

**THE POETICS OF BREVITY: RUSSIAN AND UZBEK SHORT PROSE BETWEEN
MINIMALISM AND CULTURAL DIALOGUE**

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Abstract: This article explores the poetics of brevity in Russian and Uzbek short prose, focusing on the artistic strategies that enable authors to convey complex psychological and philosophical meanings within limited textual form. Short genres such as the drabble, miniature, and flash fiction have gained prominence in contemporary literary practice due to their capacity for semantic concentration and emotional intensity. Through a comparative analysis of Anton Chekhov and Salomat Vafo, the study demonstrates how Russian and Uzbek literary traditions employ different yet complementary approaches to conciseness, silence, and symbolic imagery. Chekhov's prose is characterized by psychological nuance, open composition, and the expressive function of pause, whereas Vafo's miniatures draw on Eastern contemplative aesthetics, natural symbolism, and the poetics of quiet emotional resonance. The research is based on comparative-typological, structural-semiotic, and cultural-contextual methods, allowing the short story to be viewed as a dynamic space of intercultural dialogue. The article concludes that brevity in both traditions is not a limitation but a form of heightened artistic expression that transforms silence into a meaningful communicative act.

Keywords: short prose; drabble; minimalism; Chekhov; Salomat Vafo; symbolism; poetics of silence; comparative literature; Russian literature; Uzbek literature; intercultural dialogue.

Introduction.

Contemporary literature has witnessed a steady turn toward short forms—miniatures, drabbles, vignettes, flash fiction. Emerging at the intersection of classical poetics and a fast-paced digital culture, these compact formats intensify meaning and emotion in minimal textual space. In short fiction, every word serves a structural function; silence, ellipsis, and pause operate as autonomous artistic devices.

The present-day appeal of brevity is hardly accidental. Under conditions of accelerated perception and information overload, short prose answers both the cognitive rhythms and aesthetic expectations of readers while retaining the philosophical and psychological depth associated with canonical literature. In Russian writing, short forms have long been central—from Pushkin and Gogol to Chekhov, Bunin, and Shukshin—where concision becomes a privileged means to register psychological nuance, an inner pivot, or a moment of insight. Uzbek prose, by contrast, consolidates its investment in brevity later, largely in the twentieth century and especially in the post-Soviet period, when experimentation, symbolism, and interiority intensify across small genres.

Comparing Russian and Uzbek short prose invites us to look beyond typological labels (drabble, novella, miniature) toward questions of artistic concept, craft, and intercultural influence. The dialogue between the Russian school of narration and the Uzbek tradition of imagistic thinking produces a distinctive hybrid mode that fuses European compositional rigor with Eastern symbolism and contemplative cadence.

Literature Review and Methodology

Short forms call for a multi-perspectival approach that combines literary analysis, cultural poetics, and comparative typology. Foundational ideas for theorizing the short story derive from Russian formalism and its continuations: V. Shklovsky's technique of defamiliarization, B. Eichenbaum's functional account of the short story's inner completeness, and Y. Tynianov's dynamic view of literary evolution. M. Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope is particularly useful for compact forms, where space and time condense into a "semantic node," a point of encounter between character and truth. Structural-semiotic perspectives—Y. Lotman's "secondary modeling systems," R. Barthes's textual codes, G. Genette's narratology—clarify how micro-elements (word, image, pause, rhythmic cut) carry maximal load within minimal volume.

Concurrently, scholarship on Uzbek literature tracks the emergence of short forms as a laboratory for artistic experiment—from psychological miniatures to philosophical parable—mediated by oral tradition (maqol, hikoyat, masal) and dialoguing with Russian and Western European models. Critics such as S. Rakhmatullaev, A. Dadabaev, and M. Yo'ldosheva underscore both the continuity with folk poetics and the absorption of modern compositional methods. A younger generation—Salomat Vafo, Shoirra Ergasheva, Alisher Normatov—tests the drabble and micronovella as a universal idiom for expressing interiority in a globalized world.

Methodologically, this article integrates: Comparative-typological analysis, to map overlaps and distinctions in aesthetics, composition, and style across Russian and Uzbek texts; Structural-semiotic reading, treating the short text as a tight system where each sign gains value within the whole; Poetic analysis, tracing metaphor, symbol, syntactic economy, rhythmic recurrence, and the expressive function of pause; Cultural-contextual interpretation, situating micro-poetics within national worldviews, religious imaginaries, and ethnocultural symbolics; and Psycholinguistic attention to inner speech and the emotional code of brevity—how short forms represent thought, feeling, and tacit cognition.

Chekhov and Salomat Vafo serve as case studies for a diachronic and intercultural comparison: two distinct milieus, convergent commitments to concision, and different routes to the aesthetics of silence.

Main Discussion 1) Short Prose as an Experimental Space

Unlike the novel, short prose rarely unfolds as the expansion of plot; instead it crystallizes a moment, an intensity, a threshold of recognition. Chekhov famously conceived the short story as "a moment of life, caught in motion." Contemporary typologies distinguish the novella (plotfully closed, often with a twist), the drabble (highly constrained, typically 100 words, yet semantically complete), the miniature (lyrical, state-oriented), and flash fiction (extreme compression with narrative vector).

In Russian practice, the "Chekhovian" model privileges an open composition, minimal fabula, and a refusal of moralizing commentary. Events do not so much conclude as reverberate within the protagonist's consciousness; the story becomes a space of psychological pause. Uzbek

traditions evolve along a different vector: their roots in folk wisdom and Sufi poetics value aphoristic density and parabolic clarity. Throughout the twentieth century—and more markedly after independence—Uzbek prose sutures European narrative templates to a contemplative tempo: silence acquires semantic weight, stillness counts as action, and suspension articulates meaning.

2) The Economy of Expression: Detail, Pause, Symbol

B. Eichenbaum's dictum—that mastery lies in the single detail where “the whole is contained”—aptly characterizes short forms. In mini-prose, significance is frequently displaced into a gesture, an object, a micro-image. In Chekhov's “The Death of a Government Clerk,” a trivial sneeze inflates into an existential emblem of fear and dependency; an apparently negligible incident becomes a lens on social and psychological subjection. This economy is mirrored, yet modulated, in Uzbek miniatures: detail tends to encode spiritual rather than merely situational states. In Salomat Vafo's texts, recurring motifs—letter, bird, wind, mirror—index expectation, quiet, separation, and inwardness. The small action (“the bird fell silent at the window”) retrieves an expansive emotional metaphor.

The pause is pivotal: it converts the reader into co-author by creating a zone of active inference. Chekhov's injunction to “cut until it is clear without words” ties lacunae to clarity. In Vafo, pauses generate a meditative drift; silence acquires agency, becoming not just atmosphere but a structuring presence. If Russian mini-prose often wields pause for tension, Uzbek mini-prose frequently mobilizes it for contemplation—two paths to the same poetics of the unsaid.

Symbolic repertoires diverge while occasionally intersecting. Russian short prose leans on domestic or temporal symbols—train, road, window, rain, clock—markers of passage and waiting. Uzbek prose favors natural-mystical signs—wind, desert, shadow, water—as emblems of fate, transition, and the inner path. In both, symbol is dramaturgy rather than ornament, organizing the energetic center of the text.

3) Composition and Rhythm: From Inner Shock to Quiet Equilibrium

Short prose typically follows a compact architecture: incipit – inflection – pause. In Chekhov, the turning point is psychological recognition rather than eventful climax; in Vafo, a shift in image or intonation registers the inner movement. Russian brevity tends toward compressed dynamism; Uzbek brevity inclines to rhythmic stasis—a poised stillness where emotion is sustained rather than discharged. This difference generates two modalities of “laconic depth”: one dramatizes pressure, the other distills calm.

4) Cultural Dialogue and Historical Vectors

Russian influence on Uzbek prose dates back to the late nineteenth century, when print culture and language instruction facilitated sustained contact. Translations of Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov helped define modern notions of style, composition, and psychological verisimilitude in Central Asia. Chekhov's model—ellipsis, inner conflict, nuance—proved especially generative for Uzbek writers seeking to portray inwardness without rhetoric. Yet Uzbek prose retained its own roots in oral forms, Qur'anic parable, and Navoi's classical lyricism, which imparted a distinct rhythm and symbolic horizon. In the Soviet period, periodicals and publishing networks in Tashkent and Moscow intensified a two-way exchange, including the emergence of Russian-language Uzbek prose. The result is less imitation than **dialogue**: Russian psychological exactitude meets Eastern symbolism and philosophical inflection.

5) Two Case Studies: A. P. Chekhov and Salomat Vafo

Chekhov (1860–1904) shaped the modern short story through exacting measure and economy. His narration avoids explicit moral commentary; irony and compassion coexist within a sober gaze. “Sleepy” (1888) exemplifies his micro-dramaturgy: the exhausted nurse girl, compelled to rock the master’s child, circles through hypnotic repetitions (“sleepy,” “eyes stick together”), until a fatal outcome emerges not as villainy but as the last station of human depletion. The cradle becomes a symbol of bondage and rote compulsion; the tragedy arises from state, not act. The composition contracts to one scene; the affect arises in the interstice rather than the statement. The ending—open, judgment withheld—entrusts meaning to the reader.

Salomat Vafo, a leading voice in contemporary Uzbek mini-prose, writes in a meditative register where silence and image do the carrying. In “Tinglovchi shamol” (“The Listening Wind,” 2018), almost nothing “happens”: a woman waits for a letter that never arrives; the wind stirs the curtain. Yet beneath this outer immobility extends an inner landscape of anticipation, weariness, and acceptance. The wind mediates between within and without; light, window, and fabric compose a symbolic grammar that conveys feeling without declaration. Where Chekhov often stages an inner collision between person and milieu, Vafo explores an inner equilibrium—a search for alignment with the world’s breath. Both aesthetics rest on laconic means; they simply tune silence to different ends: catharsis versus dissolution, pressure versus poise.

Conclusion

This comparative inquiry confirms the universal capacity of small forms to condense complex psychological and philosophical content within minimal volume. Russian and Uzbek traditions converge in conceiving short prose as a concentrated artistic gesture: a site of reflection rather than plot accumulation, of state rather than action. The Russian line, epitomized by Chekhov, articulates a poetics of silence grounded in economy, observation, and trust in the reader. The Uzbek line, synthesizing European composition with Eastern contemplativeness (as in Vafo), advances a poetics of quiet, natural symbolism, and the philosophy of waiting.

Chekhovian brevity dramatizes the everyday’s latent crisis; Vafo’s restraint stages the soul’s quiet adjustments. Together, they illustrate how brevity is not a limit but a method—a way to tell the untellable by distributing meaning across detail, pause, and symbol. Short prose thus becomes a privileged arena of cultural dialogue, where European analytic impulse meets Eastern intuition and where the word tends toward silence—not as absence, but as the most articulate form of presence.

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