TYPOLOGICAL PARALLELS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES

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Abstract. The article compares how literary scholarship took shape in Uzbek and English letters and argues that the two traditions passed through similar stages despite having no direct contact before the twentieth century. Using the comparative-historical and typological method of V. M. Zhirmunsky, the study sets side by side four groups of texts: pre-modern treatises on prosody and poetics, collections of critical biographies of poets, early twentieth-century writings that tied literary study to national identity, and modern university textbooks of literary theory. The comparison shows three convergences. Alisher Navoi's *Majolis un-nafois* (1491) and Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779–1781) use the same biographical-evaluative form. Fitrat's *Adabiyot qoidalari* (1926) and the founding of English studies at Oxford (1894) and Cambridge (1917) both turned criticism into an academic discipline at a moment of national self-definition.

Keywords: comparative literary studies, Uzbek literary scholarship, English criticism, tazkira, poetics, aruz prosody, literary theory, Jadid movement, typological convergence.

Uzbek and English literary scholarship grew up in different language families, religious cultures and political histories. Until the late nineteenth century they had almost no direct contact, and even in the Soviet period English criticism reached Uzbek readers mostly through Russian translation. A comparison of the two can therefore not rest on influence. It has to look for typological parallels, that is, for similar solutions that two cultures found independently when they faced similar problems. The question has practical weight for Uzbek philology today. Since 1991 Uzbek universities have introduced courses in world literature, comparative literature and literary theory that draw heavily on English-language sources. Teachers and doctoral students often treat these sources as foreign models to be adopted. The argument of this article is different: several of the categories that English criticism treats as its own, such as the critical biography of the poet, the treatise on versification and the link between literary study and national identity, have long analogues in Uzbek scholarship. Recognising them makes the dialogue between the two traditions more equal. Comparative work on Eastern and Western literatures has a history in the region. V. M. Zhirmunsky studied the Uzbek heroic epic alongside European epic material and formulated the principle that similar social and cultural conditions produce similar literary forms [15]. B. Qosimov's research on the Jadid movement placed Uzbek literary thought of the early twentieth century in the context of Muslim reform movements across Russia and the Ottoman Empire [10]. The present article applies the same approach to the history of literary scholarship itself rather than to literary works.

The aim is to identify the main points of convergence between Uzbek and English literary studies and to show where the two traditions diverge. The material consists of texts that defined how each culture talked about literature. On the Uzbek side these are Alisher Navoi's *Majolis un-nafois* [8], Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's treatise on aruz prosody known as *Muxtasar* [2], Cho'lpon's article "Adabiyot nadur?" (1914), Fitrat's *Adabiyot qoidalari* [6] and the modern textbooks of T. Boboyev [4] and D. Quronov [11]. On the English side the corpus includes George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* [9], Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* [13], Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* [7], Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* [1] and R. Wellek and A. Warren's *Theory of Literature* [14]. The study

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uses the comparative-historical method in the typological form developed by Zhirmunsky [15]. Texts are compared by function: what task a given work performed in its own culture and what form it chose for that task. Contact relations are noted where they exist, chiefly in the twentieth century. Susan Bassnett's distinction between influence studies and the study of analogies [3] is used to keep the two kinds of evidence apart. In both traditions systematic talk about literature began with prosody. Navoi's *Mezon ul-avzon* and Babur's *Muxtasar* [2] describe the metres of aruz, list their variants and give examples from Persian and Turkic poetry. Their purpose was practical: a poet who wished to write correctly needed a reference work. Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) was written with the same intention for the English court. It classifies metres, stanza forms and rhetorical figures and supplies English names for Greek and Latin terms [9].

The two cultures also produced a defence of poetry. Sidney answered Puritan attacks by arguing that poetry teaches virtue more effectively than philosophy or history, because it presents the ideal in a concrete image [13]. Navoi in his prose works and Babur in the *Boburnoma* defend the poet's status in a different religious frame, yet the argument is close to Sidney's: verse is legitimate when it serves moral and spiritual instruction. In neither case was poetics a separate science. It was part of the education of a cultivated person.

The strongest structural parallel lies in the genre of the tazkira. *Majolis un-nafois* contains short entries on more than four hundred poets of Navoi's time and of the preceding generation [8]. Each entry gives the poet's origin and character, quotes a verse and adds a judgement on its merit, sometimes with a correction of a line. Nearly three centuries later Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* followed the same pattern on a larger scale: a biography, a survey of the works and an evaluation, with frequent quotation and frank censure [7].

The two works have no historical connection. The similarity comes from a shared view of literature as the product of a person whose life and character explain the work. This biographical-evaluative method dominated both traditions until the twentieth century, and in both it was later attacked: in English by the New Critics, who insisted on the autonomy of the text, and in Uzbek by Soviet sociological criticism, which replaced the author's character with class position. The targets were the same, although the replacements differed.

At the turn of the twentieth century both cultures turned literary scholarship into a means of national self-definition. In England Matthew Arnold argued that criticism should spread "the best that is known and thought in the world" and assigned to literature a role that religion was losing [1]. Terry Eagleton has shown that this programme led to the establishment of English as a university subject: the Oxford Honour School of English Language and Literature opened in 1894 and the Cambridge English Tripos in 1917 [5]. English literature became the shared heritage through which a modern national identity was taught.

The Jadids performed a comparable task for Uzbek. Cho'lpon's article "Adabiyot nadur?" (1914) defined literature as the life force of a nation, and Fitrat's *Adabiyot qoidalari* (1926) offered the first textbook of literary theory in Uzbek, written for schools [6]. Fitrat built new Uzbek terms for genre, plot and character and drew examples from Turkic folklore and classical poetry. As B. Qosimov has documented, the Jadid project linked the reform of schooling, the press and literature into one programme of national awakening [10]. The tools differed from Arnold's, but the function was the same: literary study as civic education.

The difference lies in what followed. English studies developed without interruption through the twentieth century. Uzbek scholarship lost Fitrat, Cho'lpon and many others in the repressions of 1937–

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1938, and their works returned to the curriculum only gradually, fully after 1991. O. Sharafiddinov's book on Cho'lpon [12] is an example of the recovery work that this break made necessary.

Today both traditions organise literary studies in the same way. Wellek and Warren distinguished literary theory, literary criticism and literary history and argued that the three depend on one another [14]. Uzbek textbooks use the same triad, *adabiyot nazariyasi*, *adabiy tanqid* and *adabiyot tarixi*, and add folklore studies and textology as auxiliary disciplines [4; 11]. Quronov's *Adabiyotshunoslikka kirish* discusses the literary work as an aesthetic whole, the author, genre and the reader in categories that an English reader of Wellek and Warren would recognise [11]. Part of this convergence is a matter of contact. Russian formalism, which Wellek knew well, shaped Soviet literary theory and through it Uzbek textbooks. After 1991 hermeneutics, reception theory and narratology entered Uzbek scholarship directly from English and German sources. The deeper parallels described above, however, predate any contact and support the view that literary scholarship tends to pass through similar stages: craft manual, critical biography, national philology, academic theory.

Uzbek and English literary scholarship converge at several points that cannot be explained by influence. Treatises on prosody served poets as practical manuals in both cultures. Navoi's tazkira and Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* share the biographical-evaluative form. Arnold and the founders of English studies on one side and the Jadids, Cho'lpon and Fitrat on the other made literary study part of national education within the same few decades. Modern textbooks in both languages divide the field into theory, criticism and history.

The main divergence is historical rather than conceptual. Uzbek scholarship was broken off in the late 1930s and had to recover its own founders after 1991, while English studies developed continuously. For Uzbek teaching this suggests a concrete step: courses in literary theory can present Navoi, Babur and Fitrat next to Sidney, Johnson and Arnold as authors of comparable works, not only as objects of national literary history. Further research could extend the comparison to the history of literary terminology in the two languages.

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