

THE EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN'S FANTASY IN UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract

Children's fantasy literature in Uzbek literary tradition represents a unique synthesis of folklore heritage, national mythology, didactic narrative, and modern artistic experimentation. This article explores the historical formation, genre characteristics, thematic evolution, and aesthetic features of children's fantasy in Uzbek literature. Special attention is given to the transformation from folklore-based magical narratives to modern literary fantasy shaped by socio-political change and post-independence cultural identity.

Key words: Uzbek children's literature, fantasy genre, folklore tradition, mythopoeics, magical realism, satire, absurdity, national identity, symbolic narrative, child protagonist.

Children's fantasy in Uzbek literature is inseparable from the rich oral and written traditions that have shaped the cultural imagination of the Uzbek people for centuries. Elements of the fantastic have long existed in folk tales, epic narratives, legends, and didactic stories transmitted across generations. The development of children's fantasy literature in Uzbekistan must therefore be examined within a broader historical and cultural framework that includes folklore, classical literature, Soviet literary policy, and post-independence national revival.

The earliest foundations of Uzbek children's fantasy lie in oral folklore. Folk tales featuring magical creatures, heroic children, enchanted objects, and supernatural trials formed the imaginative world of young listeners long before the appearance of printed children's books. These narratives transmitted moral codes and symbolic representations of good and evil. The earliest forms of Uzbek fantasy are found in oral folklore. Epic narratives such as Alpomish represent heroic fantasy deeply intertwined with mythological and supernatural motifs. The protagonist Alpomish possesses extraordinary strength and courage, confronting magical obstacles, rival warriors, and symbolic trials. Although grounded in social reality, the epic incorporates mythic exaggeration, prophetic dreams, and archetypal quests that align with global heroic fantasy traditions.

Uzbek folk tales (ertaklar) also form a vast imaginative corpus. These stories often feature magical helpers, enchanted objects, shape-shifting beings, dragons (ajdarho), and wise old figures. The narrative structure typically follows a journey motif: a young hero or heroine overcomes injustice through bravery, intelligence, and moral purity. Fantasy elements serve not only decorative purposes but symbolic ones—representing internal growth, ethical testing, and cosmic balance between good and evil.

Animal tales and trickster narratives introduce elements of absurdity and satire. Through anthropomorphism and exaggeration, these stories critique greed, foolishness, and tyranny. Thus, fantasy in early Uzbek tradition already combined entertainment with moral instruction.

During the classical period, fantasy motifs became embedded within poetic and allegorical literature. The works of Alisher Navoi contain rich symbolic imagery and mythopoeic imagination. In epics such as Farhod va Shirin and Layli va Majnun, supernatural dreams, mystical journeys, and symbolic landscapes transcend literal realism. While primarily romantic and philosophical narratives, they incorporate fantasy through idealized heroes, divine intervention, and cosmic symbolism.



Another influential narrative tradition includes the adaptation of Eastern fairy cycles such as Chor Darvesh. These stories intertwine adventure, magic, fate, and romance, contributing to a shared Central Asian and Persianate fantasy heritage. Here, imagination functions allegorically—expressing spiritual struggle, divine love, and moral virtue.

Although these classical texts were not written exclusively for children, they later influenced children's adaptations and became part of the cultural foundation of Uzbek fantasy storytelling.

Xudoyberdi To'xtaboyev played a crucial role in shaping modern Uzbek children's fantasy. His works introduced absurdity, satire, and playful imagination into children's prose. Fantastical situations blended humor with social critique and allowed indirect engagement with reality. His famous novel "Sariq devni minib" introduces humorous fantasy through exaggerated situations and imaginative episodes. Although grounded in everyday Soviet-era life, the narrative employs absurd elements and child-centered perspective to critique bureaucracy and social hypocrisy.

Another significant work is "Shirin qovunlar mamlakati", which constructs a semi-fantastical setting filled with symbolic exaggeration and satirical tone. The narrative reflects absurdist fantasy traditions, using imaginative landscapes to highlight social contradictions. In these works, fantasy becomes a vehicle for intellectual engagement rather than mere fairy-tale morality.

In the post-independence era, children's fantasy diversified thematically and stylistically. Writers rediscovered national mythological imagery and combined it with modern narrative techniques. Fantasy became a space for exploring identity, ethical values, and cultural continuity.

Uzbek children's fantasy often emphasizes moral development. The child protagonist undergoes trials leading to personal growth and responsibility. Humor and satire serve as pedagogical strategies, enabling critique without confrontation. Symbolism remains central. Magical objects and journeys function as metaphors for knowledge and transformation. The interplay between realism and fantasy reflects a worldview in which mystery coexists with everyday life. Environmental and gender themes have become more prominent in recent decades. Strong female protagonists and ecological awareness reflect social change. Educational institutions and publishing houses support the genre's development, though challenges such as limited translation remain.

Overall, children's fantasy in Uzbek literature represents a dynamic synthesis of tradition and innovation. It nurtures imagination, reinforces cultural identity, and contributes to moral and intellectual development.

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