



LAND, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND RURAL LIFE IN WILLA CATHER'S MY ÁNTONIA AND TOG'AY MUROD'S OTAMDAN QOLGAN DALALAR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This study explores the representation of land, cultural identity, and rural life in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and Tog'ay Murod's *Otamdan qolgan dalalar* (Fields Inherited from My Father). Although these novels originate from different cultural and historical contexts, both portray the deep connection between individuals and the land they inhabit. Employing a comparative literary approach, the research examines how the two authors use rural settings to construct cultural identity, preserve collective memory, and express social values. The study applies comparative textual analysis supported by concepts from cultural memory studies and ecocriticism. The findings reveal that land functions not only as a physical environment but also as a symbol of heritage, belonging, and continuity. While Cather emphasizes immigrant experiences and adaptation to the American prairie, Tog'ay Murod highlights ancestral inheritance and the preservation of national identity through agricultural traditions. The analysis demonstrates that both novels contribute significantly to the understanding of rural literature and cultural memory despite their distinct literary traditions. The study also identifies common themes of resilience, attachment to homeland, and the role of rural communities in shaping individual and collective identities.

Keywords: comparative literature, cultural identity, rural life, land, cultural memory.

Introduction

Literature frequently reflects the relationship between human beings and their environment. In rural fiction, land often functions as more than a geographical setting; it becomes a source of identity, memory, and cultural continuity. Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918) and Tog'ay Murod's *Otamdan qolgan dalalar* represent two important examples of rural literature produced in different cultural contexts. While Cather portrays the experiences of immigrant communities in the American Midwest, Tog'ay Murod focuses on the life of Uzbek farmers and their attachment to ancestral land.

Previous studies on *My Ántonia* have primarily examined immigrant



identity, frontier culture, and memory. Research on Otamdan qolgan dalalar has concentrated on national values, historical consciousness, and rural traditions. However, comparative studies connecting these two works remain limited. Therefore, this article aims to investigate how both authors depict land as a foundation of cultural identity and rural life.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is land represented in the two novels?
2. What role does land play in shaping cultural identity?
3. How do the authors portray rural life and collective memory?
4. What similarities and differences can be identified between the two works?

2. Methods

This research employs a qualitative comparative literary method. The primary sources are Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and Tog'ay Murod's *Otamdan qolgan dalalar*. Comparative textual analysis is used to examine themes, narrative techniques, and symbolic representations.

The study is informed by two theoretical perspectives. First, cultural memory theory explains how literature preserves collective experiences and historical consciousness. Second, ecocriticism provides a framework for understanding the relationship between people and their physical environment. Through close reading and thematic comparison, the study identifies common and contrasting features in the portrayal of land and rural existence.

Results and Discussion

3.1. Land as a Symbol of Identity

One of the most significant similarities between the two novels is the symbolic role of land. In *My Ántonia*, the Nebraska prairie represents opportunity, growth, and belonging. For immigrant families, the land becomes a means of establishing a new life and integrating into American society. Through labor and perseverance, characters transform an unfamiliar environment into a homeland.

In *Otamdan qolgan dalalar*, land carries a more ancestral meaning. It is closely associated with family history, cultural traditions, and national identity. The title itself emphasizes inheritance and continuity across generations. The land is not merely cultivated; it is respected as a sacred legacy passed from fathers to children.

Despite differences in historical context, both novels portray land as an essential component of personal and collective identity. Characters define themselves through their connection to the soil, agricultural labor, and rural community.

3.2. Representation of Rural Life



Rural life occupies a central position in both narratives. Cather presents the American prairie as a challenging yet rewarding environment. Her characters face harsh weather conditions, economic difficulties, and social adaptation. Nevertheless, rural life is depicted as a source of strength, independence, and community solidarity.

Similarly, Tog‘ay Murod portrays village life as a foundation of moral and cultural values. Agricultural work structures everyday life and strengthens social relationships. The novel highlights traditional customs, family responsibilities, and communal cooperation. Through detailed descriptions of farming activities and rural traditions, the author emphasizes the significance of village culture in preserving national identity.

Both writers demonstrate that rural communities play a crucial role in shaping human character. Hard work, resilience, and commitment to collective welfare emerge as shared values in the two novels.

3.3. Cultural Memory and Heritage

Memory functions as a key narrative element in both works. In *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden reconstructs his childhood experiences through nostalgic recollection. His memories of Ántonia and the prairie contribute to the preservation of a disappearing rural world. Memory becomes a bridge between the past and the present.

In contrast, *Otamdan qolgan dalalar* connects memory to ancestral heritage and historical continuity. The narrative repeatedly emphasizes the responsibility of preserving traditions inherited from previous generations. The land serves as a physical reminder of collective experiences and cultural values.

Although the novels employ different narrative approaches, both suggest that memory is essential for maintaining cultural identity. Through memory, individuals remain connected to their roots and historical experiences.

3.4. Narrative Techniques and Cultural Perspectives

The authors employ distinct narrative techniques that reflect their cultural backgrounds. Cather relies heavily on personal recollection and lyrical descriptions. The first-person narration creates intimacy and emphasizes subjective memory. The landscape often appears through the emotional perspective of the narrator.

Tog‘ay Murod adopts a style deeply rooted in Uzbek oral traditions and national storytelling practices. His narrative incorporates cultural expressions, local customs, and symbolic references that reinforce the connection between people and land.

These stylistic differences illustrate how literature adapts universal themes to specific cultural contexts. While both novels address identity and belonging, they do so through unique narrative traditions.



Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that *My Ántonia* and *Otamdan qolgan dalalar* share significant thematic similarities despite their cultural differences. In both novels, land functions as a symbol of identity, memory, and continuity. Rural life is portrayed as a source of moral strength and cultural preservation, while collective memory reinforces connections between individuals and their communities.

However, the novels differ in their cultural emphasis. Cather focuses on immigration, adaptation, and the formation of new identities within the American frontier experience. Togʻay Murod highlights ancestral inheritance, national values, and the preservation of traditional rural culture. These differences enrich the comparative perspective and reveal the diverse ways in which literature represents the relationship between people and land.

The findings suggest that comparative studies between American and Uzbek literature can contribute to broader discussions of cultural identity, rural representation, and memory studies. Future research may further explore ecocritical and postcolonial dimensions of these texts.

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