



MEMORY, MORAL CHOICE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AND UZBEK PROSE

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Abstract. This article explores the representation of memory, moral choice, and national identity in contemporary English and Uzbek prose through a comparative literary perspective. Modern writers increasingly address questions of belonging, ethical responsibility, historical trauma, and personal dignity in response to globalization and rapid social change. The study applies comparative, narratological, hermeneutic, and discourse-analytical methods to selected English and Uzbek literary texts. The results indicate that English prose frequently emphasizes psychological memory, individual isolation, and moral ambiguity, while Uzbek prose more often foregrounds collective memory, family continuity, and ethical responsibility rooted in cultural tradition. In both traditions, protagonists are confronted with difficult moral decisions that shape their identities and relationships with society. The article concludes that literature from both cultures demonstrates how memory functions not only as recollection of the past but also as a moral force influencing the present. Comparative analysis confirms the relevance of Uzbek prose within broader world literary studies.

Keywords: Comparative literature, memory studies, moral choice, national identity, English prose, Uzbek prose, narrative ethics, contemporary fiction.

Introduction

Contemporary literature increasingly reflects the crises of memory, identity, and morality that characterize the modern world. Writers use narrative forms to examine how individuals remember the past, make ethical decisions, and define themselves within changing societies. Mikhail Bakhtin emphasized that literary meaning emerges through the interaction of voices, values, and historical consciousness [Bakhtin, 1981]. Paul Ricoeur argued that memory is closely connected with identity and narrative self-understanding [Ricoeur, 2004]. Judith Butler showed that identity is formed through repeated social practices rather than fixed essence [Butler, 1990]. Fredric Jameson linked literary form with ideological tensions of modern society [Jameson, 2005].

English and Uzbek prose of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries often engages these concerns through distinct cultural models. However, direct comparison between the two traditions remains underdeveloped. Therefore, this article investigates how memory, moral choice, and national identity are represented in selected English and Uzbek prose works.

Method

This research uses a qualitative comparative methodology combining several complementary approaches accepted in contemporary literary scholarship. The first method is the **comparative-textual method**, which identifies common themes and structural differences in English and Uzbek prose. Through this approach, texts were analyzed according to their treatment of memory, ethical conflict, social duty, and identity formation.



Second, the **narratological method** was employed to examine perspective, chronology, voice, and character consciousness. Based on the theoretical work of Gérard Genette, this method focuses on how stories are told rather than only what is told [Genette, 1980]. Particular attention was given to retrospective narration, confession, fragmented recollection, omniscient commentary, and dialogic narration. These devices often reveal the relationship between memory and moral judgment.

Third, the **hermeneutic method** was applied to interpret symbols related to homeland, family, duty, silence, and loss. Literary objects and spaces such as houses, roads, letters, graves, workplaces, and landscapes were studied as carriers of ethical and emotional meaning. This method is especially useful when texts communicate values indirectly through imagery rather than explicit statements.

Fourth, the study used **discourse analysis** to examine how social expectations influence character identity. This included analysis of speech patterns, silence, generational authority, and institutional language. The approach is informed by cultural criticism and identity theory, including work by Stuart Hall, who argued that identity is historically constructed and constantly reinterpreted [Hall, 1996].

The corpus included selected works by Kazuo Ishiguro, Julian Barnes, and Ian McEwan from English literature, as well as works by O'tkir Hoshimov, Isajon Sulton, and Erkin A'zam from Uzbek literature. Selection was based on thematic relevance, literary recognition, and availability of scholarly discussion.

Finally, triangulation was used to compare findings from all methods. This strengthened interpretive validity and reduced dependence on a single analytical perspective.

Result

The analysis demonstrated that memory serves different but equally important functions in the two literary traditions. In contemporary English prose, memory often appears uncertain, selective, or painful. Narrators revisit the past in order to understand guilt, missed opportunities, or emotional repression. Recollection is frequently incomplete, creating ambiguity about truth. As a result, memory becomes a psychological struggle rather than a stable source of identity.

In Uzbek prose, memory more commonly functions as collective continuity. Family stories, ancestral values, and social customs help characters interpret present difficulties. The past is not merely personal recollection but a living moral inheritance. Characters often measure themselves against elders, traditions, and communal expectations. This gives memory a stabilizing and ethical role.

Moral choice is central in both corpora. English protagonists are often faced with subtle ethical dilemmas involving silence, betrayal, passivity, or self-deception. Their conflicts are internal and psychologically complex. Uzbek protagonists more frequently confront visible social duties: loyalty to family, honesty in hardship, respect for elders, and responsibility to community. Their moral choices are often linked to preserving dignity under pressure.

National identity is also represented differently. English texts frequently portray identity as fluid, private, and fragmented within multicultural or posttraditional societies. Uzbek prose tends to connect identity with language, homeland, family honor, and historical belonging. Yet in both traditions, identity is shown as dynamic rather than fixed. Characters negotiate between inherited values and modern realities.

Another major result is that both literary traditions criticize moral emptiness. Whether through emotional detachment in English prose or loss of ethical tradition in Uzbek prose, writers warn



that forgetting human responsibility leads to spiritual decline. Thus, memory becomes a moral resource that protects dignity and social cohesion.

Discussion

The results support Paul Ricoeur's view that memory and identity are inseparable because people understand themselves through narratives of the past [Ricoeur, 2004]. In the English texts, unstable memory reflects uncertainty of selfhood in late-modern society. Characters reconstruct their lives through doubt, regret, and reinterpretation.

The Uzbek texts suggest a more communitarian model of identity. Memory is embedded in family, place, and tradition, which corresponds to collective cultural frameworks discussed by Jan Assmann in studies of cultural memory [Assmann, 2011]. Such literature does not idealize tradition automatically, but it treats inherited values as important moral resources.

The contrast in moral choice is also significant. English prose often dramatizes private conscience and emotional responsibility, whereas Uzbek prose emphasizes relational ethics—duty toward others, respect, and endurance. These models should not be ranked hierarchically; they represent different historical experiences and social structures.

At the same time, both traditions converge in their concern for dignity, truthfulness, and the consequences of forgetting. Comparative reading therefore demonstrates that national literatures remain culturally specific while engaging universal ethical questions.

Conclusion

This study confirms that contemporary English and Uzbek prose offers rich perspectives on memory, moral choice, and national identity. English writers often depict memory as uncertain and psychologically burdensome, using it to explore guilt, loss, and fragmented identity. Uzbek writers more commonly portray memory as collective inheritance that sustains moral orientation and communal belonging.

Despite these differences, both traditions place ethical decision-making at the center of human experience. Their protagonists must choose between comfort and truth, silence and responsibility, self-interest and dignity. Literature thus becomes a space where societies reflect on values under modern pressure.

The findings also show that Uzbek prose deserves broader international comparative attention because it combines national specificity with universal human concerns. Future studies may focus on translation, reception, trauma narratives, or digital comparative corpora. Overall, comparative analysis reveals that memory is not only remembrance of the past but also a guide for moral life in the present.

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