

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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***THESE MOUNTAINS ARE GREAT MOUNTAINS / BU TOG 'LAR – ULUG' TOG 'LAR (1991)***  
Evril Turon / Mamadali Mahmudov (1940-2020)

OVERVIEW

**Author** Mamadali Mahmudov (pen name Evril Turon) was an Uzbek writer and public intellectual. He was born on December 12, 1940, in the village of Bog'don, Forish District, Jizzakh Region, Uzbekistan, and graduated from Tashkent State University with a degree in journalism and philology. Mahmudov worked in journalism and publishing as a literary contributor, editor, and director of periodicals, and held leadership roles in the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan and the Cultural Foundation of Uzbekistan. He gained wide recognition with the novella *Bog'don qashqiri* (*Bog'don Wolf*, 1975), which reinterpreted the Basmachi movement—an anti-Soviet insurgency—by presenting its protagonist as a figure motivated by national self-determination. His essay collection *Tog' ohusi* (*Mountain Deer*, 1974) and later work *O'lmas qoyalar* (*Immortal Cliffs*, 1981) explored themes of historical memory, national identity, and the legacy of Russian imperial expansion in Central Asia. His subsequent novels, *Bo'z bo'ri* (*The Grey Wolf*), *Oqqul* (*White Flower*), and *Oynur*, were written while he was in prison. In 1999, Mahmudov was arrested and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment on charges related to anti-constitutional activity; in 2013 he received an additional term for alleged violations of prison regulations. He was released in 2017 after serving seventeen years. His membership in the Writers' Union was reinstated in 2018. He died on October 16, 2020. Mahmudov is regarded as an important voice in late Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbek prose, noted for reassessing contested historical narratives and articulating themes of national consciousness and cultural memory.

**Novel** *These Mountains Are Great Mountains* is an edition of an earlier work, *O'lmas qoyalar* (*Immortal Cliffs*), originally published in 1981 in the magazine *Sharq Yulduzi*. The author made minor edits and changed some names, but the work essentially remains the same, presented under a new title. While facing harsh criticism in the Soviet Union for its idealistic depiction of historical events, which contradicted the dominant ideology that denied the colonial nature of Russian rule, the novel was published abroad in 1981 – first in the Federal Republic of Germany and later in Turkey. After Uzbekistan gained independence, the work was reprinted, and the author was awarded the Cho'lpon Prize. In 2001, he received the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award, and the novel was also published in French in Paris in 2008. During the author's imprisonment, literary critics largely remained silent about the novel. Only after his release and reinstatement to the Writers' Union did scholarly research on his work resume.

**Background** The novel's events unfold primarily in Kattabog', a region familiar to the author, but also extend to Tashkent, Bukhara and Russian Siberia. The mountainous landscape is depicted with warmth, reflecting the author's personal connection to the region. The narrative incorporates biographical elements: his father, who went missing during World War II, served as a *tog'begi* or mountain administrator (like the protagonist); and his grandfather, a determined fighter against the occupiers (paralleling the protagonist's father) was killed by Russian colonial troops. From a young age, he dreamed of becoming a writer and of creating a comprehensive account of Russia's conquest of Central Asia (then known as Turkestan, meaning "Land of the Turks", and covering much of present-day Uzbekistan) in the nineteenth century. In the novel, he combines the historical events of the conquest of Turkestan with artistic invention, preserving and interweaving the stories of his warlike ancestors.

**Main Characters**

<b>Bo'ronbek</b>	A <i>madrasa</i> (Islamic religious school) student; later <i>tog'begi</i> (mountain administrator)
<b>Mirzabek</b>	A <i>madrasa</i> student who later becomes the village <i>qozi</i> (judge)
<b>Rayhon</b>	The beauty of the village and Bo'ronbek's wife
<b>Rahmat</b>	o'ronbek's father and a respected middle-class villager
<b>Humorxonim</b>	Bo'ronbek's mother
<b>Bo'riboy</b>	A Kazakh friend of Bo'ronbek
<b>Uyg'oqbek</b>	Bo'ronbek's uncle, a merchant living in Siberia
<b>Tatyana</b>	Uyg'oqbek's Russian wife

## SYNOPSIS

The novel begins in a mountain village in the mid-nineteenth century. Two respected villagers, Rahmat and Qudrat, travel to Bukhara to arrange the marriage of Qudrat's son, Mirzabek, a madrasa student. The marriage is necessary because he has dishonored his teacher's daughter, who has become pregnant. Rahmat also has a son studying at a madrasa in Tashkent and considers arranging his marriage to the village beauty, Rayhon. At the wedding, Bo'ronbek appears with his uncle Uyg'oqbek, a merchant who lives in Siberia. From the beginning, tension arises between Mirzabek, who strictly follows Islamic ideology, and Uyg'oqbek, who values freedom and independence. Soon after, Bo'ronbek marries Rayhon, but Mirzabek secretly becomes fascinated by her. Later, Bo'ronbek and Uyg'oqbek travel to Siberia to trade goods. On the way they are attacked by bandits, and Uyg'oqbek is killed. Bo'ronbek continues to Omsk, where Uyg'oqbek's Russian wife Tatyana lives. While she mourns her husband, Bo'ronbek spends the winter there and begins an affair with Tatyana's sister Anna, who is married to Yevseyev. In the spring, Bo'ronbek returns to Kattabog'. Tatyana and her sons accompany him, honoring Uyg'oqbek's wish that they settle in the village. Upon his return, Bo'ronbek is appointed *tog'begi*, while Mirzabek becomes *qozi*. While Bo'ronbek is in the mountains, Mirzabek secretly enters Rayhon's room and assaults her. Overcome with shame and despair, Rayhon attempts suicide, but her mother-in-law prevents her. Suspecting that his mother-in-law may have noticed his crime, Mirzabek murders Bo'ronbek's mother by placing a poisonous spider in her mouth, making her death appear mysterious. Meanwhile, Russian troops advance into the region. Determined to preserve their independence, Bo'ronbek and his supporters begin preparing for armed resistance and consider assisting the Emir of Bukhara in the expected confrontation. Bo'ronbek gathers volunteers and organizes the villagers for the coming conflict. Rahmat gradually begins to suspect an illicit relationship between Rayhon and Mirzabek and secretly observes their behavior. One winter night, he sees Mirzabek sneaking into Rayhon's room. In a fit of rage, he kills Mirzabek and the innocent Rayhon, then returns to the volunteers. Bo'ronbek and his Kazakh companion fight bravely against the Russian troops and receive praise and promises of high rank from the Emir of Bukhara. However, the Emir's envious servants later brutally beat him and leave him for dead near a high cliff. Miraculously, his friends rescue him. The Russians eventually regroup, launch a second offensive, and achieve victory, leaving the survivors to watch their home and garden destroyed.

## SCENES

**Rahmat's House on the Hill** The events unfold in the village of Kattabog', situated at the foot of Mount Yulduzli, in the 1860s. Rahmat's family lives in a secluded stone house on the hillside. He and his wife, Humor, have four children: two daughters who are married and live with their own families; their eldest son, Oqilbek, who maintains a house nearby; and their youngest son, Bo'ronbek, who has been studying at a madrasa for seven years.

**At the Millstone** Rahmat visits the mill where his old friend Qudrat works. They joke and drink *kumis* (fermented mare's milk) together. A stout man on horseback arrives – the village *qozi*. Qudrat explains that he has come at a bad time because his wheat has not yet been ground. The *qozi* asks for quick service for his son's wedding, but Qudrat insists that he wait like everyone else. The *qozi* turns pale but agrees and departs.

**Tangled Ties and Forbidden Affections** Rahmat is about to leave, but Qudrat stops him and asks about the *qozi's* beautiful daughter, Rayhon, whom his wife wants their son, Mirzabek, to marry. Rahmat replies that if the boy likes her, nothing can be done. As he leaves, Rahmat feels worried because his son Bo'ronbek also very fond of Rayhon.

**A Letter in the Time of Drought** Later, the friends share a meal and talk, but Qudrat seems troubled. When Rahmat asks what is wrong, Qudrat shows him a letter from his son, Mirzabek. In it, Mirzabek explains that he wants to marry his teacher's daughter, Shahribonu, and feels compelled to do so because she is pregnant with his child. He asks his father to help arrange the wedding as soon as possible.

**The Water Woman Ritual** Qudrat's wife and Rahmat's wife prepare to perform the ancient "Water Woman" ritual to call for rain. In the morning, the residents of Kattabog' gather at the old mosque at the foot of the mountain to perform the "Water Woman" ritual. Although the villagers are Muslim, they continue to observe pre-Islamic customs. The women raise an effigy dressed in human clothing and pour water over it while singing a song asking God for rain. Young men play the *dombra*, (a two-stringed lute), and the *doira* (a frame drum), while girls play the *chankauz* (a traditional jaw harp) and sing. Among them is Rayhon. A young man named O'ng'ar gazes at her with love in his eyes. After the ritual, a festive meal is prepared, and the villagers dine together.

**Encounter on the Road to Bukhara** The next day, Rahmat and Qodirbek set off for Bukhara as matchmakers to arrange Mizabek's marriage. On the way, they stopped in the Kazakh village of Valibek,

an old friend of Rahmat. He slaughtered a camel in honor of his guests, and the villagers gathered in the yurt. Among them was a man who resembled a bandit, and Rahmat and Qodirbek took an immediate dislike to him. During the conversation, however, it became clear that the man, Bo'riboy, was intelligent and well informed about political matters. He spoke about the future of Turkestan, which he believed might fall under the colonial rule of England or Russia. He called on the Turkic peoples to unite, and it became evident that he sympathized with Marxist ideas.

**The Story of Bo'riboy** After dinner, the guests depart. Valibek, asks Bo'riboy to stay the night, and he agrees. Bo'riboy tells Rahmat his story. He is from the Bukey Horde region near Astrakhan and studied in St. Petersburg. The inhabitants of the Bukey Horde rose in rebellion against the Russian tsar, and punitive forces suppressed the uprising with great cruelty. His mother and younger brother were killed, and his father was arrested. He later aligned himself with resistance movements among Kazakh communities of the Junior and Middle *Zhuzes* (major Kazakh tribal confederations) opposing Tsarist imperial authority; however, these uprisings ultimately failed. He appealed to the Uzbek *khans* (local rulers) and *emir* (the ruler of the Emirate of Bukhara) for help, but to no avail. Thus, he eventually found refuge in a Kazakh village.

**A Betrothal Feast and a Bitter Debate** Rahmat and Qudrat arrive at Khoja Alo's house to arrange the betrothal of Mirzabek to Khoja Alo's daughter. The guests gather for a lavish dinner where wine is freely served. Among them is a man with a piercing gaze who quietly observes the gathering. Soon an argument arises between the guests and this sharp-eyed stranger about Turkish rule and language. Rahmat criticizes the townspeople for speaking Persian, but the man replies that Persian is the official language and is also used in madrasa education. The discussion turns to history, and he argues that Timur's polygamy caused rivalry among his sons, weakening the empire after his death. Rahmat and Qudrat resent and dislike his views.

**An Evening in Kattabog'** About a hundred people gather as the residents of Kattabog' question Uyg'oqbek, who lives in Siberia with his Russian wife. He admits that ordinary people live in poverty but claims Russia is more advanced than Turkestan. Mirzabek objects, saying it is wrong to disparage one's homeland, praising the madrasa for its education and Islam for its guidance. Uyg'oqbek tries to reply but lacks knowledge. Suddenly, a song begins. Mirzabek sings an ancient melody, and a Kyrgyz man dances with wild yet graceful movements. Uyg'oqbek's beautiful daughter, Rano, watches, captivated by the dance's energy and charm.

**A Toast and a Dispute** Bo'ronbek invites Mirzabek and Uyg'oqbek to drink from a mountain spring. While they are drinking, Uyg'oqbek offers them Russian vodka. The young men drink and chat. Uyg'oqbek raises a toast to the highlanders; Mirzabek drinks for pleasure and the enjoyment of female company; and Bo'ronbek drinks to his homeland, a gesture that strikes the others as somewhat arrogant. Mirzabek then begins to reproach Uyg'oqbek for marrying a Russian woman. Uyg'oqbek takes offense, and Bo'ronbek grows angry. Mirzabek presses his argument, claiming that Siberia once belonged to Turkic peoples and that many place names there are of Turkic origin.

**The Dance of Embarrassment** They approach the crowd, listening to songs about O'ng'ar, a young man from the village who also loves Rayhon. Bo'ronbek feels uneasy, as he intends to send matchmakers to Rayhon and believes she is ready to accept his proposal. Mirzabek invites him to dance. He is very handsome and an excellent dancer, but Bo'ronbek moves awkwardly, and the audience begins to laugh at his clumsy steps. Realizing their amusement, he blushes and quietly slips out of the circle.

**Thoughts of His Beloved** Bo'ronbek walks along the bank of a mountain river, then climbs into the mountains, remembering Rayhon and their meeting – their passionate embraces and kisses. Rain begins to fall. He wanders for a long time and returns home completely drenched. Inside, his father, Mirzabek and Uyg'oqbek are talking. Mirzabek jokes, hinting that Bo'ronbek has been lingering near Rayhon's house, which irritates him. Although they are friends and their fathers hope to strengthen their bond, the young men hold different spiritual views, and this creates a strain in their friendship. They continue their conversation, drink a bottle of Russian vodka, and then go to bed.

**Night in the Garden** Meanwhile, disturbing events unfold in Rayhon's family courtyard. O'ng'ar plans to kidnap her, but Boronbek's nephew, Qodir, learns of the plan and is determined to stop him. As O'ng'ar descends a rope to avoid being spotted by the dogs guarding the house nestled among the rocks, Qodir unties the rope. O'ng'ar falls into the river, and Rayhon's brothers spot him and capture him.

**Village Justice** The next day, O'ng'ar is punished according to village custom. By order of the elder, he receives sixty lashes and is given the nickname "Thief O'ng'ar." He stoically endures the harsh punishment; however, near the end, when he is publicly declared a thief, he collapses. Mirzabek notices him glaring at Bo'ronbek with hatred, but Bo'ronbek grimly replies that he is not afraid.

**A Proposal in the Making** Rahmat tells Bo'ronbek that he should marry soon, as Rayhon has reached marriageable age and many suitors are interested. He plans to build a house for Bo'ronbek and Rayhon, which will be ready in a month. Today, they will visit Rayhon's parents to formally propose and seek their permission. Bo'ronbek is delighted by the news.

**Mirzabek's Wedding** Mirzabek's wedding begins with joy. The bride, Shahribonu, arrives from Bukhara with city guests. Rahmat hosts a festive dinner in their honor. The guests chat animatedly, sharing stories and laughter, and the celebration continues into the early hours of the morning.

**Debate and Discord: Clash of Beliefs** Among the guests is a sharp-eyed man named Murodbek. Soon he begins arguing with Uyg'oqbek about religion. Murodbek passionately defends Islam, while Uyg'oqbek criticizes it, and Bo'ronbek supports Uyg'oqbek. The discussion widens to politics. Murodbek warns that the country risks becoming a colonial possession of England or Russia. Turning to Uyg'oqbek, he asks what he thinks about the infidels' seizure of Turkestan. Uyg'oqbek condemns their policy but says the Russians still have much to teach. Murodbek answers bitterly that hypocrisy is something they could learn from them as well. Insulted, Uyg'oqbek slaps him. A fight erupts among the guests, and only by evening do they finally reconcile and restore peace.

**Duel of Vengeance** The wedding day of Bo'ronbek and Rayhon approaches. Suddenly, O'ng'ar, seeking revenge, challenges Bo'ronbek to a fight. Bo'ronbek accepts. The two men face each other on horseback, swords drawn, at the very spot where O'ng'ar was once punished. After a fierce duel, Bo'ronbek emerges victorious.

**The Wedding** Rayhon and Bo'ronbek are happy, enjoying each other's company. In the morning, Mirzabek and his wife, Shahribonu, visit them, and the young couples have breakfast together. Each study and evaluates the other. Rayhon, Bo'ronbek, and Shahribonu think purely and sincerely, while Mirzabek quietly regrets that such beauty as Rayhon now belongs to Bo'ronbek. Even gentle and attractive Shahribonu seems eclipsed by Rayhon's charm.

**The Wolf Cub in the Mountains** Bo'ronbek and Mirzabek set out with their guests to show them the mountains, and the visitors admire the natural beauty. They stop to rest and eat: Rahmat and Qudrat prepare the food while some of the men perform *namaz* (the Islamic prayer performed five times daily). Bo'ronbek and several guests then continue toward Oqqoya, joined by Mirzabek. On the way, they come across a wolf cub, which Mirzabek captures. Believing the mother wolf must be nearby, Uyg'oqbek urges him to release it, but Mirzabek refuses, saying he has a secret plan and will rejoin them later. Bo'ronbek agrees to continue on but asks him once more to let the cub go.

**The Silence of the Innocent** Mirzabek, hoping to lure the cub's mother, begins to torment it cruelly, trying to make it howl. The cub, however, remains silent. He then throws it onto the rocks. Its teeth chatter weakly as it looks at him with what seems like hatred, yet it makes no sound. Enraged, Mirzabek cuts off its ears, justifying his cruelty by claiming that its parents stole several rams from the village herd the previous winter. Finally, he plunges a knife into its right eye and throws it into a cave.

**The Blue Wolf Debate** When he joins the boys, Bo'riboy, a Kazakh guest, asks about the blood on his clothes. Mirzabek, concealing that he had been tormenting a wolf cub, replies that he merely cut a slit above the cub's ears. Uyg'oqbek rebukes him, saying he should not have done so, for the wolf is both vengeful and brave; it is not accidental that the Turks trace their origins to the Blue Wolf. Bo'ronbek, unaware of the cub's suffering, defends the act, noting that it is customary to cut dogs' ears and that such a practice is considered normal.

**A Test of Trust** When Bo'ronbek arrives, Rayhon greets him joyfully. She admits that his friend Mirzabek strikes her as untrustworthy and keeps staring at her during breakfast. Bo'ronbek turns pale but quickly recovers, assuring her that everything is fine, as this is their first meeting. He gently asks Rayhon not to speak ill of those close to him. Blushing, Rayhon agrees.

## BO'RONBEK TRAVELS

**Departure to Yettisuv** Bo'ronbek and Uyg'oqbek prepare to leave for Siberia to trade. Uyg'oqbek brings his camels from the steppe. Rayhon weeps, begging him to return quickly. Their loved ones see them off. The caravan, carrying twenty-one camels loaded with dried fruit and honey, sets out. Traveling day and night, they reach Yettisuv.

**Ambush at the Cemetery** As they pass a cemetery, a ghostly figure suddenly appears before them. It begins to speak, declaring the graveyard the best resting place for Muslims. The travelers are horrified. Uyg'oqbek fires his pistol, but the figure does not fall. They soon discover it is a scarecrow hiding a bandit beneath it – one of two attackers. Gunfire erupts. Bo'ronbek manages to kill the bandits, but Uyg'oqbek

and the caravan leader are fatally wounded. Deeply distressed, Bo'ronbek buries them and continues the journey with the remaining servant.

**News of Loss in Omsk** After a difficult journey, the caravan arrives in Omsk, Russia, on a snowy night. Uyg'oqbek's wife, Tatyana, is deeply saddened by the news of her husband's death. Their two sons, still children, bear the loss with quiet resilience. She performs the Christian mourning rites. Bo'ronbek delivers Uyg'oqbek's final request: that Tatyana return with her sons to his homeland, the village of Kattabog'. She offers no reply.

**The Servant's Tale** It is autumn in Turkestan and winter in Siberia. Because the journey is dangerous, they decide to wait until spring. One day, Bo'ronbek visits a caravan servant named Holbek, a sorrowful man who shares his tragic story. He once loved his wife deeply, but they had no children. One day he catches her with her lover, a cruel executioner far stronger than himself. He later kills the man in revenge. When his wife reveals she is pregnant, he leaves in despair and wanders the desert until he meets Uyg'oqbek. Bo'ronbek grows sad, remembering that he has no children.

**Clash of Views** Bo'ronbek suddenly falls ill, worrying Tatyana. Her sister Anna and brother-in-law Eduard Yevseyev arrive to visit. Eduard sneers that the Asian will not die because they are resilient. Tatyana is outraged and insists that race does not matter. Eduard calls her a traitor for marrying an Asian and claims she has defiled Russian blood. She condemns him for thinking only of profit and believing that exterminating Asians will make him a general and rich. Their bitter argument continues until Anna calls them to breakfast.

**On the Streets of Omsk** Seven days later, Bo'ronbek has recovered. He is cared for by Tatyana's sister, Anna, and a mutual attraction develops between them, though Bo'ronbek tries to suppress his feelings. To avoid attention, he dresses in European clothes and goes to visit his Russian friend, Yuri Koryakin. Though only a blacksmith, Koryakin is well-read and lends him Russian magazines and newspapers. They stroll through the city together, encountering many poor people and miserable drunks. Koryakin attributes this suffering to serfdom.

**A Night of Temptation** In the evening, Bo'ronbek and Koryakin return to Tatyana's house, where Bo'ronbek prepares pilaf. Everyone gathers in the dining room, including Anna. After dinner, the guests depart. Meanwhile, merchants from Turkestan arrive to sell fabrics. Tatyana needs a translator and calls Bo'ronbek. When he returns, Anna is alone. She invites him to play cards, and he agrees. Left alone together, they give in to their feelings and spend the night together.

**Return to Turkestan** Bo'ronbek continues to see Anna until spring, when she becomes pregnant. Following the wishes of her late husband, Uyg'oqbek, Tatyana finally decides to move to Kattabog' and sells her house, livestock, and furniture. Anna, hiding her tears and keeping her secret, leaves for St. Petersburg with her husband. Bo'ronbek leaves Omsk with Tatyana and her two sons, experiencing mixed feelings of shame and joy: on the one hand, he rejoices over the child; on the other, he feels guilty toward Rayhon.

**Homecoming and Mourning** The caravan reaches Kattabog', and everyone greets the travelers with joy. For the first three days, Tatyana and Bo'ronbek conceal the news of Uyg'oqbek's death. When it finally becomes known, the entire community mourns and performs the mourning rites. Bo'ronbek's father donates land, and they begin building a house for Tatyana and her children. The elders ask Tatyana to convert to Islam, and she complies, dressing and praying like a Muslim woman. Later, the camel driver, Holbek, marries her.

**Duty and Sorrow** After their marriage, Mirzabek and Bo'ronbek do not return to the madrasa. Mirzabek is appointed *qozi* and Bo'ronbek becomes *tog'begi*. Once in office, Mirzabek quickly grows arrogant and haughty, gaining weight. Bo'ronbek, in contrast, approaches his work with enthusiasm, losing weight and becoming slimmer. He organizes the protection of mountain animals and plans to create a new garden. Some people express disapproval, sarcastically asking who he works so hard for, since he has no children. Rayhon cannot conceive and suffers greatly because of this.

**Between Loyalty and Pressure** Bo'ronbek's parents want him to marry another woman – Rano, Uyg'oqbek's daughter – because Rayhon is infertile. Mirzabek also suggests that Bo'ronbek take another wife, but he refuses. One night, Rayhon tearfully urges him to marry someone else, blaming herself for his situation. Bo'ronbek firmly replies that he never will. Rayhon complains that she is hurt by Mirzabek's advice and doubts his sincerity. She hesitates to tell Bo'ronbek that Mirzabek came to them while he was in Siberia and confessed his love to her. Bo'ronbek dismisses her concerns, saying she is exaggerating and that Mirzabek is not a bad person.

**The Maimed Wolf's Return** Bo'ronbek sets off for the lake and meets three horsemen along the way. One of them is his father's friend, Yovqochti. He accompanies them home, where Rahmat greets them

warmly. Mirzabek arrives soon after. Yovqochti tells them about a ferocious, one-eyed wolf with severed ears that has been attacking people. Last winter, it and its pack attacked two villagers: one was killed and his horse devoured, while the other miraculously escaped. Hearing this, Bo'ronbek remembers the wolf cub whose ears Mirzabek once cut off. Mirzabek blushes but quickly recovers and calmly begins eating dried raisins.

**The Warning** Yovqochti invites Bo'ronbek outside. Once there, he informs him that the Russian army is approaching and will soon capture Tashkent before advancing toward them. He urges them to prepare for battle. They then confer with the others and decide to compile a list of villagers ready to defend their homeland.

**A Crime in the Night** Bo'ronbek and his two nephews set out to explore the mountains. Meanwhile, disturbing events unfold in Kattabog'. Mirzabek secretly tidies Bo'ronbek's house, kills the dogs by feeding them bread laced with needles, and enters Rayhon's bedroom. He assaults her, restraining her with shackles and threatening her if she calls for help, claiming that she summoned him because she wanted his child.

**The Fire She Couldn't Name** Humorbibi cannot sleep because of a toothache. When she goes out into the yard, she notices a man running away and shouts after him to stop. Suddenly, she sees flames in Rayhon's room – Rayhon has set her bed on fire. Humorbibi rescues her. Rayhon cannot tell the truth; she weeps and says she does not know how the fire started. Humorbibi chooses to believe her.

**Death in Silence** Humorbibi is tired and wants to take a nap. Mirzabek watches her in secret, afraid she might recognize him. When he finds a moment alone, he enters the room and forces the Black Widow into Humorbibi's half-open mouth. Before she can open her eyes, he covers them with a pillow. She is frightened, then falls silent. People gather for the funeral, and no one ever learns the true cause of her death.

**A Father's Grief** Rahmat is grief-stricken and speaks only to his friend Qudrat, who is also deeply saddened. The cause of their sorrow is the village's condemnation of his son, the *qozi* Mirzabek, for bribery and injustice. Eventually, Qudrat falls ill and dies suddenly.

**Burden of a Secret** Bo'ronbek and his nephew Qodirbek, the son of his elder brother, are traveling to Tashkent because Qodirbek wishes to study at a madrassa. Meanwhile, Rahmat prepares his white horse for a hunt organized by the Khan of Bukhara, in which Bo'ronbek will take part. However, Rahmat is deeply depressed, as he misses his wife, Humor, and is tormented by the secret of her strange and unexpected death.

**Tashkent Under Threat** Bo'ronbek and Qodirbek return from Tashkent. Rahmat asks why his grandson did not remain at the madrassa. Bo'ronbek explains that he was unwilling to leave the boy in the city because of the unstable situation. Russian troops under Commander-in-Chief Mikhail Chernyaev are preparing to attack Tashkent, while France, Türkiye, and England oppose the move.

**Victory at the Horse Races** Bo'ronbek and Tatyana's son, Alisher, travels to Bukhara for horse races organized by the Emir of Bukhara. Muhammad Dev competes; he is imposingly built, extremely strong, and has never lost. At first, Bo'ronbek faces him on horseback and manages to unhorse him. Furious, Muhammad says, "Fine, we'll see in the chase." But Bo'ronbek also wins the chase. The emir congratulates him and presents him with an expensive gift.

**Vengeance in Kattabog'** In Kattabog', Bo'ronbek awaits bad news: Qodirbek has been attacked by a wolf and is dying. The entire village mourns, and Bo'ronbek blames himself for not leaving the boy in Tashkent. Determined to avenge him, he sets out to hunt the wolf. Several village youths lie in wait for the opportune moment. At last, a pack of wolves approaches the sheep; the youths surround them and open fire. The wolves scatter and fall into a prepared, lightly covered pit.

**The One-Eyed Wolf** In the cold night, the trapped wolves growl and leap, trying to escape the pit. Mirzabek approaches and sees the one-eyed, enraged wolf he once maimed, recoiling in fear. Bo'ronbek also remembers the incident and, for the first time, feels hatred toward Mirzabek.

**Seeds of Suspicion** An old man from the village, passing by Rahmat's house, always sings a song about how your friend is actually your enemy. Rahmat begins to torment him with doubts. For the first time, he thinks Rayhon is cheating on him with Mirzabek. Meanwhile, Bo'ronbek senses that something has changed in Rayhon. He grows distant, and she suffers from his coldness. At times, she considers leaving him, yet she cannot imagine her life without him.

**Whispers of Betrayal** Mirzabek has lost the respect of others, especially after his dishonesty as a judge was revealed. Rahmat even said, "It is better to embrace a snake than to be friends with Mirzabek". These words frighten him. In response, Mirzabek plots to kill Rahmat and releases two snakes into his room. However, the cat spots them and kills them. After this incident, Rahmat begins to suspect that someone is trying to harm him. Seeking answers, he visits a fortune teller, who warns him that his enemy is someone close to him.

## **RUSSIANS ADVANCE**

**Shadows Over Kattabog'** In July, the residents of Kattabog' heard that Tashkent had been captured by Chernyaev. Traitors had been involved in the fighting, and the khans of Bukhara and Khiva had offered no assistance. Grim rumors of Russian atrocities spread, and eyewitnesses arriving in Kattabog' told disturbing tales of the Russian advance.

**Preparing for Battle Against Chernyaev** Bo'ronbek's friend, the Kazakh Bo'riboy, arrives in Kattabog' with a detachment of about 100 men. Rahmat advised them to settle in the valley, set up yurts, and prepare for battle against Chernyaev. Bo'ronbek and Bo'riboy began recruiting volunteers. This was no easy task; only after an inspiring speech were the people moved to defend their land. Meanwhile, several villagers, including Mirzabek, wrote to Chernyaev, declaring their allegiance and promising to welcome his troops.

**Paths of War and Desire** Bo'ronbek's plan is as follows: they will make every effort to avoid a direct clash with Chernyaev's army. Chernyaev is expected to engage the forces of the Emirate of Bukhara near the city of Jizzakh, while Bo'ronbek's men strike from the rear. Bo'ronbek and his detachment set out, while Mirzabek seeks a meeting with Rayhon.

**Suspicion in the Cave** Rahmat suddenly returns and takes refuge in the Teshiktosh cave near his home. Each day he watches Rayhon, tormented by suspicions of infidelity. At times he despises himself for these thoughts, yet he continues his vigil, determined to uncover the truth.

**The Night of Fury** One cold, windy night, he sees a man approaching Rayhon's house – Mirzabek. Rage overwhelms him. He rushes toward the house, drawing ever closer as he hears Rayhon's cries. Instead of stirring compassion, her cries only intensify his fury. Bursting into the room, he strikes Mirzabek down with his sword, then turns the blade toward Rayhon, who stands frozen in shame and fear.

**Retreat at Temurlang Gate** Rahmat returns to the volunteers looking pale, his eyes bloodshot and his face marked by a strange mixture of joy, sorrow, and cold detachment. Bo'ronbek is deeply troubled by his appearance. The volunteers strike Chernyaev's army from the rear while the Bukhara forces advance, driving them back toward the narrow mountain pass known as Tamerlane's Gate. Caught off guard, Chernyaev orders his troops to split into two groups and retreat. During the fighting, Rahmat is wounded.

**Victory Shadowed by Fear** Chernyaev retreats to the right bank of the Syr Darya. The volunteers rejoice in their victory, but Bo'ronbek and Bo'riboy remain anxious, fearing that Chernyaev will regain his strength and return. The Emir of Bukhara summons them and praises their efforts, promising them high positions as a reward. He casts a glance toward Sir Forest, a guest from England, seeking his approval. Although the perceptive Englishman favors the young men, Bo'ronbek worries about the future of his homeland, fearing that it may become a pawn in the hands of Europe.

**A Sinister Plan** Muhammad Dev, the commander of the Emir of Bukhara's forces, hears the Emir's praise and burns with anger at Bo'ronbek's success. He has long harbored a grudge against him over his defeat in the horse race. Determined to eliminate his rival, Muhammad Dev gathers his accomplices and reveals a plan to take revenge on Bo'ronbek.

**A Toast Turned to Violence** Muhammad Dev invites Bo'ronbek to his yurt, offering to celebrate the victory together. Bo'ronbek reluctantly agrees. They drink for a long time, and Muhammad Dev repeatedly praises Bo'ronbek's courage and strength until he becomes intoxicated. At last, Muhammad Dev suddenly humiliates him, mocking his inability to have children. Enraged, Bo'ronbek lunges at him, and a fight ensues. Muhammad Dev's men then set upon Bo'ronbek, beating him brutally and knocking him unconscious.

**Rescue on the Cliff** On a snowy, frosty night, following Muhammad Dev's orders, Bo'ronbek was dragged to a mountain cliff, stripped, and pinned against the rock like Christ. Even those who carried out the order hesitated – they risked death in the freezing cold – and soon fled. Then Bo'riboy, who had been secretly watching the entire scene, appeared and rescued Bo'ronbek.

**Recovery and Affection** Bo'ronbek falls gravely ill, and his friends tend to him. Rano, Tatyana and Uyg'oqbek's daughter, shows him particular kindness – she has fallen in love with him. Despite the

objections of those around her, she remains among the volunteers, continuing her devoted care. Bo'ronbek begins to recover when Dmitry Romanovsky (a Russian general involved in the conquest of Central Asia) captures Jizzakh (a city in present-day Uzbekistan).

**Samarkand in the Shadow of Advance** Bo'ronbek tells Bo'riboy that they were mistaken to trust the emir. He believes the struggle is not merely local, but part of a broader resistance to tsarist rule. Meanwhile, Romanovsky advances toward Samarkand (a major city in present-day Uzbekistan). Eduard Evseyev, the husband of Tatyana's sister Anna – Bo'ronbek's former lover – arrives in Kattabog' to visit Tatyana. Some village officials greet him with bread and salt, hoping to win the Russians' favor.

**Reign of Reprisals** Yevseyev thirsts for revenge against the volunteers who fought Chernyaev. Relying on lists compiled by informants, he begins executing those involved, and the reprisals soon extend even to their children. Tatyana vehemently objects and tries to stop him. Yevseyev rewards several village traitors with official positions and, although he holds her in little regard, appoints Tatyana – the *qozi* – as a judge since she is, after all, a relative.

**Ashes of Home** Yevseyev also seeks to kill Bo'ronbek, whom he considers dangerous and against whom he harbors a personal grudge. But he cannot find him, as Bo'ronbek remains in hiding. In retaliation, he burns down Bo'ronbek's garden and house. Yevseyev tells Tatyana that Anna and her son will soon visit her, then mounts his horse and rides toward Samarkand. Meanwhile, Bo'ronbek watches his burning home from afar, bitterness in his heart and tears in his eyes.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### BO'RONBEK

Bo'ronbek is the protagonist, embodying many of the virtues of an ideal hero as well as the author's ideological and philosophical views. At times, this ideological weight renders him more modern in outlook than representative of his historical era; nevertheless, the character effectively conveys the complexity and contradictions of the period.

*Compassionate* Bo'ronbek is deeply sensitive to the pain, helplessness, and suffering of others. This is evident when Rayhon tearfully confesses her infertility and urges him to take another wife; he categorically refuses and promises that he will never abandon her. His compassion is further demonstrated during his time in Siberia, when he encounters a woman begging with her three children and, moved by pity, gives her all the money he has. Significantly, his empathy extends even to the natural world: when Mirzabek captures a wolf cub, Bo'ronbek insists that it be released unharmed.

*Brave* From an early age, Bo'ronbek is raised by his father according to the traditions of Turkic warrior culture, which shapes both his physical endurance and psychological resilience. His training is deliberately severe: he learns to climb steep cliffs, is forced to swim across a fast-flowing mountain river after being thrown into it, and masters horsemanship. These formative experiences cultivate discipline, courage, and self-reliance. Consequently, Bo'ronbek's later decision to volunteer in the fight against the Russian invaders emerges not as a spontaneous act of heroism, but as the logical outcome of his upbringing and internalized warrior ethos.

*Sound thinking* At the beginning of the novel, Bo'ronbek is a student at a madrasa in Tashkent, and he is portrayed as intelligent and well educated. His views and arguments are grounded in historical and scholarly knowledge, which becomes especially evident in moments of debate. At times, however, he appears less like a fully realized character and more like a spokesperson for the author's ideas.

### RAHMAT

Rahmat likewise embodies many of the author's ideological positions and is portrayed as a representative of a people who have preserved the ancient traditions of their Turkic ancestors – traditions the writer clearly admires. At times, especially in his reflections on religion and politics, his character carries a noticeable ideological weight. Nevertheless, in his actions and personal experiences, Rahmat appears more grounded, realistic, and psychologically convincing than some of the other figures in the novel.

*Strong* Rahmat is powerful both physically and mentally. When confronted with hardship, he neither complains nor yields, choosing instead to endure difficulties with quiet resilience. He lives by firm principles and remains faithful to them. Though once betrothed to a young Kazakh woman – whose memory later becomes a source of nostalgia – he never betrays his wife. After losing her, he bears his grief in silence, without tears; and when invaders threaten his homeland, he enters battle without hesitation and fights with courage.

**Ruthless** At times, Rahmat's principles harden into ruthlessness. Convinced that his people have lost their pride through softness, he idealizes their warrior ancestors and demands harsh strength from those around him. In moments of anger he loses restraint, reacting with excessive severity and little regard for ordinary compassion. Most tragically, when he believes his daughter-in-law has been unfaithful, he acts without seeking the truth and, in a fit of rage, kills both her and the man who violated her.

## MIRZABEK

In the novel, Mirzabek appears in several guises. At first he leaves a positive impression, but as the plot unfolds he reveals increasingly negative traits. Critics at the time observed that this abrupt shift in character lacks sufficient motivation. The author may have intended to portray the duality of his nature, yet the novel does not fully succeed in developing or convincing the reader of this transformation.

**Cunning** At the beginning of the novel, Mirzabek – a madrasa student – displays sharp intelligence and a cunning, calculating mind. He remains composed in debates, presents his arguments persuasively, and anticipates the reactions of others. This clever manipulation conceals his true nature, making it difficult for those around him to discern his character for a long time.

**Cruel** Mirzabek is capable of great cruelty, a trait he conceals behind his cunning and outward composure. This darker side first appears when he torments a defenseless wolf cub. Later, his violence escalates: he brutally assaults Rayhon and ultimately murders Boronbek's mother, who had treated him like a son since childhood.

**Dishonest** Mirzabek relentlessly pursues his ambitions through deception. In Bukhara, he seduces the daughter of a respected man and makes her pregnant, leaving her and her family with no choice but to consent to the marriage. Having become a judge, he engages in bribery and corruption. Enchanted by Rayhon's beauty, he resorts to violence and blackmail to satisfy his desires. The author presents these traits as almost innate. According to the novel's backstory, Mirzabek is the illegitimate son of a dissolute man with whom his mother eloped in her youth – a secret unknown to those around him, including his current husband, Qudrat, who married her after she was abandoned.

## THEMES

### POLITICS

**Conflict** The events of the novel unfold in the mid-nineteenth century (circa 1860–1865), during a complex and controversial period in the history of Turkestan, marked by political upheaval and ideological tension. This was the era of the Russian conquest of the Khanate of Kokand, which brought new colonial administration and provoked resistance among local populations. The author portrays these tensions through his characters, whose differing visions reflect the uncertainties of the time. Mirzabek represents a rigid, traditionalist Islamic worldview, advocating social order based on unquestioning obedience. In contrast, Bo'riboy and, to some extent, Bo'ronbek embody reformist and proto-Marxist ideas, emphasizing justice and social responsibility. Other figures look outward for support: some hope for English intervention, while others align themselves with Russian authority, often motivated by personal gain rather than principle. Through this spectrum of positions, the novel captures the intellectual, moral, and social turmoil of Turkestan under the pressure of conquest and cultural transformation.

*Illustrative Moment:* Rahmat and Qudrat are staying in a *yurt* (traditional nomadic tent) in a Kazakh village where they are warmly received by Rahmat's friend. During a dinner held in honor of the guests, a Kazakh named Bo'riboy from Astrakhan (a Russian city on the Volga River near the Caspian Sea) speaks about the unity of the Turkic peoples. He envisions the creation of a strong, unified state and laments the fragmentation that followed the death of Timur (a Central Asian conqueror who founded a vast empire in the late fourteenth century), when the once-powerful realm was divided into separate khanates. Concerned about the future of Turkestan amid Russian expansion and possible British influence, he places his hopes in Turkic unification. At the same time, he points to Russia as an example of national consolidation and development, arguing that peaceful coexistence with the Russian people is possible. A bearded man from the aul objects, claiming that he has witnessed firsthand the suffering of the Kazakhs during the Russian advance into the region. In response, Bo'riboy grows indignant, insisting that he distinguishes between the Russian people and their rulers, and that ordinary people everywhere ultimately strive for freedom. The debate escalates and ends with the villager insulting Bo'riboy. This episode vividly reflects the ideological confusion and political complexity of the mid-nineteenth century, revealing the diversity of opinions, the absence of unity, and the lack of a shared national vision.

### SOCIETY

**Racism** Although the author and the protagonist distinguish between tsarist authorities and the Russian proletariat, the novel strongly criticizes the racist attitudes of Russian colonizers toward the local population. This is particularly evident in the portrayal of Russian military officials, who openly display bias and behave in ways that humiliate and demean Asian people.

*Illustrative Moment:* Yevseyev, Anna's husband, a Russian military officer, engages in a heated argument with Major Stepanov, who is also an orientalist, in the presence of Tatyana, Anna's sister. Yevseyev claims that "semi-savage Asia" caused Rus' to suffer for three centuries and that Russia must now take revenge, declaring the beginning of a great Russian era. Stepanov counters that Genghis Khan, a Mongol-Turkic conqueror, brought devastation to both Rus' and Turkestan, and that it is inaccurate to portray Asians as semi-savages, noting the region's many scholars and thinkers. Yevseyev dismisses this argument, insisting that the East is stagnant and will inevitably bow to Russia. This scene highlights the colonizers' racist attitudes toward Asians.

**Religion** The author presents a distinctive perspective on religion. Through his characters, he conveys his attitude toward Islam, often contrasting it with the pre-Islamic Turkish era, which he idealizes as a time of freedom and self-determination. The novel also reflects a Marxist-influenced critique of religion, portraying it as a tool for maintaining subjugation and obedience among the population. For example, characters such as Mirzabek advocate strict adherence to religious norms, using them to legitimize the ruling authorities' control over the people, whereas Bo'riboy, Bo'ronbek, Uyg'oqbek and Rahmat perceive Islam as contributing to the suppression of the Turks' militant spirit and their desire for freedom. By opposing the idealized pre-Islamic past to the religious present, the author frames Islam as a historical force that reshaped social values and curtailed collective autonomy. In doing so, the novel advances a broader critique of institutionalized faith, presenting it as both a spiritual framework and a political instrument that influences identity, obedience, and resistance.

*Illustrative Moment:* Uyg'oqbek, Boronbek's uncle from Siberia, visits his relatives, and Rahmat hosts a feast in his honor for the residents of Kattabog'. During the gathering, a heated debate arises between Uyg'oqbek and Mirzabek. Uyg'oqbek criticizes the madrasa system, claiming it offers only religious instruction and neglects broader intellectual development. He argues that Arab influence, brought through Islam, undermined and ultimately destroyed Turkic cultural traditions. Mirzabek defends Islam, asserting that its endurance proves its strength: it triumphed over fire worship and Buddhism and persists to this day.

Bo'ronbek intervenes with a philosophical perspective, noting that all religions claim exclusive truth but in reality reflect partial human interpretations. Humanity, he suggests, was created by one God, and no single tradition can monopolize divine truth. Mirzabek cites the Prophet Muhammad's teaching that all people are equal before God. Bo'ronbek counters that Muslims label followers of other faiths as unbelievers, just as they now view their own fire-worshipping ancestors as infidels – an unjust attitude. The debate concludes with Bo'ronbek accusing Arab conquests of bringing suffering to the Turks and turning religion into a tool to subdue a once-militant people. The episode highlights the difficulty of seeking truth when approaching faith.

**Gender** In the novel, gender relations in the mountain village differ somewhat from more conservative settings. Women do not wear burqas and participate in village festivals with their faces uncovered. Nevertheless, their rights remain limited. Their roles are clearly defined: they are expected to manage the household, satisfy their husbands' desires, and bear children. In matters of sexual conduct, women are held responsible for both infidelity and even rape, regardless of the circumstances. In such cases, they face harsh and often disproportionate punishment.

*Illustrative Moment:* Rahmat is increasingly tormented by suspicions. An old man from the village, Rahim Bobo, passes by his house, singing a song about his lover's betrayal – an ominous detail that intensifies Rahmat's inner turmoil. A fortune teller's prediction that his enemy is someone close to him further fuels his growing paranoia. Watching Rayhon's room, he notices Mirzabek approaching. Seeing the light still burning inside, he interprets it as deliberate evidence of betrayal. Overcome by a wounded sense of honor, he bursts into the house. Overcome by a wounded sense of honor, he bursts into the house. Although he hears Rayhon's cries, his suspicions remain unshaken. He kills Mirzabek and then Rayhon, declaring her unworthy of being called a woman. This episode illustrates how internalized suspicion distorts perception and overwhelms the mind. Rahmat's prior knowledge of Rayhon's honesty proves powerless against the cultural logic of honor and shame governing his actions. The scene exposes the destructive power of patriarchal codes, in which doubt and pride lead not to truth, but to irreversible tragedy.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Attraction / Desire / Sexual affair** The novel explores the theme of male desire from multiple perspectives, linking it to morality and social responsibility. The author portrays desire as a natural human weakness, particularly when it is reciprocated or encouraged by women, but he distinguishes between

virtuous and destructive expressions of this impulse. In the relationship between Bo'ronbek and Anna, desire is tempered by conscience: Bo'ronbek experiences deep guilt toward Rayhon, reflecting his adherence to moral and social codes despite personal temptation. In contrast, Mirzabek's lust is unrestrained and predatory, manifesting as aggression, coercion, and violation of others' rights. Through these contrasting portrayals, the novel frames desire not merely as an individual trait but as a reflection of broader ethical and ideological principles: it underscores the importance of self-control, respect, and social responsibility while condemning cruelty, exploitation, and moral corruption.

*Illustrative Moment:* Anna invites Bo'ronbek to play cards in his room, and he gladly accepts. During the game, Anna, having dealt an ace, places her hand on his. Bo'ronbek feels an immediate attraction and instinctively embraces her. She does not resist, and they spend the night together. That day, both Bo'ronbek and Anna feel guilty – he for betraying Rayhon, she for her part in it, especially since she is married – but that night, their desire drives them to seek each other again, unable to resist the longing that continues through the following months. This episode illustrates the complexity of human nature, highlighting the tension between physiological impulses and moral responsibility, and showing how desire can persistently challenge conscience even in morally conscientious characters.

**Sadism / Cruelty** In the novel, the antagonist, Mirzabek, displays deeply rooted sadistic tendencies. He derives gratification from inflicting pain, yet he persistently reframes his cruelty as morally justified. His violence is never, in his own mind, meaningless; it is always explained as punishment, correction, or even protection. He torments a wolf cub in revenge for its parents' attack on his flock, transforming personal anger into what he considers rightful retribution. More disturbingly, he rationalizes his brutal assault on Rayhon – carried out with chains and physical violence – by convincing himself that he is granting her fulfillment through motherhood, since she had been unable to bear Bo'ronbek a child.

*Illustrative Moment:* Mirzabek secretly enters Rayhon's room. She desperately resists, but he manipulates her with threats, claiming that everyone will blame her and insisting that he understands her love for her husband. At the same time, he convinces himself that his actions are justified: he wants to make her "happy," keep the encounter secret, and ensure the birth of his son. Despite her continued resistance, he restrains her and attacks her violently, ultimately causing her to lose consciousness. This episode illustrates the psychological and social dynamics of the villain's behavior. Mirzabek's cruelty is intertwined with patriarchal entitlement and distorted rationalizations, showing how male desire and power operate in the context of systemic gender inequality.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How would you define the novel's central theme, and how effectively is it developed throughout the narrative?

In what ways does Mirzabek's character evolve over the course of the novel? Are these changes psychologically and narratively convincing?

How does the author use the dialogue about religion to express broader social or ideological concerns?

How is the political situation in Turkestan at the beginning of the nineteenth century represented, and what role does it play in shaping the narrative?