

# Fragmentary Composition In 21st-Century Uzbek Prose: New Forms Of Nontraditional Novella Structure

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**Abstract:** This article examines the emergence and consolidation of fragmentary composition as a leading structuring principle in 21st-century Uzbek prose, with special attention to the nontraditional novella (*qissa*). After the homogenizing aesthetics of late socialist realism and the transitional poetics of the 1990s, Uzbek writers have increasingly embraced mosaic, discontinuous, and hybrid arrangements that challenge linearity and monologic narration. Drawing on narratology (Genette, Bal), chronotope theory (Bakhtin), postmodernist poetics (Hutcheon, McHale), and media-aware approaches to digital textuality (Hayles, Ryan), the study maps how fragmented forms register social change, diasporic mobility, memory work, and the pressures of the platformized public sphere. Methodologically, the article combines close reading with contextual literary history and intermedial analysis, using a corpus of contemporary Uzbek novellas published in print and online venues since 2001. The results show that fragmentariness appears as purposeful architecture rather than mere stylistic ornament: it foregrounds ellipsis and gaps to model the epistemic uncertainty of postsoviet life; deploys multiple, shifting focalizations to represent polyphonic social experience; and integrates paratextual and documentary shards—diary entries, chat logs, news flashes—to negotiate truth claims between fiction and reality. The nontraditional *qissa* thus operates as a laboratory for re-calibrating narrative time, producing polychronic chronotopes where virtual spaces and embodied places collide, and for re-situating the authorial voice amid citation, retranslation, and intertextual memory. The article concludes by arguing that these compositional experiments have already redefined the Uzbek novella's genre ecology: they support translation and transnational reception, enrich classroom pedagogy of contemporary literature, and open a durable path for integrating oral tradition and digital culture without forfeiting local specificity.

**Keywords:** Uzbek prose; *qissa*; fragmentary composition; chronotope; intertextuality; digital culture; polyphony; montage poetics.

**Introduction:** The Uzbek novella has long been a genre of negotiation: between oral storytelling and the European short novel, between collective ideals and individual conscience, between epic continuity and lyric brevity. In the 21st century, this negotiation has intensified under the pressures of social transformation, migration, and digitalization. Readers accustomed to the linear teleology of the classic realist novel now encounter structures that proceed by leaps, returns, and discontinuous juxtapositions; narratives that refuse causal closure while insisting on ethical attention; voices that are embedded within, or even contested by, documentary fragments and paratextual

debris. What marks the most compelling nontraditional *qissas* of the period is not a simple rejection of plot, but a strategic redistribution of narrative energy away from chronological advancement and toward the affective and epistemic labor of the fragment.

The term fragmentary composition names both a surface texture and a deep architecture. On the surface it designates short sections, white-space caesuras, vignettes, and genre switching; at a deeper level it encodes decisions about how a story can be known and who may speak within it. The fragment creates a rhythm of interruption and resumption; it shapes attention, invites inference, and acknowledges the

opacity that surrounds personal and collective histories. In Uzbek prose, this impulse has recognizable antecedents in montage-like forms of 20th-century modernism and in the episodic organization of oral narrative cycles, yet its current prominence also reflects a postprint media ecology in which readers navigate tabs, feeds, and notifications. The qissa's capacity for concentrated intensity and structural agility makes it an apt site for processing such conditions.

While fragmentary narration flourished globally in the late 20th century, its recent Uzbek manifestations respond to local histories. The long shadow of censorship has left a metapoetic sensitivity to what cannot be said directly. Diasporic and bilingual realities complicate narrative voice and audience address, encouraging hybrid textualities in which letters, transcripts, and translated passages become material signs of movement. Urban transformation, labor migration, and changing family structures shift the social chronotope: homes and neighborhoods are re-imagined through returns and departures, across borders and screens. The nontraditional qissa emerges as a portable form for thinking these conditions without surrendering to the illusion of completeness.

The scholarly problem is twofold. First, how should we describe the compositional strategies that make fragmentation in contemporary Uzbek novellas feel constructive rather than merely chaotic? Second, what are the cognitive and ethical stakes of those strategies for readers who must interpolate, remember, and doubt in order to complete the story? These questions require tools from narratology, genre theory, and media studies, recalibrated to an Uzbek-language corpus and its translational afterlives.

The aim of this study is to identify and theorize the principal modes of fragmentary composition in 21st-century Uzbek nontraditional novellas and to evaluate how these modes reconfigure narrative time, focalization, and truth claims. The article seeks to show that fragmentation in the qissa functions as a generative design that enables polyphony, mediates between virtual and embodied space, and stages the limits of knowledge in a rapidly changing society.

The corpus consists of contemporary Uzbek novellas published between 2001 and 2024 in literary journals, small-press editions, and reputable online platforms. Selection prioritized texts that self-evidently engage discontinuous composition through short numbered sequences, embedded documents, abrupt shifts of narrator or addressee, or visible integration of digital registers such as chat transcripts, status updates, and micro-essays. The study reads the novellas in the

original Uzbek where possible and, when relevant, consults authorized Russian or English translations to track how fragmentation travels across languages.

Analytically, the article employs a layered method. First, close readings produce micro-level descriptions of segmentation, transitions, and gaps. Second, a narratological framework derived from Genette and Bal clarifies how order, duration, and frequency are manipulated, and how focalization shifts among internal, external, and variable regimes. Third, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope supports a macro-level account of how fragmented time and place organize social experience, while Lotman's semiotics helps articulate the border-crossing logic of montage. To address the imbrication of digital culture, the study draws on Hayles's notion of electronic textuality and Ryan's theorization of virtual immersion to explain how screen logics are simulated within print. Finally, comparative references to postmodernist poetics (Hutcheon, McHale) situate Uzbek developments within broader debates on intertextuality, metafiction, and the ethics of uncertainty.

The method is qualitative and interpretive rather than statistical, yet it aims for systematicity by triangulating formal description, theoretical modeling, and historical context. The article does not propose a definitive taxonomy; instead, it identifies recurrent patterns whose variations illuminate the compositional intelligence of the nontraditional qissa.

The first result is a redefinition of narrative continuity. Fragmentary Uzbek novellas often proceed through clusters of scenes that appear autonomous yet resonate across long intervals. A school courtyard in one section echoes faintly in a later hospital corridor; a proverb in a grandmother's voice reappears reframed as an online meme; a minor character glimpsed from a bus window returns as the subject of a report. This technique replaces causal linearity with associative logic. The connective tissue is not always an event but a motif, a tone, or a lexeme whose semantic field accrues mass over time. The reader's task is to build a mental index of such recurrences, allowing a dispersed plot to assume shape through recognition rather than anticipation.

A second finding concerns the management of silence. Uzbek fragmentary novellas routinely withhold critical information, creating lacunae around biography, motivation, or political context. These gaps are not merely suspense devices. They represent, in miniature, the cultural reality that narratives about the recent past remain provisional, contested, and sometimes dangerous. Silence is dramatized formally by ellipses, blank pages, and ruptured syntax, but also structurally

by scenes that end just before or after a decisive act. The fragment, here, is an ethics of discretion. It refuses to exploit trauma for spectacle; it encodes respect for those who cannot speak; it protects privacy while insisting on remembrance. Readers are summoned to practice tactful inference, to attend to what can be responsibly imagined and what must remain unknown.

The third pattern is a choreography of voices that supersedes single-point focalization. The nontraditional qissa uses fragments to stage heteroglossia: letters are juxtaposed with transcripts from an interrogation; an intimate diary entry is set alongside a clipped news brief; a child's recollection collides with a bureaucrat's minute. This multi-register composition models the polyphony of everyday life. It resists the sovereign narrator and aligns, instead, with a documentary impulse extended from oral culture into the digital. The effect is not simply plurality but accountability. When one voice contradicts another, the novella invites readers to weigh credibility, to understand how different discourses monopolize reality, and to recognize the provisional nature of each testimony.

Temporal design emerges as a fourth axis. Fragmentation enables sophisticated manipulations of time without resorting to cumbersome flashback cues. A section might deliver a present-tense moment from a border crossing, followed by a fragment of a long-ago summer in a kolkhoz, followed by a transcript date-stamped with yesterday's hour. The reader negotiates a polychronic chronotope in which lived time, remembered time, and recorded time overlap without hierarchical priority. This simultaneity reflects the temporal texture of contemporary Uzbek life: the persistence of inherited forms, the urgency of current adaptation, and the archival pressure of documentation. The fragment becomes a temporal switchboard, distributing affect and information across noncoincident layers.

Spatiality is equally reoriented. In many novellas, space is not an inert container but a perforated membrane. Homes open onto chat rooms; city squares mirror social media feeds; deserts are mapped not only by footsteps but by stories retold in transit. Fragmentary composition depicts this mediation by letting the virtual and the material co-author scenes. A message thread interrupts a family dinner; an archived photograph reconstitutes a vanished street; an online rumor precipitates an offline catastrophe. Such crossings complicate the classical realist chronotope of home, journey, and return. The journey may be circular or algorithmic; the return may take the form of a scroll back to earlier posts. Yet the prose remains grounded in local diction and sensory detail, preserving the

textures of Uzbek vernacular life within and against the overlay of networks.

Intertextuality takes on a practical, not merely decorative, function. The fragment is a conduit for citation, allusion, and reframing. A proverb may be quoted, glossed, and ironized across three sections; a line from a doston may be refracted through contemporary slang; a Soviet slogan may reappear as graffiti on a relocated factory wall. These operations do not parody tradition into irrelevance; they reactivate it under new conditions. Often translation itself becomes a compositional device. Lines are presented in Uzbek and then in an alternate register or language, sometimes with deliberate mismatches that highlight semantic drift. The reader's awareness of translation as labor and loss supports the novella's exploration of migration and cultural brokerage.

Another salient result is the integration of microgenres that reflect social documentation. Fragments mimic medical forms, legal notices, transit tickets, or application portals. The text acquires a texture of bureaucracy which characters must navigate, and which readers recognize from daily life. By placing bureaucratic microgenres alongside intimate confession or mythic retelling, the novella dramatizes the friction between institutional discourse and personal voice. Neither cancels the other; their juxtaposition provides a composite truth more persuasive than either alone.

The nontraditional qissa also repositions the authorial figure. In some texts, a self-reflexive narrator announces the act of cutting and arranging, admitting the difficulty of assembling a whole from incongruent parts. This candor functions as a contract with the reader, who accepts co-responsibility for making sense. Elsewhere, the author recedes behind curated documents, allowing the pattern of fragments to serve as signature. In both cases, authorship is less about omniscience than about care: about choosing what to include and what to withhold, about arranging voices so that they can be heard without coercion. Fragmentariness proves compatible with ethical humility.

Concerns about accessibility inevitably arise. Does fragmentation alienate readers? Evidence from classroom practice and reading groups suggests the opposite when scaffolding is provided. Because fragments are short, they can be approached in modular fashion, enabling discussion and interpretation at different proficiency levels. Moreover, fragmented novellas often support re-reading, as earlier sections gain new resonance from later revelations. This recursive readability aligns with

digital habits without capitulating to distraction; the text uses short forms to sustain long attention.

From a genre-historical perspective, the adoption of fragmentary composition does not dissolve the qissa into an amorphous miscellany. On the contrary, it consolidates the novella's identity as a form that can compress novelistic amplitude into a concentrated architecture. The contemporary Uzbek qissa uses fragments to balance breadth and intensity, local specificity and transnational legibility. Because fragments can travel—quoted, excerpted, circulated—the novella becomes easier to translate and promote abroad without flattening cultural nuance. Translation can preserve segmentation, maintain polyphony, and reproduce paratextual features that signal documentary texture.

Finally, the fragment's cognitive affordances should be emphasized. Fragmentation invites pattern recognition, empathy through gaps, and critical evaluation of sources. It trains readers to infer and to doubt responsibly, skills that are valuable beyond literature. In a period saturated with information and misinformation, the nontraditional Uzbek qissa models how to hold contradictory data without immediate synthesis, how to practice patience in understanding, and how to maintain solidarity with partial stories that resist final closure.

Fragmentary composition has become a central resource of 21st-century Uzbek nontraditional novellas. Far from representing a crisis of form, fragmentation furnishes a flexible architecture for rendering polyphonic social reality, negotiating digital and material chronotopes, and articulating an ethics of testimony amid uncertainty. The contemporaneous qissa deploys segments, gaps, and embedded documents not as stylistic eccentricities but as truth procedures: they permit the careful staging of silence, the juxtaposition of discourses, and the reassembly of disrupted temporalities. The results include intensified reader participation, enhanced translatability, and a recalibrated authorial stance grounded in curation rather than command.

For literary scholarship, these developments recommend a revision of inherited analytic tools. Narratology must account for documentary microgenres and platform-derived textualities; chronotope theory must recognize the polychronic overlays of networked life; intertextual analysis must expand to include translation as compositional practice. For pedagogy, fragmentary novellas offer modular entry points that support discussion and close reading across registers and media. For cultural policy and publishing, they demonstrate how local literature

can engage global forms without abandoning the idioms and rhythms that make Uzbek prose distinctive.

The nontraditional qissa, in short, has not only survived but prospered by absorbing the discontinuities of its time. Through fragmentary composition it constructs a durable middle space between epic continuity and lyric intensity, between archive and anecdote, between village lane and data cloud. That middle space is now one of the most vital habitats of contemporary Uzbek narrative imagination.

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