

Historical Truth and Artistic Texture in the Novels of Prosper Merimee and Abdullah Qadiri

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Abstract: This article delves into the historical events, truths, and artistic nuances found in the novels "Mehrobdan Chayan" by the Uzbek writer Abdulla Kadiri and "Chronicle of the Sultanate of Charles IX" by the French writer Prosper Merimee, offering insightful commentary on these literary works.

Keywords: historical novel, historical truth, artistry, artistic composition, historical period.



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Introduction. An essential criterion for historical literature is to vividly depict the pivotal events that significantly impacted the life of the nation and its people, encompass a genuine socio-historical portrayal of the era described, and align them with scholarly insights on that historical epoch. The nature of the portrayed period and events dictates the selection and portrayal of characters within the literary piece. It necessitates showcasing the universal essence of revolutionary life changes, the collective efforts undertaken by the masses, and the communal jubilation accompanying the establishment of a new societal order.

Analysis of the literature on the subject. In his monograph "The Creative Journey of Abdullah Qadiri," Oybek commented on historical novels, stating that attaining historical accuracy through artistic depictions and presenting an authentic tapestry of life's intricacies lost to time demands a vibrant portrayal. It is crucial to imbue the artistic renderings with the concrete historical essence of the era, veritably displaying past realities, the events' significance, and depicting the social dynamics through character portrayals. A fundamental criterion for crafting historical novels is to depict historical truths in accordance with scholarly findings. (<https://literature.islamonline.uz/>)

Hence, the socio-political issues, historical events, and figures spotlighted in historical works must harmonize with the historical veracity of the characters involved. Consequently, assuming that historical works should strictly adhere to documented facts alone would be an oversimplification. Even within historical narratives, authors can illuminate the zeitgeist and its socio-political dilemmas based on their interpretations. (Ganiyeva T. 2022.)

Among Uzbek historical works, some eloquently capture the essence of a specific era through intricately woven narratives and imagery, offering a precise depiction of historical realities.

For example, Abdulla Qadiri also traversed this path in crafting Uzbek historical novels, showcasing exemplary artistic prowess. One notable work in this vein is the novel "Mehrobdan Chayan," which serves as a natural progression from Qadiri's earlier piece, "O'tkan Kunlar,"

delving into the historical narrative surrounding Khudoyar Khan and his adherents. Completed in February 1928 and published the following year, this novel represents the writer's second major literary endeavor.

At the outset of the novel, the author articulates: "Khudoyar Khan, the subsequent representative of Turkestan's feudal lords, ruthlessly subjugated peasant families and artisans to fulfill his desires, imposing merciless punishments on those who dared oppose him." This thematic core elucidates the novel's essence, aiming to delineate the character, aims, ethics, and lifestyle of the scholars and scribes underpinning Khudoyar Khan's realm, capturing as much depth as the narrative allows. Furthermore, a juxtaposition highlighting the morals, societal strata, family lives, and authenticity of the impoverished masses standing in opposition to these oppressive forces is discernible. Qadiri's endeavor to portray the unsung heroes of Uzbek history without shying away from life's harsh realities is evident in his words: "I endeavored to vividly portray the forgotten heroes until the essence of Uzbek history stirs." (Abdulla Qadiri, 1994.)

While the novel primarily revolves around 19th-century events - the era of the Khans, it's imbued with a contemporary vigor reflective of the times in which it was penned. The title "Scorpion from the Altar" symbolizes the critique of individuals advocating Islamic ethics and engaging in unsavory deeds. Historical narratives often embody the essence of two eras - the period under scrutiny and the backdrop of the writer's contemporary milieu. Qadiri deftly juxtaposes the interactions between the "Tuban class" representatives and the impoverished families, encapsulating profound messages about societal structures and power dynamics.

The novel deftly portrays a panorama of characters representative of the 19th-century Uzbek society, enlivening the narrative with figures like the callous Salih Makhdum, his submissive wife Nigor Ayim, and the timid yet resilient Rana. These character sketches intricately weave a tapestry of national chronicles from that epoch, bringing to life a vivid portrayal of societal archetypes. Qadiri's adept portrayal of these characters as vibrant, sentient beings mirrors a crucial aspect of historical novels - breathing life into fictional personas to encapsulate the zeitgeist authentically.

The narrative of Qadiri further showcases his skill as a novelist with the intricate details he includes regarding Salih Makhdum's lineage. Delving into the tale of Salih Makhdum's father, the author cleverly intertwines real historical events linked to the Kokhan Khanate's history. The conflicts among the Turkestan emirates are subtly woven into the storyline through the thread of a concubine.

This concubine, whose marriage to Umar Khan's son Madali Khan led to treachery by certain mullahs within the horde, initiated a sequence of events that altered the course of history. The demand for a significant fatwa, despite the true circumstances not being heard, set the stage for deception and betrayal. This deception extended to Emir Bahadir Khan (Nasrullah Khan) of Bukhara, who, entranced by the concubine, sought validation through a biased fatwa from unlettered scholars, ultimately launching a religiously-motivated yet avaricious attack on Ferghana. This ill-fated endeavor resulted in the massacre of numerous innocents and the execution of Madali Khan.

The aftermath of this tragedy saw the implicated scholars and teachers, depicted as "scorpions from the altar," facing repercussions. Amir Bahadir Khan held these individuals accountable, stripping them of their positions, religious rights, and subjecting them to persecution. Among the scholars involved in the issuance of the fatal fatwa was Salih Makhdum's father, whose entanglement in this grim affair further deepens the layers of complexity within Qadiri's narrative.

Qadiri's prowess as a novelist shines through his depiction of Salih Makhdum's ancestry. By introducing Salih Makhdum's father into the narrative, Qadiri intricately weaves historical events from the Kokhan Khanate into his tale. The internal conflicts among the emirates of Turkestan

find their place within the storyline due to the intriguing presence of a concubine. This concubine's marriage to Madali Khan, the son of Umar Khan, after betraying Umar Khan, catalyzed a series of events steeped in deception and power play. A pivotal moment arises when a significant fatwa - issued without a fair hearing - ignites a chain of tragic consequences, culminating in the ruthless execution of Madali Khan and the bloodshed of countless innocents. The aftermath sees a reckoning for the scholars and teachers involved in this nefarious scheme, dubbed "scorpions from the altar," who face retribution at the hands of Emir Bahadir Khan (Nasrullah Khan) of Bukhara. This narrative twist underscores the intricate interplay of power, betrayal, and divine authority within the historical context evoked by Qadiri.

Contrary to the traditional complacency within the Uzbek society towards religious scholars and Khan rule, Qadiri injects a revolutionary fervor influenced by Russian and global literary masterpieces into his work. By sculpting dynamic and spirited characters embroiled in the tumult of the era, he imbues the narrative with a revolutionary essence akin to the real-life uprisings depicted in Prosper Mérimée's novel, "Chronicle of the Reign of Charles IX." (Prosper Mérimée, 1890.)

Mérimée's deliberate articulation of his narrative purpose mirrors the evolving romanticism of the epoch, signaling a departure from conventional historical storytelling. By prioritizing anecdotes imbued with authentic representations of customs and heroes from a specific era, Mérimée challenges the conventional idealism espoused by classical historians of the 17th and 18th centuries. His preference for unembellished truths over polished narratives underscores his commitment to authenticity and unvarnished storytelling.

Against the backdrop of France's tumultuous 16th century, characterized by religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, Mérimée's novel explores the reign of Charles IX amid the cauldron of religious turmoil and political machinations. The narrative delves into the intricacies of this fractured era marked by bloodshed, intolerance, and intricate power dynamics, bringing to life the struggles and tribulations of its characters against the backdrop of a nation in turmoil.

Seeking to offer his unique perspective on the historical era, Mérimée delved into a scarce collection of memoir-like sources. In Chapter 8 of his historical novel, he intriguingly sets up a whimsical dialogue between the reader and the author, taking a satirical jab at the Romantics for their penchant for idolizing individuals, scrutinizing their actions, and delving into their supposedly profound philosophical musings. Mérimée, however, criticizes such approaches as distorting historical truths, advocating for a broader examination of the moral underpinnings across different societal strata to unearth the drivers of historical transformations. His "yearbook," as he terms it, delves deeply into the moral fabric of court nobles, Huguenots, and Catholic Church representatives. Mérimée skillfully navigates through the customs of the clergy, the influence of German assessors, and the daily lives of the common bourgeois and soldiers, painting a vivid portrait of the social milieu of the time.

In Mérimée's interpretation, the infamous St. Bartholomew's Night emerges as a calculated coup orchestrated from the upper echelons and actualized with the backing of the broader French populace. The deep-rooted religious conflicts between Catholics and Huguenots in 16th-century France set the stage for power struggles among the Protestants led by Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, the royalist faction, and the ultra-royalist clan of the Dukes of Guise. Amidst this backdrop, King Charles IX employs a strategy of division and manipulation, fomenting animosity among the factions, unwittingly entangling a significant portion of the populace in the melee. (Kattabekov A. 1972)

Throughout his life, Mérimée harbored disdain for the Restoration regime, lambasting its religious sanctimony, monarchical opulence, and aristocratic superstitions within his literary works.

Unapologetically articulating his convictions, Mérimée distanced himself from political entanglements, encapsulating his beliefs within his literary oeuvre.

The artistic allure of Mérimée's "Chronicle of the Reign of Charles IX" lies in its meticulous and impartial portrayal of the socio-political milieu steeped in the throes of religious warfare. The novel's namesake, "chronicle," underscores its aspiration to objectively document the unfolding events throughout the annals of France, eschewing a narrow focus on key episodes or political figures for a holistic depiction of the era.

Interwoven within the narrative fabric, the populace's sentiments and attitudes towards authority are vividly captured, as exemplified in an early scene near Paris before the tumultuous events of Bartholomew's Night. Mérimée masterfully encapsulates the societal mood, illustrating the divide between Catholics revering a new Virgin Mary statue and Huguenots taking aim with arquebuses, showcasing the simmering tensions and polarized sentiments prevalent amongst the people. (Reizov B. 1958)

Baron de Vaudreuil responded, "Oh, he tallies them by the dozen!" - However, what transpired next was beyond belief! On a whim, he decided to engage in a duel himself; he dispatched a challenge to a courtesan, fully attired in his regimental dress, just because she happened to cross his path!

➤ Pure fabrication! Bernard interjected vehemently.

To capture the authentic essence of society, he includes dialogues between common folk, nobility, and courtiers. Crude jokes regarding faith, discussions about women - both in jest and malice, gossip about deaths, and scandals filled the crux of their conversations. They are willing to stain the reputation of a friend who believes in his lover's fidelity with the most salacious insinuations:

- "- Ever since the unfortunate Lannoy's demise near Orleans, Mrs. Turgy has not entertained any suitors," remarked George, steering away from the religious debacles that ensue.
- Who would dare assert that a lady in Paris remains unattached? Bevil interjected, "Comminge must have held her very dear."

"That is why young Navaret kept his distance," Vaudreuil chimed in, "he must have dreaded such a fearsome adversary."

"Is that why Comminges is possessive?" inquired the captain.

"He is as possessive as a tiger," retorted Beville, "determined to eliminate any admirers of the enchanting countess; hence, to avoid falling for her charms, he had to secure Comminge." (Prosper Mérimée 1890)

Analysis and Outcome. Merimée underscores that appraising the actions of 16th-century individuals should not be scrutinized through the lens of 19th-century sensibilities. The moral standards vary not only across nations but also across epochs, necessitating a nuanced approach to historical judgment. At first glance, Merimée's narrative and Qadiri's novel appear reminiscent. Anwar, akin to Bernard, emerges as the adopted son of Salih Makhdum, a destitute noble of his time. Salih Mahmood aspires for Anwar to serve in the Khan's court, mirroring Bernard's familial expectations. Facilitated by the assistance of Nasim's late father, Anwar ascends to prominent roles within the Khan's domain. By entwining the life trajectories of their protagonists like a delicate thread, both authors deftly blend historical actualities with the artistic tapestry of an epic era. They adeptly elucidate the socio-political and ideological landscapes of their respective societies during epochs characterized by transition.

Conclusions and suggestions. A comparative analysis between "Mehrobdan Chayan" and "Days of the Past" reveals a more pronounced, lucid, and transparent party conflict in the former. This conflict emerges authentically from historical roots, heralding the awakening and evolution of

social consciousness. Life's authenticity and historical veracity are elevated to an artistic realm, infusing dynamism, growth, and confluence into the narrative, transitioning the struggle into a realm of "two classes." Realism permeates the work, depicting the inexorable clash between conflicting factions as new forces triumph over antiquated ideologies. This metamorphosis of society's social struggle underscores the epic nature of "Mehrobdan Chayan," positioning the novel as a beacon of socio-historical narrative excellence. The epic narrative approach coupled with the creation of enduring epic characters validates the genre's narrative breadth and depth. Epic destinies and character essences assume paramount significance within such expansive works, heralding the formidable stature of the heroes within the narrative archetype.

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