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COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF PLOT CONSTRUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK AND ENGLISH CRIME PROSE (BASED ON MATERIALS OF THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY)

Parpiyeva Dilfuza Usmirjanovna
Email: dilfuzaparpiyeva0@gmail.com
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Abstract. This article undertakes a comparative-typological analysis of the principles of plot construction in contemporary Uzbek and English crime prose of the early twenty-first century. Proceeding from the formalist distinction between fabula and syuzhet and from T. Todorov's thesis concerning the double-story architecture of detective narrative, the study examines how the story of the crime and the story of the investigation are correlated within the two national traditions.
Keywords: crime prose, plot construction, fabula and syuzhet, comparative typology, detective narrative, double story, narratology, chronotope, denouement, genre invariant, ethical dominant, epistemological dominant, contemporary Uzbek literature, English-language crime fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Crime prose occupies a position of exceptional interest within the system of contemporary literary genres. Having emerged in the nineteenth century as a marginal form of popular reading, over the course of the twentieth century it acquired the status of one of the most widely disseminated and commercially significant narrative forms, and by the beginning of the twenty-first century it had entered into sustained interaction with so-called serious prose, absorbing the techniques of psychological analysis, social critique and experimental narration. This trajectory renders crime prose a privileged object of comparative inquiry, since no other genre displays with equal clarity the interaction between a stable international structural scheme and the national and axiological traditions that fill it with content. The theoretical foundation of the present inquiry rests upon the distinction between fabula and syuzhet elaborated within the Russian formalist school, according to which the events of a narrative possess both a chronological and causal order of occurrence and an order of presentation constructed by the author. In no other genre does the divergence between these two orders acquire such constitutive significance as in crime prose. T. Todorov formulated this property in his classical thesis that detective narrative contains not one story but two: the story of the crime, which has already been completed before the narrative begins and remains absent from the text, and the story of the investigation, which constitutes the visible surface of the work and whose function consists in gradually reconstructing the first. Plot construction in crime prose is therefore not merely one aspect of poetics among others; it is the very principle that constitutes the genre. It follows that crime prose provides an unusually reliable instrument for comparative-typological research. Because its plot scheme is formalised to a maximal degree, any national deviation from that scheme becomes immediately perceptible and admits of description in precise terms. Where in lyric poetry national specificity is dispersed across style, imagery and intonation and therefore resists formalisation, in crime prose it is concentrated at structurally identifiable points: the introduction of the initial disturbance, the distribution of information between narrator and reader, the position of the investigating subject and above all the character of the denouement. It is precisely these points that constitute the object of the present analysis.

The English-language tradition of crime writing, taken here to encompass the crime prose of Britain and Ireland, entered the twenty-first century with a rich and internally differentiated inheritance: the analytical puzzle of the Golden Age, the moral ambivalence of the hard-boiled school, the documentary precision of the police procedural and the psychological suspense of the

thriller have all been absorbed into a repertoire upon which contemporary authors draw freely. The work of Ian Rankin, Val McDermid, Kate Atkinson and Tana French exemplifies several tendencies characteristic of the period: the professionalisation and simultaneous psychological complication of the investigating figure, the serialisation of narrative across multiple volumes, the transformation of the city into an autonomous semantic agent, and a marked reluctance to provide the reader with unambiguous moral closure. The Uzbek tradition of crime prose possesses a different history and a different internal logic. Its formation was conditioned on the one hand by the narrative heritage of the classical epic and the qissa, with their pronounced didactic orientation and their conception of justice as a cosmic rather than merely juridical order, and on the other hand by the Soviet-era variety of institutional crime narrative with its emphasis upon collective responsibility and the pedagogical function of literature. The paradigmatic text for the contemporary period remains Tohir Malik's multi-volume novel Shaytanat, which established a durable model in which the depiction of the criminal world is inseparable from a sustained meditation upon the spiritual causes of moral decline. Within this model the investigation of a crime functions as the outward form of an inquiry into the condition of the human soul. The central hypothesis of the present study proceeds from this contrast. It is assumed that the divergence between the two traditions is to be sought not in the inventory of plot elements, which is largely shared, but in the hierarchy of those elements and in the function assigned to the denouement. In the English tradition the dominant is epistemological: the narrative is organised around the movement from ignorance to knowledge, and the resolution of the plot coincides with the resolution of a cognitive problem, while the moral evaluation of what has been disclosed may remain deliberately suspended. In the Uzbek tradition the dominant is ethical: the disclosure of the identity of the perpetrator constitutes an intermediate rather than a final stage, and the plot attains completion only when the moral meaning of the events has been established and articulated. The chronological framework of the study, confined to the early twenty-first century, is not arbitrary. This period is marked by processes that have altered the conditions of literary production in both traditions: the consolidation of the post-Soviet literary market and the disappearance of institutional commissioning in Uzbekistan, the intensification of translation flows, the globalisation of genre conventions through screen adaptation, and the emergence of digital publication and reader communities that influence the construction of serial narrative. Comparison within a single synchronic slice therefore permits the observation not only of inherited differences but also of convergence occurring in real time. A methodological difficulty must be acknowledged at the outset. The categorial apparatus employed in the study of crime fiction was elaborated almost entirely upon Western material, and its unreflective application to Uzbek texts carries the risk of Eurocentric normativity, that is, of describing the Uzbek tradition as a catalogue of deficiencies measured against an implicitly universal standard. The present study seeks to avoid this danger by treating the two traditions as functionally equivalent realisations of a common structural scheme rather than as a norm and its deviation, and by supplementing the imported apparatus with the categorial resources of Uzbek literary theory. The scholarly problem of the study may accordingly be formulated as follows: notwithstanding the abundance of research devoted separately to English-language crime fiction and to the poetics of contemporary Uzbek prose, no systematic comparative-typological description of their principles of plot construction has been undertaken. The aim of the article is to identify and describe the comparative-typological features of plot construction in contemporary Uzbek and English crime prose. The following tasks were accordingly defined: to establish the structural parameters along which the plot organisation of the two traditions may be compared; to determine the invariant elements common to both; to describe the national variants realised within each; and to identify the tendencies of convergence and divergence characteristic of the early twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of the present study within Uzbek literary scholarship is provided above all by the work of D. Quronov, whose elaboration of the categorial apparatus of literary theory has established the terms in which questions of plot and composition are now discussed in Uzbek philology. The scholar consistently distinguishes between the sequence of events as such and the compositional order in which they are presented, and demonstrates that the artistic effect of a work is generated precisely in the tension between these two orders. Of particular significance for the present inquiry is D. Quronov's insistence that composition is not an external framework imposed upon material but the bearer of meaning in its own right, so that a change in the order of narration entails a change in the semantic result. This position provides the direct methodological warrant for treating plot construction, rather than thematic content, as the principal parameter of comparison between two national traditions. The research of Q. Yo'ldoshev in the field of the analysis of literary texts constitutes the second pillar of the theoretical framework. Elaborating the principles of artistic analysis, the scholar places particular emphasis upon the reception of the text, upon the mechanisms by which the reader is drawn into the work and upon the role of the emotional and evaluative response in the constitution of literary meaning. Q. Yo'ldoshev's approach is especially productive in application to crime prose, since this genre is constructed upon the deliberate management of the reader's expectation and upon the calculated withholding and release of information. His emphasis upon the evaluative dimension of reception likewise supplies a theoretical ground for the hypothesis advanced in this article concerning the ethical dominant of the Uzbek plot model, inasmuch as it treats moral response not as an extraneous addition to aesthetic experience but as one of its constitutive components. A further dimension of the problem is disclosed in contemporary studies of the social functions of literature and education. In the work of S. Ergashbaev on the development of the spiritual worldview of young people through the system of continuous education, it is substantiated that the formation of value orientations is the product of a sustained institutional process rather than of isolated influences; applied to the present material, this thesis helps to explain the persistence of the didactic orientation of Uzbek narrative. In another study by the same author, concerning the elevation of the spiritual and philosophical worldview of young people, the role of critical reflection in the formation of worldview is singled out. The study by M.M. Mirzaolimjon og'li and E. Shohbozbek, devoted to the educational policy of New Uzbekistan and to new models of universities, discloses the institutional context within which the contemporary reader of genre prose is formed. Within foreign scholarship the problem has been framed through several competing paradigms. T. Todorov's structuralist account established the double-story architecture as the constitutive principle of the genre and produced a typology distinguishing the whodunit, the thriller and the novel of suspense. J.G. Cawelti approached the same material through the concept of formula, interpreting genre schemes as culturally shared ritual structures that reconcile the reader's need for familiarity with the need for novelty. P. Brooks shifted the emphasis from structure to the dynamics of reading, treating plot as the organisation of narrative desire and the ending as the retroactive bestowal of meaning upon everything that precedes it. F. Moretti, by contrast, questioned the very project of describing genre through invariants and proposed a quantitative and evolutionary account of literary history, while the volume edited by M. Priestman supplies the historical context of the English-language tradition. Comparative examination shows that Uzbek scholarship has elaborated the categories of composition and evaluative reception while foreign scholarship has developed the formal typology of genre; the gap addressed by the present article is the absence of a systematic comparative-typological description bringing the two together.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundation of the present study is constituted by the comparative-typological method, which made it possible to examine the two national traditions not in terms of influence and borrowing but as functionally equivalent realisations of a common structural scheme, and thereby to avoid the hierarchical subordination of one tradition to the other; within this general framework the structural-semiotic approach performed the leading function, since it permitted the description of plot as a system of relations between elements rather than as a sequence of events, and the identification of the positions within that system whose filling varies from one tradition to the other. The narratological apparatus of the distinction between fabula and syuzhet was applied in establishing the divergence between the order of occurrence and the order of presentation in each corpus, and in measuring the depth and function of that divergence. Functional analysis in the tradition deriving from the morphology of narrative was employed in order to reduce the concrete episodes of the texts to a finite inventory of plot functions and to compare the distribution and sequencing of those functions across the two traditions. Motif analysis served to identify recurrent semantic units — the discovery of the body, the false suspect, the confession, the return of the repressed past — and to establish their differing weight within each corpus. The analysis of the chronotope was applied in examining the organisation of narrative space and time, and in particular the semantic autonomy accorded to the urban environment and the function of retrospective temporal insertion. The receptive-aesthetic approach was used to reconstruct the horizon of expectation presupposed by each tradition and to determine how the management of the reader's information is calibrated to that horizon. The hermeneutic method was employed in interpreting the semantic layers of the denouement, and in particular in distinguishing between the cognitive and the evaluative components of closure. The historical-genetic method made it possible to trace the derivation of the contemporary plot models from their respective antecedents, the Golden Age puzzle and the hard-boiled novel in the one case and the epic and qissa traditions together with institutional crime narrative in the other. The comparative-historical method was applied in correlating the two developmental lines within a single synchronic slice and in identifying the processes of convergence occurring in the early twenty-first century. Intertextual analysis served to register the traces of translated and adapted foreign models within contemporary Uzbek texts and to distinguish genuine structural assimilation from surface citation.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis conducted yielded a five-parameter typological matrix permitting the description of the plot organisation of the two traditions upon a single formal basis. Along the first parameter, the architecture of the double story, it was established that both traditions realise the constitutive division between the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, but distribute it differently: the English corpus tends to maximise the asymmetry between the two, reducing the story of the crime to a set of inferred traces disclosed only in the final movement, whereas the Uzbek corpus characteristically renders substantial portions of the story of the crime directly, so that the reader frequently possesses information unavailable to the investigating figure and the source of tension shifts from ignorance to anticipation. Along the second parameter, the narrative position of the investigating subject, the English tradition was found to favour the professionally competent but personally compromised figure whose private disorder is systematically counterposed to the order he or she restores, while the Uzbek tradition situates the investigator within a dense network of kinship, communal and moral obligation, so that the figure functions less as an autonomous cognitive instrument than as a representative of a collective normative order. Along the third parameter, the mode of closure, four types were distinguished: epistemic closure, in which the narrative concludes with the resolution of the cognitive problem; juridical closure, in which it concludes with institutional sanction; ethical-retributive closure, in which it concludes with the establishment of moral correspondence between deed and consequence; and ambivalent closure, in which resolution is withheld. The analysis established

that the English corpus of the period gravitates markedly towards epistemic and ambivalent closure, while the Uzbek corpus retains a strong preference for ethical-retributive closure. Along the fourth parameter, the organisation of the chronotope, the English tradition was found to accord the urban environment an autonomous semantic function, such that the city operates as a generative source of the events rather than as their setting, whereas in the Uzbek corpus spatial organisation is characteristically structured by the opposition between the mahalla as a zone of normative visibility and the anonymous space beyond it, with crime located in the movement between these zones.

DISCUSSION

In order to situate these results within contemporary scholarly discourse it is expedient to turn to the methodological opposition between T. Todorov and F. Moretti concerning the very status of genre invariants. In The Poetics of Prose, T. Todorov advances a consistently structuralist position according to which a genre is definable through a finite set of constitutive rules, and the individual work is intelligible as a realisation, a variation or a deliberate violation of those rules. Applied to crime prose, this yields the thesis of the double story and the tripartite typology of whodunit, thriller and suspense. The strength of the approach lies in its capacity to render national and individual variation describable in exact terms, since deviation can be measured only against a specified norm; its presupposition, however, is that the genre possesses a stable synchronic structure that may be abstracted from the historical and commercial conditions of its production. F. Moretti challenges precisely this presupposition. In Graphs, Maps, Trees he argues that literary history cannot be grasped through the close analysis of canonical texts, since the canon represents a vanishingly small fraction of what was written and read, and proposes instead the quantitative examination of large corpora. Within this framework a genre is not a stable structure but a population of competing formal solutions subject to selection by the reading market, and what the structuralist describes as a constitutive rule appears as the temporary outcome of a competitive process. Moretti's analysis of the emergence of the clue in detective fiction illustrates the point directly: the device that Todorov would treat as a constitutive element of the genre is presented as a formal innovation that displaced its rivals for historically contingent reasons. The philosophical substance of this disagreement lies in the divergent ontological status the two scholars ascribe to genre: for Todorov the genre is a structure realised in the individual text, whereas for Moretti it is a statistical regularity within a population of texts. Two further positions complicate the opposition productively. J.G. Cawelti's conception of formula occupies an intermediate ground, treating genre schemes as culturally transmitted ritual structures whose stability derives not from formal necessity but from their capacity to satisfy recurrent collective needs. P. Brooks displaces the question from structure to the temporality of reading, arguing that plot is constituted by the reader's desire for an ending and that the ending retroactively confers meaning upon all that precedes it — a position of direct consequence here, since it implies that a difference in the type of closure is not a local variation but a reorganisation of the semantic economy of the text.

CONCLUSION

The comparative-typological analysis undertaken in this article has shown that contemporary Uzbek and English crime prose realise a common structural scheme through systematically divergent hierarchies of its elements. The divergence between the two traditions is accordingly not a matter of the presence or absence of particular plot devices but of the dominant that organises them into a whole.

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