision and rich artistry, making characters appear before our eyes like living individuals. This requires a writer or creator to possess great perseverance, courage, exactness, integrity, and an objective attitude toward texts and sources; as a result, there can be no doubt about how vast the genre’s possibilities still are.

In an autobiographical work (regardless of its specific type), when classifying the degree of harmony between scholarly rigor and artistry, the author compares and emphasizes the importance of the text’s scholarly, artistic, psychological, and socio-publicistic spirit. The American scholar Paul Kendall classifies autobiographical writing into the following eight aspects, showing how their distinctive features can rise and be differentiated from artistry toward scholarly method:

1. a novel cast in a biographical style;
2. an artistically embellished (belles-lettres) biography;
3. an interpretive biography;

4. a psychological biography;
5. a biography depicting life and the era;
6. a biography written on a research basis;
7. an academic biography;
8. an epistolary (“letters about a life”) biography. [3, 127]

This process itself proves how important a systematic approach is in the semantics of autobiographical works. Thus, from the standpoint of scope and perception, the autobiographical genre guarantees the emergence of distinctive experiences (interpretation and depiction) that string together the formulas “human-writer-hero-life” like beads on a single thread.

An autobiographical work written in poetic form by one creator and addressed to another can also be assessed by how well it reflects certain facets of the genre. For example, in the following quatrain, the People’s Poet of Uzbekistan Abdulla Oripov encourages the fuller articulation of the vivid image of the People’s Writer of Uzbekistan, N. Aminov (in Uzbek language):

Ёзганим шу – ёдлик ва хат бўлади,

Неъматни топганим чин бахт бўлади.

Бир ўзбек шоири шу сўзни айтай,

Ишончли битта дўст Неъмат бўлади. [10, 15]

In the cited quatrain, the memory and character of the satirist writer and remarkable person Ne'mat Aminov are glorified as a symbol of friendship and loyalty. In the poet's four lines – conceived as a letter, a memorial note, an essay – the complexity of human activity becomes visible; the truthful panorama of a life-caravan passing among friends and foes emerges; and the instinct to live through life as a mature citizen is vividly felt. From this standpoint, it should be acknowledged that poetic, prose, and dramatic forms of autobiographical writing are widely found in Uzbek literature, and that, however complex it may be to express an individual's life path, certain scholarly-artistic searches are indeed taking place in this field.

We can also observe that historians, writers, and literary scholars such as B. Ahmedov, H. Qudratullaev, and H. Sultonov, in further developing the autobiographical genre, have broadly illuminated the place of historical figures in Uzbek literature and in the history of our statehood through their invaluable works. Every era has criteria that call people to reflection and debate; without them, society cannot progress. It is evident that the views of the philosopher J.-P. Sartre on this matter remain relevant today: "When we say that a person is responsible, this does not mean that they are responsible only for their own personality; they are responsible for all people. When we say that a person chooses themselves, we mean that each of us chooses ourselves; yet at the same time, we also want to say that, in choosing ourselves, we choose all people." [12, 115]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, we chose enlightenment and science and began implementing the concept of our Jadid forefathers in the struggle to free our people from oppression. Today, when we once again measure the truthfulness of those principles and consider the path taken by our ancestors who sacrificed themselves for the people, other issues also become clearer alongside the moral reflections mentioned above.

Reflecting on the criteria and foundations of artistic value, Professor B. Sarimsoqov advances the following ideas: "A true creator must build their own aesthetic world, their own realm. If they merely imitate nature and, losing harmony with it, merge with it completely, they cannot be regarded as a

creator. But if, without losing harmony with nature, they are able to create their own artistic 'nature' – and if such an artistic nature is impossible to produce within empirical reality – then such a creator may be considered a genuine artist. For example, A. Qodiriy was able to depict, in a profound, precise, and captivating manner, the socio-political, economic, and cultural life of the Kokand Khanate and the Tashkent Beklik on the eve of Turkestan's conquest by Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, against the backdrop of the love adventures and tragedy of two young people." [11, 58]

Indeed, B. Sarimsoqov draws attention to two aspects: first, the life philosophy reflected in a true creator's nature transfers, in one way or another, into the artistic work; second, the "heated" writings emerging from the inner fire of a sharp-minded, active intellectual like A. Qodiriy point to the long-standing socio-economic dependence of the Uzbek people, and to the independence achieved – when "the sun touched our shoulders." In the broad and substantial memoir "About My Father" ("Отам ҳақида"), devoted to A. Qodiriy, the unprecedented potential of the autobiographical genre becomes clearly visible. In particular, using A. Qodiriy's childhood in harmony with his personality becomes an important factor in clarifying the theoretical aspects of the problem.

In studying the gradual development of the autobiographical genre in modern Uzbek literature, the following three classifications make it possible to interpret it correctly:

1. the period when autobiographical genres created in the 1920s-1940s (articles, essays, publicistic writing in newspapers and journals) emerged;
2. autobiographical works of the 1950s-1990s – literary portraits and memoirs written from the lives of famous people;
3. autobiographical works created from the 1990s to the present (commemorative narratives about historical figures, Jadids, and famous people).

The reason for this classification is that after World War I, the socio-spiritual activity of Jadid thinkers – up to 1938 – became extremely intense. As a result, in their memoirs, signs of the genre's enrichment appeared due to both external and internal factors. Second, in autobiographical works after World War II, attention increased to interpreting the pre-war period and the subsequent "days of learning," and to the honorable path traversed up to the years of stagnation. Then, from independence to the present, a tendency was chosen to

restore the reputations of our era's heroes, to clear their good names, and to create works devoted to the lives and activities of the most talented creators of the twentieth century – regarded as national pride and honor. At the core of this aim was a call to the rising young generation to know the past and recent history, and to guide them toward becoming closely acquainted with our intellectuals who were exiled, executed, or imprisoned under false accusations. This principle made a major contribution to the genre's gradual development.

From the 1970s onward, Prof. N. Karimov, in order to increase the genre's social activity, first contributed by developing it through scholarly and artistic-publicistic, educational works devoted to the brightest moments of the life and creativity of Hamid Olimjon – the singer of happiness and joy. Later he made a major contribution by writing biographical documentary novels devoted to A. Qodiriy, Cholpon, Usmon Nosir, Oybek, Gʻafur Gʻulom, Abdulla Qahhor, and other leaders of enlightenment. In this very approach, the speech of the writer and the scholar merges, and the narrative prefers to engage with the "interesting games of fate," slander, and enmity through enlightenment ideals and precise facts from archival documents.

Academician N. Karimov explains his recollections of Oybek as follows: "Oybek's heart was filled with a deep love for literature; he had been Cholpon's student, and he cherished Abdulla Qodiriy and other great figures – therefore, he later devoted his life to literature. Oybek's greatness lay in the fact that, at a time when Qodiriy and Cholpon were subjected to repression and their works could not be read, the newly emerging genre of the novel could have died out. Realist prose genres and realist poetry might have disappeared. In order not to let their absence be felt, Oybek – although he was a fine poet – turned to prose. By writing the novels "Qutlugʻ Qon" and "Navoi", he raised to a new peak the genre pioneered by A. Qodiriy and Cholpon. After that, every minute of life had to be used productively for Oybek. He spent the last seventeen years of his life in illness. After suffering a stroke in 1951, he could no longer speak clearly, and his hand could not write. Nevertheless, when his wife Zarifa, who worked at the Agricultural Institute, returned from work, he would dictate in the evenings, producing two novels, epics, and articles – one of the factors that testified to Oybek's civic courage and greatness." [14]

Indeed, after World War II, especially for Oybek – the author of an autobiographical novel – unjust slanders were made, and

the writing of "Navoi" was not easy. The autobiographical novel "Navoi", written for the 500th anniversary of Hazrat Navoi, is, in terms of genre and composition, a high work of art demonstrating the writer's mastery as an intellectual – this is not an exaggeration. With the demands of the era, it becomes clear that the image of Navoi reflected in the text is the fruit of Oybek's own distinctive human feelings. These are fully expressed in Z. Saidnosirova's autobiographical memoirs titled "Oybegim mening". If we say that such aspects form a distinctive analytical school leading to a poetic interpretation of the autobiographical genre in Uzbek literature, then undoubtedly great searches, losses, and pains are embodied behind it.

It is evident that the genre's modified forms in each era rose to a fairly high level. For if we think today, the fact that a sensitive scholar like N. Karimov could thoroughly examine some manuscript fonds preserved in archives – treating artistic texts as letters/documents – study extensive information carefully, and substantiate it, is itself a striking proof that this was a great act of courage.

"Khoja Afzal began to recount, one after another, the events that had taken place after Navoi left the capital. The king had taken his inclination toward revelry and debauchery to an extreme. Here and there, in every corner and crevice, various plotters – wriggling like snakes and unable to find a way to discharge the dark rage that had gathered in their hearts – suddenly raised their heads. Treachery and bribery grew rampant in the divan and throughout all offices. Majididdin, having seized the reins of the state, spews fire and poison like a dragon at everything good. He considers himself the king's deputy. Not only Navoi's friends and close companions, but even those who praised his poetry, acknowledged his justice, or showed him goodwill, found themselves under Majididdin's ruthless cudgel. Under the guise of raising funds for the treasury, Majididdin is plundering the people and stripping them bare. Some beks and various officials who are in league with the chief minister obtain vast lands with a single decree and spend weeks at lavish banquets and gatherings, drinking and gambling. They bring girls to such vile, corrupt dens and smother them in the foul fumes of debauchery..." [9, 284]

Oybek, who was able to craft the distinctive plot of an autobiographical novel, remained faithful throughout his entire creative career to writing with the same devotion. This is because, as N. Karimov puts it, Navoi's entire legacy – an author whom Oybek read with deep admiration – reflects

realities that are not confined to one time or place: "After Navoi was appointed governor and sent to Astarabad, the unpleasant events that occurred in Herat have happened in all eras and in all countries. Events of this kind, or similar ones, are still occurring continuously in different parts of the world today. Having heard of the harsh situation in which Herat and its people found themselves in Majiddin's time, Navoi utters the above words in an effort to somewhat comfort Khoja Afzal and to put an end to misfortunes; and in these words there is not an absence of lofty rhetoric alongside concrete action. Yet because this is connected with the specific poetics of the novel, we perceive in Navoi's words rays that illuminate his image as a humanist poet and statesman. In general, in these and similar scenes of Oybek's novel, Navoi's characteristic love of justice and truth is interpreted on so elevated a plane that this feature – untypical of, and even alien to, Western literature – signals the distinctiveness of Uzbek literature as a national literature." [8, 141]

Accordingly, in the artistry of an autobiographical work, a three-dimensional measure-yesterday-today-tomorrow appears as an aesthetic criterion, complementing itself through the impartiality of "matter" (reality). In the essence of this measure, we sense that in the world of Navoi as a person of intellect and great thought—a broadly thinking PERSON—there is reflection of concern for humanity's interests. At the same time, Navoi is seen not merely as a governor or official, but as a complete wise leader who responds to the pains of the era in time, learns of people's spiritual condition, offers patronage, and, when necessary, fearlessly expresses his views to the court elite—hence the reader's aesthetic amazement at Oybek's talent.

History is interwoven into the architectonics of an autobiographical work. The historical dimension and its criteria find their proper place and full expression in the composition of an autobiographical text. In particular, in works written in the genre of the historical-autobiographical sketch, at certain moments reality is presented primarily according to artistic principles, while at others a publicistic tone becomes dominant. We can see that this very feature is preserved in the memoir about A. Qodiriy. In this regard, it is no coincidence that the author says: "In this genre, I strove, to the best of my ability, to recount what I saw and lived through, and what I heard – whether lofty or humble:

"Due to certain technical reasons, the last two chapters were not included in the first edition of the book. Moreover, after a

considerable time had passed following that first edition, some new information was collected, the theme of the work was somewhat refined, and the understanding of A. Qodiriy expanded significantly. Of course, these memoirs still cannot be regarded as a complete account of A. Qodiriy's life and creative work. We hope that, with the assistance of those who knew him, this memoir will become more comprehensive." [13, 4]

In the presented passage, the author worries that it is too early to rush to a final conclusion about A. Qodiriy: there may still be facets we do not know, have not studied, and have not heard. Indeed, A. Qodiriy is a great ocean. It is beyond doubt that the luminous face of a person who, in a short life, lived in an orderly manner, devoted his lifetime to reading, study, and the passion for writing, and spent his life in struggle for Turkestan's freedom, will yet provide answers to many questions for the future.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is that, in the history of twentieth-century Uzbek literature, another important phenomenon is the reflection of time and space in the poetics of autobiographical writing; and, of course, the introduction of ideology also does not fail to exert a noticeable influence. The very fact that, in the eras in which A. Qodiriy, Oybek, and A. Qahhor lived, extremely sharp clashes, struggles, and daily experiences occurred constantly demands a deep intellectual approach to the problem. For the correctness, reliability, and clarity of any information must be guaranteed by relying on precise facts and by clarifying them on the basis of documents. This principle allows us to understand the interpretive scope of the work more profoundly.

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