BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg
BG PULSE JOURNAL

The Unity of Historical Fact and Artistic Interpretation in Erkin Samandar's Novellas and Novels

Atajanov Sarvar Samandarovich
Associate Professor, Department of Uzbek Language and Literature, Urgench State University
doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24074495

Abstract. The article examines the relation between historical fact and artistic interpretation in Erkin Samandar's novels Sultan Jaloliddin, Traces of the Whirlwind, or Ogahiy, and The Wheel of Doom, and in the novella Pahlavon Mahmud Puryoyvaliy. It shows that historical dates, places, and persons form the narrative basis of the works, while dialogue, interior monologue, the story within a story, the symbolic image, and legend extend that basis by artistic means. The article also addresses the problem of distinguishing documentary fact from creative imagination, and the role of historical memory and of symbolic images in generalising historical truth.
Keywords: historical fact, artistic interpretation, artistic fiction, historical novel, novella, historical memory, symbolic image, legend, repression, Erkin Samandar.

One of the principal questions that define the nature of the historical novel is the relation between historical truth and artistic invention. In a historical work, the mere retelling of past events does not of itself fulfil an artistic purpose. The writer selects the events recorded in the sources, arranges them according to a definite ideological and aesthetic aim, and, through artistic depiction, restores to life the deeds of historical persons and the relations among them. As Georg Lukács observed, the chief task of the historical novel is not to retell historical events, but to awaken, in a poetic manner, the people who took part in those events [1]. In this process, historical fact forms the narrative foundation of the work, while artistic interpretation extends its semantic and psychological layers. The present article analyses the unity of these two layers in the prose of Erkin Samandar.

The novel's relation to its historical basis appears, first of all, in the information given at the beginning. Before portraying Jaloliddin, the author cites, as an epigraph serving as the point of entry, a description attributed to the historian al-Nasawi [2]. It records the sultan's outward appearance, his Turkic origin, his knowledge of languages, and his disposition. In the action that follows, this brief description is enlarged by artistic detail and filled out through the hero's political views, his courage, and his inner experience. Information taken from a source thus provides the initial basis of the portrait, while the writer's imagination forms its individual character.

The novel's fidelity to historical chronology is also visible at the opening of the action: "AD 1220. Autumn" [3]. According to the historical sources, it was in the autumn of 1220 that Chingiz Khan (Genghis Khan) began his campaign against Termez and then turned his principal attention to Khwarazm, the centre of the Khwarazmshahs' state. The campaign against Urganch began at the start of 1221 [4]. In the novel this historical background is brought to life through the drought at the fortress of Ilol, the people's waiting for rain, and the depiction of Turkon Khatun's state of mind.

A clear instance of the relation between historical fact and artistic interpretation appears in the conversations of the characters. The political dispute between Jaloliddin and Alauddin Muhammad brings the reader close to the conflict of ideas behind the historical decisions. Jaloliddin insists that what protects the sultanate from the enemy is not defence but attack, whereas Alauddin relies on

the strengthening of the fortresses. The Khwarazmshah's defensive strategy is a historical fact; the detailed conversation between father and son is the writer's artistic interpretation. Dialogues of this kind cannot be taken as historical documents. They are an artistic means, created out of the historical situation and out of the positions of the persons concerned.

The same holds for the figure of Jochi. The sources record that Khwarazm was assigned to Jochi's rule and that he demanded the peaceful surrender of the city [4]. In the novel this fact is interpreted as Jochi's moral opposition to his father's policy: "True, the enemy must be destroyed and wiped out. But what fault lies with ordinary people who had no part in the war? What sin have the womenfolk committed?" The function of these words is not to record a speech delivered in history, but to express the work's ethical attitude to the human consequences of Chingiz Khan's campaigns.

Erkin Samandar nevertheless draws the boundary between fact and invention consciously. In The Wheel of Doom [9], a prefatory review records that no precise documents concerning Muhammad Hoji have survived. The hero's family life, his conversations with the colonel, and his experiences in prison are therefore artistic reconstructions, and it would be wrong to treat them as documentary conversations. They are artistic means that serve to reveal the nature of the atmosphere of repression.

In the novel, historical fact is generalised through symbolic images. The "machine of doom" in the prologue — a mechanism that, "day and night, keeps moving for as long as is required, never tiring of its course and never sated with drinking blood" — is an artistic allegory of the system of political repression. The sending of its three wheels to the former three khanates alludes to historical facts of Russia's colonial policy in the region [6]. In the retrospective scenes of 1919, the cutting down of the g'ujum trees in Islomxo'ja's garden is interpreted as a symbol of the destruction of the people's spiritual supports. The closing sentence, "Thus a burial ground of martyrs whose names are unknown came into being in Urganch," unites the victims in a single tragic destiny within popular memory, rather than documenting each of them individually. The image of new trees putting forth their buds in place of the two hundred g'ujum trees uprooted from Islomxo'ja's garden gives symbolic expression to the restoration of historical justice in the period of independence.

Pahlavon Mahmud Puryoyvaliy: historical date and popular legend

In the novella, the relation between historical fact and artistic interpretation appears through various generic forms. The hero's birth is fixed by an exact date — AH 645, AD 1247 [11] — yet a prophetic motif is introduced through images such as the dispersal of the black clouds gathered over Khiva at the moment the infant enters the world. Likening Khiva to a ship sailing on the ocean of life, the author generalises the invasions and the internal conflicts in the city's history. In the episode in which a memorial to the martyrs is raised on Pahlavon Mahmud's initiative, the memorial is depicted as a "spirit-statue" and as "a living image of the dream of freedom," so that the spiritual essence of the historical event is brought to the fore.

Popular legends are also incorporated into the historical reality of the work. Scenes such as Pahlavon Mahmud's freeing of many Khwarazmian captives by cutting an oxhide into a thin strip and so forming a vast circle, and the appearance of the Polvon canal after he draws a line on the ground with his staff, should be judged not as historical documents but as an artistic reworking of legendary motifs preserved in popular memory [12]. In such scenes, ingenuity, humanity, and the idea of liberty, rather than historical exactness, occupy the centre.

The conclusion may be stated as follows. First, in the prose of Erkin Samandar, historical fact — dates, places, historical persons, and their principal decisions — forms the narrative foundation

of the work. The writer relies on historical chronology and on the descriptions preserved in the sources, among them the histories of al-Nasawi and of Ogahiy.

Second, artistic interpretation extends this foundation by means of dialogue, interior monologue, retrospection, the story within a story, the symbolic image, and legend, and thereby discloses the human and spiritual meaning of historical events.

Third, the writer consciously marks the boundary between documentary fact and creative imagination. The dialogues and the private experiences in the novels are not historical documents. They are to be judged as artistic means that reveal the nature of an age.

Fourth, symbolic images — the machine of doom, the g‘ujum tree, the cemetery of the unknown martyrs, the khan’s library, and the memorial to the martyrs — generalise historical fact artistically and connect it with popular memory and with the question of national identity.

References

1. Lukács, G. The Historical Novel. London: Merlin Press, 1962. 363 pp.
2. al-Nasawi, Shihab al-Din Muhammad. A Description of the Life of Sultan Jaloliddin Manguberdi. Translated from Arabic. Tashkent: Yozuvchi, 1999. 352 pp.
3. Samandar, Erkin. Sultan Jaloliddin [Sulton Jaloliddin]. Tashkent: G‘afur G‘ulom Publishing and Printing House, 2007. 286 pp.
4. Eshov, B., and Odilov, A. A History of Uzbekistan. Vol. I, From the Earliest Times to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century. Tashkent, 2014. pp. 307–308.
5. Samandar, Erkin. Traces of the Whirlwind, or Ogahiy [Quyun izlari yoxud Ogahiy]. Tashkent: Mumtoz so‘z, 2009. 350 pp.
6. Qosimov, B., et al. Uzbek Literature of the Period of National Awakening. Tashkent: Ma’naviyat, 2004. pp. 8–11.
7. Ziyayeva, D. “The Historical Works of Muhammad Rizo Ogahiy.” In The Place of Muhammad Rizo Ogahiy in the Development of Classical Uzbek Literature: Proceedings of a Republican Scholarly and Theoretical Conference. Tashkent, 2020. p. 186.
8. Bayoniy, Muhammad Yusuf. The Genealogy of the Khwarazmshahs [Shajarayi Xorazmshohiy]. Tashkent: G‘afur G‘ulom Literature and Art Publishing House, 1994. 104 pp.
9. Samandar, Erkin. The Wheel of Doom [Qiron g‘ildiragi]. Tashkent: Sharq, 2016. 222 pp.
10. Hasanov, R. “A Trace Left across the Continents.” Hurriyat, 2022, no. 5. Available at: https://uzhurriyat.uz/2022/05/14/qitalarda-izi-qolgan/
11. Samandar, Erkin. Pahlavon Mahmud Puryoyvaliy. Tashkent, 2000.
12. Ro‘zimboyev, S., and Bekchanov, Sh. Legend and Historical Truth. Khiva: Khorezm Mamun Academy Press, 2000. 60 pp.