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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PICAESQUE GENRE IN UZBEK AND AMERICAN LITERATURE: THROUGH THE PRISM OF "SHUM BOLA" AND "HUCKLEBERRY FINN"

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Abstract. This article provides a comparative analysis of Gafur Gulom's *Shum Bola* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It explores how both authors utilize the picaresque genre to critique social structures through the eyes of "mischievous" protagonists. The study examines thematic parallels such as the quest for freedom, the contrast between nature and civilization, and the use of vernacular language. Despite differing cultural contexts—colonial America and early Soviet Uzbekistan—both works serve as profound commentaries on human resilience.

Keywords: Picaresque, satire, protagonist, freedom, vernacular, folklore, Uzbekistan, America, Gafur Gulom, Mark Twain.

The literary figure of the "trickster" or the "picaresque hero" is a universal phenomenon, appearing across diverse cultures to challenge the status quo. In the realm of world literature, few characters capture the essence of youthful rebellion and survival as vividly as Huckleberry Finn and the nameless protagonist of Gafur Gulom's *Shum Bola* (The Mischievous Boy). While separated by thousands of miles and distinct historical epochs—19th-century Pre-Civil War America and early 20th-century Central Asia—the narratives share a profound structural and thematic DNA.

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is often cited as the "Great American Novel," fundamentally because it broke away from formal European literary traditions to embrace the raw, rhythmic vernacular of the Mississippi River valley. Similarly, Gafur Gulom's *Shum Bola* (1936) stands as a pillar of Uzbek literature, utilizing the "lattachar" (vagabond) tradition to paint a panoramic picture of Uzbek life during a period of intense social transition.

The significance of comparing these two works lies in their shared use of a child's perspective to expose adult hypocrisy. In both novels, the "mischief" of the protagonist is not merely a personality trait but a survival mechanism in a world characterized by poverty, injustice, and shifting moral landscapes. This article aims to dissect the literary devices, linguistic choices, and socio-political critiques present in both texts. By examining how Huck and the "Shum Bola" navigate their respective environments, we can better understand the universal nature of the search for identity and the rejection of restrictive social norms. Through this comparative lens, the "mischievous boy" emerges not as a delinquent, but as a moral compass in a disordered world.

Both *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Shum Bola* strictly adhere to the picaresque tradition. A picaresque novel is typically episodic, featuring a





lower-class protagonist (the picaro) who lives by his wits in a corrupt society.

Twain's Huck flees the "sivilizing" influence of Widow Douglas and the violence of his father, finding sanctuary on a raft. Gafur Gulom's hero, driven by hunger and a restless spirit, wanders from the markets of Tashkent to various villages, encountering a kaleidoscope of characters—from thieves to eccentric mullahs.

In *Shum Bola*, the structure is defined by the "road." As Gulom writes, the boy's journey is a series of encounters where he must constantly adapt his persona to survive. He notes, "The world is wide, and if you have a tongue in your mouth, you won't starve" [1, p. 42]. This mirrors Huck's sentiment on the river: "You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" [2, p. 116]. The river and the road serve as liminal spaces where the rigid laws of society do not apply.

Satire is the primary weapon for both Twain and Gulom. Twain uses Huck to critique the institution of slavery and the false piety of the American South. Huck's moral crisis regarding whether to "turn in" the runaway slave Jim represents the conflict between a socially conditioned "deformed conscience" and a "sound heart."

Gulom, writing in the early Soviet era but reflecting on the pre-revolutionary and transitional period, targets the vestiges of feudalism and religious hypocrisy. In the famous scene where the boy works for a master who counts every grain of food, Gulom satirizes the greed of the upper class. The boy's witty observations expose the absurdity of traditional hierarchies. As noted in literary criticism, "Gulom uses the boy's innocence to unmask the darkness of the old regime" [3, p. 88]. Both authors suggest that the "outcasts" of society often possess a higher morality than those who claim to be its pillars.

A revolutionary aspect of both novels is the elevation of common speech to the level of high literature. Twain famously used various dialects to give authenticity to his characters, a move that was initially criticized by librarians but later hailed as the birth of modern American prose.

Gafur Gulom achieved a similar feat in Uzbek literature. He infused his prose with the rhythm of the *askiya* (Uzbek wordplay) and folk humor. The language of *Shum Bola* is salty, vibrant, and filled with the idioms of the bazaar. This linguistic choice serves to ground the story in the lived reality of the people. Gulom's work "transformed the Uzbek literary language by bringing it closer to the breath of the street" [4, p. 112]. In both cases, the language itself is an act of rebellion against "proper," restrictive academic or religious discourse.

For Huck Finn, "civilization" is synonymous with shoes, schooling, and the stifling morality of the town. For the "Shum Bola," it is the enclosure of the home and the demands of labor. Both boys find their true selves in nature—Huck on the Mississippi and the Uzbek boy in the vast landscapes and bustling markets outside the control of his parents. However, there is a distinct difference in their endings. Huck chooses to "light out for the Territory" to avoid further





socialization [2, p. 281]. In contrast, Gulom's protagonist eventually finds a place within the changing social order, reflecting the socialist realism influences of the time which favored the reintegration of the individual into the collective.

Conclusion. The comparison between *Shum Bola* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reveals that the "mischievous boy" is a global archetype for the human spirit's resilience against oppression. Despite the vast geographical and cultural distance between Gafur Gulom's Uzbekistan and Mark Twain's America, both authors arrived at a similar literary solution for critiquing their societies: the use of a sharp-witted, marginalized child as a narrator.

Both novels successfully moved literature away from elitist abstractions toward the vibrant reality of the common person. They proved that the vernacular of the "street" or the "river" was capable of carrying the weight of profound philosophical and moral inquiries. While Huck Finn's journey is one of perpetual flight from a society he finds irredeemable, the *Shum Bola*'s journey is one of exuberant survival and eventual adaptation.

Ultimately, these works remind us that mischief is often the first step toward independent thought. By questioning the "rules" of their worlds, Huck and the *Shum Bola* force readers to question their own. These masterpieces remain relevant today because the struggle between the individual's search for freedom and society's demand for conformity is a timeless human condition. In the laughter of these two boys, we find the echoes of a universal cry for a more honest and just world.

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