

## The Distinctive Features of the Novella Genre in Modern Uzbek Literature

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the distinctive features of the novella genre in modern Uzbek literature and examines how its structural, thematic, and stylistic characteristics are embodied in the works of Ahmad A'zam, one of the leading representatives of contemporary Uzbek prose. The study outlines the theoretical foundations of the novella as a small epic form, focusing on its compact plot structure, sharp dramatic tension, limited character system, and the use of a single decisive event to create a powerful artistic effect. Through analytical and comparative approaches, the research investigates how these genre elements manifest in Ahmad A'zam's novellas such as What Could I Have Done? (Nima qilib qo'ygan ekanman?), The Man Carrying Flowers (Gul ko'tarib ketayotgan erkak), The Lock's Tongue (Qulf tili), and From Time Immemorial (Almisoqdan qolgan Karim). Special attention is given to the author's psychological depth, portrayal of inner emotional conflict, and his ability to turn everyday situations into existential reflections – a hallmark of his narrative style. The findings demonstrate that A'zam's novellas successfully combine concise storytelling with rich psychological insight, illustrating how the novella genre in Uzbek literature functions as a space for exploring human consciousness, social relationships, and moral dilemmas within a tightly constructed narrative form.*

**Keywords:** Epic form, small epic genre, novella, short story

## INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, the epic mode represents one of the fundamental narrative forms through which writers depict human experience, social reality, and historical consciousness. As a broad literary category, the epic mode encompasses narrative works that portray events objectively, relying on external actions, character interactions, and the sequential development of plot. Scholars note that epic narration is characterized by temporal progression, spatial continuity, and an emphasis on causally connected events that together construct a coherent portrayal of life (Bakhtin 1981; Cuddon 2013). Within world literature, the epic mode is regarded as a versatile system of genres that range from brief narrative sketches to large-scale novels, accommodating diverse stylistic and thematic approaches.

Traditionally, epic forms are classified into three main groups, based on their narrative scale and structural complexity:

- **Small epic forms** – including anecdotes, fables, fairy tales, sketches, essays, and short stories. These genres are marked by brevity, a limited number of characters, and a focus on a single situation or conflict (Abrams & Harpham 2015).
- **Medium epic forms** – most commonly represented by the novella or short novel (*povest*, *qissa*), which balances conciseness with nuanced character development, often emphasizing a tightly organized plot with heightened dramatic tension (Steegeen 2020).
- **Large epic forms** – including the novel, epic poem, and epopee, characterized by extensive narrative scope, multi-layered plotlines, and comprehensive depictions of society, history, or collective experience (Moretti 2013).

These classifications demonstrate that the epic mode is not a rigid structure but a dynamic continuum, shaped by cultural context, authorial intention, and aesthetic tradition. Contemporary literary theory emphasizes that epic forms evolve across time, reflecting changes in social life, narrative technique, and artistic priorities (Fludernik 2009). In the context of Uzbek

literature, the epic mode remains a central framework for understanding the development of narrative prose, including the novella genre, which continues to adapt global literary principles to local aesthetic and cultural realities.

The present study focuses on one of the significant small epic forms – the novella. In literary scholarship, the term “novella” originates from the Italian word meaning “a new story,” and it is commonly described as a genre shorter than the short story yet capable of conveying extensive meaning with minimal verbal expression. Although concise in volume, the novella’s brevity does not diminish the depth or complexity of its content. Emerging as an independent genre in Italy, the novella took shape through the works of Renaissance writers such as Boccaccio, Sacchetti, and Masuccio. While some scholars regard the novella and the short story as synonymous, others distinguish between them; however, it is widely acknowledged that the novella is set apart by its sharply developed plot, rapid narrative progression, and unexpected twists. As Solijonov (2020) explains, the novella is characterized by tightly compressed events centered on the life of a specific individual, a limited number of characters, a single dramatic conflict, and an ending designed to produce a powerful emotional impact on the reader. The genre is further notable for its ability to encapsulate the essence of an entire historical or social moment within a small narrative space, often structured around one crucial detail or event. In Uzbek literature, works such as A. Qahhor’s *The Thief (O’g’ri)* and *The Pomegranate (Anor)*, S. Ahmad’s *The Tiger (Qoplon)*, and Sh. Xolmirzayev’s *The Stranger (Notanish odam)* serve as exemplary models of the novella form. In contemporary prose, selected works by authors such as X. Do’stmuhammad, X. Sulstonov, A. Yo’ldoshev, and particularly Ahmad A’zam may also be evaluated within the framework of the modern Uzbek novella tradition.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

##### *Theoretical framework*

This study is based on the understanding that the novella is one of the key small epic forms (*kichik epik shakl*) distinguished by

brevity, sharp plot development, and a concentrated dramatic structure. The concepts of genre, narrative structure, and small epic forms are approached through Uzbek and international scholarship, including the works of Solijonov (2020), Quronov, as well as general narratological studies (Bakhtin 1981; Cuddon 2013). These sources provide the theoretical basis for identifying the formal and stylistic markers of the novella in modern Uzbek literature.

#### *Analytical approach*

The research employs genre analysis, structural narration, and comparative literary analysis. These methods help clarify how the novella differs from the short story, how it constructs tension through a single central event, and how modern Uzbek writers adapt the genre to psychological and social themes. Both Uzbek and international theoretical materials are used to support these interpretations.

#### *Selected works*

The study focuses on a set of novellas by Ahmad A'zam, identified in the manuscript as representative examples of the genre. The analyzed texts include:

- *The Poem I Lacked the Strength to Write About the Homeland* (Vatan haqida yozishga kuchim yetmagan she'rim)
- *Dishonest Muso* (Noinsof Muso)
- *The Man Carrying Flowers* (Gul ko'tarib ketayotgan erkak)
- *What Could I Have Done?* (Nima qilib qo'ygan ekanman?)
- *Karim from Time Immemorial* (Almisoqdan qolgan Karim)
- *Someone Who Had Left* (Ketgan birov edi)
- *A World Slightly Lacking* (Bir kam dunyo)
- *Alone With Myself* (O'zim bilan o'zim)
- *The Tongue of the Lock* (Qulf tili)
- *A Three-Sided Look at the Misanthrope* (Odamoviga uch yoqlama qarash)
- *Buttonflower* (Tugmachagul)

These works are compared – when relevant – with classical Uzbek novellas by A. Qahhor, S. Ahmad, and Sh. Xolmirzayev.

*Analytical methods*

Four concise methods are used:

- **Structural analysis:** to examine plot compactness, sharp openings, and single-event focus.
- **Psychological analysis:** to study characters' inner states, emotions, and existential tension.
- **Genre comparison:** to distinguish novella elements from short stories and other small epic forms.
- **Contextual analysis:** to connect narrative situations with cultural and social aspects of modern Uzbek prose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A number of Ahmad A'zam's works – including *The Poem I Lacked the Strength to Write About the Homeland* (Vatan haqida yozishga kuchim yetmagan she'rim), *Dishonest Muso* (Noinsof Muso), *The Man Carrying Flowers* (Gul ko'tarib ketayotgan erkak), *What Could I Have Done?* (Nima qilib qo'ygan ekanman?), *Karim from Time Immemorial* (Almisoqdan qolgan Karim), *Someone Who Had Left* (Ketgan birov edi), *A World Slightly Lacking* (Bir kam dunyo), *Alone with Myself* (O'zim bilan o'zim), *The Tongue of the Lock* (Qulf tili), *A Three-Sided Look at the Misanthrope* (Odamoviga uch yoqlama qarash), and *Buttonflower* (Tugmachagul\*) – are widely recognized as novellas. A significant indicator of this classification is that A'zam himself assigns genre labels to his works when naming them. This self-identification allows scholars to confidently analyze these texts within the framework of the novella, which is characterized by narrative brevity, heightened dramatic tension, and a concentrated structure centered around a single critical event.

One of the most distinctive features of Ahmad A'zam's prose is his psychological depth and originality. Rather than relying on external adventures or large-scale social conflict, A'zam directs

attention inward, exploring the subtle layers of human consciousness – doubt, anxiety, guilt, and the fragile relationship between the individual and society. His novellas are marked by an ability to transform ordinary situations into profound reflections on personal identity and existential tension. This psychological approach distinguishes his narratives from more traditional realist prose in Uzbek literature, positioning A'zam as an innovator within the modern novella tradition.

A clear example of this approach is the novella *What Could I Have Done?* (*Nima qilib qo'ygan ekanman?*) The work begins with an unusually abrupt and striking sentence: “This morning, while washing my face, I suddenly felt I did not want to go to work.” The refusal to leave for work – an everyday action normally taken for granted – sets the entire narrative in motion. This simple deviation from routine becomes the basis for growing confusion, social pressure, and psychological unraveling. The protagonist, who has followed the same routine for years, now finds his unexpected decision interpreted by those around him as evidence of some unknown wrongdoing.

Family members are the first to express concern. His wife and children cannot comprehend why he stayed home. Soon, relatives, neighbors, friends, and co-workers begin calling him, anxiously repeating the same question: “What have you done?” The repeated inquiry becomes a kind of psychological assault, pushing the protagonist toward increasing self-doubt. The following dialogue reflects the rising intensity:

- “Hey, look at me – what have you done now?” she asked abruptly.
- “I haven’t done anything, Xurshid,” I said. “Why are all of you asking this?”
- “Who else called you?” she asked.
- “Ten people!” I snapped. “Everyone says: What have you done?”
- “See? I told you,” Xurshid said. “You must have done something. I’m not the only one saying it.”

What begins as a private decision turns into a public crisis, magnified by the community's expectations and assumptions. When even distant relatives and long-forgotten acquaintances begin phoning to ask about his mysterious act, the situation borders on the absurd. As the tension escalates, the protagonist's psychological state deteriorates – he begins to doubt himself, despite knowing he has done nothing wrong. A'zam uses this dynamic to highlight how society often imposes narratives on individuals, forcing meaning where none exists.

This existential confusion is captured in one of the novella's most important passages:

Everyone is asking what *I* have done – not what someone else has done. And they ask me, not that unknown someone who may or may not exist. And here I sit, unable to figure out what I have done. Perhaps my not knowing what I have done is itself what I have done?

This statement reflects a central quality of A'zam's novellas: the blending of psychological introspection with subtle irony and philosophical nuance. The protagonist's bewilderment exposes the fragility of self-perception when confronted by collective judgment. The individual's inner truth becomes overshadowed by the social imagination, producing an atmosphere of rising anxiety.

From a structural standpoint, the novella demonstrates several features typical of the genre. First, it begins with a sudden, unexpected opening, immediately capturing the reader's attention and setting a tone of narrative urgency. Second, the plot is built around a single critical event – the protagonist's decision not to go to work. Third, the entire narrative unfolds within a brief time frame, which is characteristic of small epic forms. Finally, the novella achieves a powerful emotional effect despite its compact size, illustrating one of the key principles of the genre: minimal words, maximum meaning.

The story also showcases A'zam's skill in compressing time, space, and psychological complexity into a small narrative volume. He demonstrates how an ordinary human action can

reveal broader social issues: conformity, miscommunication, and the tendency of society to attribute guilt without evidence. The interplay between the protagonist's internal monologue and the external reactions of others creates a layered narrative structure in which psychological and social dimensions reinforce one another.

Overall, the analysis of these and other works shows that Ahmad A'zam plays a significant role in shaping the modern Uzbek novella. His ability to merge concise storytelling with deep psychological insight marks his contribution as both artistically original and culturally important. Through his novellas, A'zam expands the expressive possibilities of the genre, demonstrating how small-scale narratives can articulate complex emotional and existential concerns with clarity and precision.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the novella holds an important position in modern Uzbek literature as a compact yet expressive small epic form. Through Ahmad A'zam's works, it becomes clear that the genre's strength lies in its ability to unite brevity with psychological depth, dramatic focus, and emotional intensity.

A'zam's novellas – marked by sharp openings, single-event plots, and limited character systems – demonstrate how ordinary situations can be transformed into reflections on human doubt, identity, and social expectation. “What Could I Have Done?” (*Nima qilib qo'ygan ekanman?*) particularly illustrates how a simple break in routine can lead to a deeper exploration of inner confusion and collective pressure.

Although the novella genre has not been widely studied in Uzbek literary criticism, A'zam's contributions show that it serves as an effective medium for conveying modern psychological and social experiences. His works reveal the genre's capacity to deliver meaningful, multilayered insights within a compact narrative frame.

Overall, A'zam's novellas confirm the relevance and artistic potential of the modern Uzbek novella, pointing to promising

directions for future research in genre development and contemporary Uzbek prose.

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