

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Shaira Narmatova, Ph.D.

Mirage / Sarob (1935)

Abdulla Qahhor (1907-1968)

OVERVIEW

Author Abdulla Qahhor was a prominent Uzbek writer of the Soviet era, renowned for his original prose style and vivid personality, shaped by his unwavering commitment to truth and moral integrity. The son of a blacksmith, he began his education at a Jadid school and continued in Soviet schools, later studying at the workers' faculty and the Pedagogical Faculty of the Central Asian State University. Qahhor worked as a teacher and editor and led the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan from 1954 to 1956. A master of short fiction, often called the "Uzbek Chekhov," his notable works include the short stories *The Sick Man* (1936), *Pomegranate* (1936), and *The Thief* (1936). He also authored novels such as *Mirage* (1935), *The Lights of Qo'shchinor* (1951), *Tales from the Past* (1965), and several dramatic works.

Novel After several experiments in the short story genre, the young Abdulla Qahhor boldly turned to the novel. *Sarob/Mirage* (1935) was the first work in Uzbek literature to touch on a contemporary theme. The novel reflected the complex realities of the 1920s and was well received by both readers and official circles. However, *Mirage* was soon criticized for its ideological ambiguity and the lack of a positive transformative role for the new Soviet system. The novel was banned and republished only after Stalin's death in 1953, during the relaxation in censorship, although debates about it continued for decades. In the years after independence in 1991, assessments of Qahhor's novel have shifted: some criticized its negative portrayal of opponents of Soviet power, while others highlighted its subtle insight into the tense atmosphere preceding Stalin's repressions (the purges, repression, and terror of 1937–1938).

Background Critics have noted the influence of Jack London's *Martin Eden* on the plot of *Mirage*: like Martin, the novel's protagonist falls in love with a girl from a wealthy family and aspires to become a writer in order to win her favor. Yet this resemblance is limited to the storyline and compositional structure. The central idea of the novel is much more complex and has given rise to diverse interpretations. Abdulla Qahhor wrote in one of his notes that, in the early 1930s, fate brought him into contact with bourgeois nationalists, and he tried to instill in others the same hatred he himself felt. Still, it is difficult to judge the author solely from the perspective of the 1930s, since he began the work at a very young age and was inevitably influenced by the prevailing ideological climate. The novel was revised twice, in 1957 and 1967, with each edition reflecting the political currents of its time. The protagonist also carries many autobiographical traits of the author himself. Despite continuing debate, *Mirage* remains valued for its artistic mastery and as a rare literary portrayal of Uzbek life in the 1920s and 1930s.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Rahimjon Saidiy	a young student, later a writer and editor
Muniskhon	Saidiy's beloved, a girl from a wealthy family
Salimkhon	Muniskhon's brother, a merchant
Murodho'ja Domla	a teacher, editor, and merchant
Sorakhon	Saidiy's wife, Murodho'ja's daughter
Ehson	Saidiy's friend, a student at Moscow University

SYNOPSIS

The events of the novel take place in the late 1920s in Uzbekistan. Orphaned early, Saidiy lives with his sister's family, but left home when his brother-in-law opposed his wish to study at university. He then enrolled at the university, where he met Muniskhon, a girl he had first encountered when submitting his

documents. Falling in love at first sight, he sought to be close to her and soon won her affection by helping with her studies.

Saidiy meets his friend Jamol, now a poet, who invites him to a gathering of young writers. There he also encounters his former teacher Abboskhon, now an influential official. When Muniskhon admires Jamol's poetry, Saidiy, envious, resolves to become a writer. His early attempts fail, but eventually one story is published, filling him with joy.

Muniskhon later invites Saidiy to her home for a rehearsal and introduces him to her brother Salimkhon, a wealthy merchant and patron of the intelligentsia. Impressed, Salimkhon welcomes him into his circle, where Saidiy meets influential figures critical of the political system. He especially admires Murodkho'ja Domla, a tradesman and linguist, who takes a keen interest in him. Hoping Abboskhon might help him marry Muniskhon, Saidiy leaves university. Murodkho'ja Domla invites him to live in his house, offering conditions for creativity, and Saidiy agrees.

Muniskhon is suddenly married off to Mukhtorkhon, an uninspiring but respected middle-aged man, leaving Saidiy devastated. Soon after, Murodkho'ja Domla offers his daughter Sorakhon – plain in looks and character. Disappointed yet pragmatic, Saidiy agrees, as Murodkho'ja Domla is wealthy and Sorakhon his sole heir.

Muniskhon, miserable in her marriage, despises her husband and seeks Saidiy as a lover, but he refuses. Both are unhappy. As the new government cracks down on dissent, Saidiy loses his job, deepening his sense of despair. Life with Murodkho'ja Domla grows unbearable as Saidiy faces endless demands from his wife's family and her reckless behavior. News of Muniskhon's tragic suicide shatters him. One snowy night, he leaves home wanders into the unknown, collapses, and perishes beneath a silent avalanche of snow.

SCENES

When They Met A girl opens the door just as someone pushes from the other side. She steps back, and a young man emerges, apologizing before heading toward the hall. She follows and timidly asks, "Don't you know Safiiy?" Surprised, he says he is, then corrects himself – he's Saidiy. They talk; he explains the university's document-submission conditions. The girl hesitates to enter, but he persuades her. She asks him not to leave until she returns. Excited, he agrees.

A Look Back The girl leaves the room, it turns out that more documents are required. They walk together and see a crowd submitting university applications. The guy jokes, asking if she's changed her mind about enrolling. She inquires about him; he confirms he will enroll and teases, "Will she listen through a crack in the door?" She replies confidently, "I'll sit in the front row." Boarding the bus, she glances back. As it pulls away, Saidiy watches her go.

More Than Love Saidiy returns to the apartment he shares with his friend Ehson, who is reading alone. They are old schoolmates; their fathers had once been close. Ehson's father, a Red Guard, died in battle. Saidiy's father, who mortgaged heavily to open a forge, went bankrupt before beginning and hanged himself. Ehson asks if Saidiy has submitted documents. Instead of replying, Saidiy wonders what girl Ehson might marry. Perceiving a change, Ehson asks if he's in love. Saidiy says it's more than love, before others enter and interrupt.

Unwelcome Visitors Two men enter – Shafrin and Sharif. Saidiy dislikes Shafrin and lies down on the bed. Sharif tells Ehson he can study in Moscow, as there are two openings in the medical faculty and he meets the requirements. Ehson is delighted. Shafrin approaches Saidiy and asks how he is; Saidiy mumbles a reluctant reply. Spotting Sharif, he pretends to have just woken up, wishing they would leave as soon as possible.

Crossroads Saidiy longs to see the girl again, often returning to the university. On his way, he is stopped by a woman in a burqa – his sister. He once lived in her husband's home, teaching and earning well, which pleased his uncle, a store owner. But guided by Ehson, he chose studies instead. Burdened by taxes, his uncle resented losing support, causing tension until Saidiy left. Now his sister softly asks him to visit; he promises soon.

Parting and Distance Ehson leaves for Moscow, and Saidiy joins the send-off along with other friends. Though Ehson had been close to him, here among the crowd, he seemed no different from the rest. Once the farewell is over, Saidiy quickly tries to shake off the others. That evening, Shafrin drops by, assuming Saidiy is lonely. Saidiy, cold and distant, wishes him gone. Eventually, Shafrin leaves.

More Than Friendship Saidiy is now studying at the university, where he finally finds the girl – Muniskhon. They begin doing their homework together regularly. Muniskhon admires Saidiy for his intelligence, calm nature, and talent, appreciating how clearly he explains things. She insists their bond is nothing more than friendship, but for Saidiy, it is far more – he has fallen deeply in love.

A Study Invitation The exams are approaching. Muniskhon and Saidiy went to the library to study, but there were no vacancies. Saidiy offered to study at his home. He waited impatiently for her answer. After a pause, Munis agreed, and Saidiy was overjoyed.

Unspoken Feelings While studying for an exam at Saidiy's house, he reads aloud in Russian while Munis listens, and then they switch roles. Saidiy struggles to hide his feelings; at one point, he involuntarily takes her hand but immediately lets go when she notices. Distracted by his emotions, he cannot explain the passage, and Munis, sensing his state, ironically advises him to be careful so as not to stumble over anything. Saidiy feels awkward, realizing she has noticed.

Chance Encounter During the winter holidays, Saidiy misses Muniskhon. One day, at a bookstore, he meets his old school friend Jamol, who has changed – now successful and well-groomed. Saidiy hesitates to approach, but Jamol spots him first and, looking down, asks, "Still studying?" Jamol works as an editor for a newspaper and magazine and writes poetry under the pseudonym Ulfat. He invites Saidiy to a meeting where young poets' works are discussed, guessing Saidiy might be interested since he once loved creativity. Saidiy, who wrote poetry in school, agrees.

At the Meeting Saidiy enters a crowded hall, filled mostly with young people. In the front row, Jamol speaks with a respectable man. On the podium, Saidiy recognizes his former teacher, Abboskhon, lecturing on art. A youth attempts to object but is silenced, while the hall buzzes with noise. When the meeting ends, Saidiy remains seated. Jamol greets him with a glance and walks past. Respectable men surround Abboskhon, and Saidiy realizes success depends on drawing near to him.

Stirred by Jealousy Saidiy steps out to get water and meets Muniskhon at the post office. She says she heard he attended a meeting of literature lovers the day before. He invites her over. At his place, she notices a magazine and speaks of new poets, praising "Ulfat" (Jamol), her brother's friend. Jealousy grips Saidiy. Glancing at her watch, she leaves. That evening, still restless, Saidiy edits his poems and sends them to the editorial office the next day.

At Muniskhon's Home One day, Muniskhon invites Saidiy to her home to do homework, as her brother is away on a business trip. Delighted, Saidiy arrives at her luxurious, richly furnished house, where she greets him warmly. They begin reading, but when he pauses to rest, Muniskhon plays a march on the piano that a Turkish officer once taught her. She shows him a photograph, and Saidiy recognizes Iskhak Afandi – a friend of one of the two Turkish teachers at his school who often visited them. A knock interrupts. Muniskhon admits a handsome, slightly drunk man named Ilkhon. He asks about her brother, then leaves. Saidiy departs soon after.

Summer Holidays While Muniskhon travels in Crimea, Saidiy devotes himself to books, poems, and stories. He sends his work to editors, but rejections follow each time. Undeterred, he persists. When his money is gone, he sells his belongings, lives on bread, and grows thin. Letters from Muniskhon bring comfort. At the post office, sending her a letter, he meets Jamol, who laments unpaid poems and overdue rent. Moved, Saidiy gives him his last coins. Jamol gratefully promises repayment soon. Three weeks later, Ulfat's Yalta poems are published, and Saidiy loses hope of ever recovering his debt.

A Brother's Approval Saidiy and Muniskhon are preparing their lesson at Muniskhon's house when her brother, Salimkhon, arrives. Curious about their relationship, he secretly watches them and decides there is nothing improper. Then he enters the room. Muniskhon introduces them, and although Saidiy is nervous, Salimkhon tries not to complicate the situation. They talk for about an hour, and as Salimkhon learns more

about Saidiy's past, he begins to feel closer to him. After the conversation, Muniskhon plays the piano, and Salimkhon sees him off warmly.

An Embarrassing Evening Saidiy frequently visits Salimkhon's house, where they discuss various topics: the Russo-Japanese War, the Panama Canal, and English colonial policy. Educated at the Ufa madrasah, Salimkhon was shaped by the *Jadid movement* (a late-19th–early-20th century Muslim reformist movement in Central Asia that promoted modern education and cultural renewal) and believes Turkestan needs educated youth. As an entrepreneur, he supports this cause. One evening, he offers cognac; Saidiy drinks heavily and later cannot recall getting home. The next day, he finds a letter and money from Salimkhon, assuring him not to worry. Ashamed, Saidiy feels deeply embarrassed.

The Letter from the Publishing House Saidiy receives a letter from a publishing house agreeing to publish his story. Encouraged, he visits the editorial office, where Editor Kenja praises the work and suggests adding another chapter he wrote. When asked about his poetry, Saidiy explains he sent poems by post. Kenja is shocked to learn that Editor Yokubjon rejected the work without even reading it. He scolds him until the Editor-in-Chief intervenes, saying the issue will be discussed at the next meeting. Saidiy feels embarrassed.

Saidiy's Distant Horizon When Muniskhon visits Saidiy, he leaves a letter from the editorial office where she can see it. Muniskhon notices the letter but pays it little attention and, as usual, begins to read. For Saidiy, this makes Muniskhon a distant horizon, always out of reach. However, Saidiy does not lose hope and patiently waits for his story to be published, dreaming that it will make this horizon tangible. Finally, his story appears in the magazine. Overjoyed, he feels as if everyone is talking about it.

Praise, Criticism, and Changed Views Saidiy's story is a success. Salimkhon calls him through Muniskhon, and when he arrives, other guests are already present. Abboskhon, his former teacher, lounges on the sofa smoking. He greets him warmly as his old student, then begins to criticize the final chapter of Saidiy's story. He explains that Kenja added it. Just then, a stout man in a beaver coat enters – Murodho'ja Domla, a schoolteacher and businessman – who loudly condemns Kenja's article on village collectivization as disastrous. Saidiy returns home, his view of Kenja changed.

Sent to the Countryside According to the decision of the faculty *Komsomol* cell (political youth organization in the former Soviet Union), Saidiy must go to the village, along with twenty mobilized *Komsomol* members, to agitate the rural population for the collectivization of land (Soviet policy from 1929 to 1933 aimed at replacing individual peasant farms with collective ones). Saidiy tries to refuse, but since those who refuse are threatened with public punishment, he is forced to go.

Stranger Among Villagers In the village, Saidiy feels like a stranger. The commission works from morning till night, trying to determine how much land the large farmers possess. Interrogations are difficult, as the farmers – fearing the loss of their land – rarely give truthful answers.

Meeting Domla In the village, Saidiy unexpectedly meets Murodho'ja Domla, who greets him warmly and leads him into a house of about ten people, including Niyozmat Hajji, recently interrogated by the commission. Plov is served. After eating, Saidiy prepares to leave, but Domla urges him to stay. Saidiy explains the university awaits him, says goodbye, and departs.

An Article for Protection On a winter day, Saidiy and Muniskhon return to the university. Saidiy suggests attending a meeting of the intelligentsia. Muniskhon reluctantly agrees, as neither of them enjoys such gatherings. Saidiy explains that Domla has written an article against collectivization. Abboskhon asks him to write a counter-article, claiming it will protect Saidiy from trouble, since the *Komsomol* cell has accused him of poor work in the village and plans to punish him. Saidiy writes the article, and it is published. Now he wonders what they will say about it today.

Cornered at the Meeting At the meeting, Kenja denounces Domla's article as a crime, not a mistake, and criticizes Saidiy's piece for mildness. The hall agrees. Chairman Abboskhon claims Domla has repented and praises Saidiy. Domla, flushed, admits fault and urges Saidiy to speak. Saidiy feigns urgency, leaving with Muniskhon.

An Awkward Gathering Saidiy visits Salimkhon, where several officials are gathered, leaving him uneasy. Salimkhon introduces him as a talented young writer working on a novel about land reform, making Saidiy blush. Discussion shifts to literature and a writer's duty. An official remarks that literature no longer mirrors life and warns, "If you write collectivization is bad, your novel won't be published." Saidiy replies it benefits landless peasants but harms owners. Domla enters, greeted coldly. When Muniskhon arrives, Saidiy silently pleads, and she discreetly leads him away.

A Village at the Edge Saidiy speaks with Muniskhon in another room. Muniskhon tells him that seven officials are against collectivization and plan to send a statement to the regional party committee. Saidiy is puzzled that officials would oppose it. The thought keeps turning in his mind: "Collectivization will ruin the village." He abandons his plan to write a novel on the subject. A week later, he reads a newspaper article sharply criticizing state workers who had submitted a resignation letter in protest, accusing them of being class enemies.

New Circles Saidiy often visits Muniskhon and gains many new acquaintances – officials, poets, journalists, lawyers, and even his former teachers and mentors from school. Respected as a writer, he frequently has his works published. Saidiy no longer wants to attend classes at the university. He feels the Komsomol members are waiting to discuss him at their meeting. On the eve of exams, he stops going altogether. He believes Muniskhon was the anchor keeping him there; now that Salimkhon's doors are open, he can meet her whenever he wishes. Many in his new circle know about their relationship and jokingly hint at their future marriage. Even without a higher education, he believes, he can still become a great writer and win Muniskhon's heart.

A Story Unpublished Ilham, a new friend, proposes that Saidiy write about a poor widow who, on a freezing winter day, unable to feed her children, sought help in the street and died. Saidiy doubts it will be published, but Ilham suggests adding that social security later aided the orphans. Saidiy writes the story, yet Kenja blocks its publication. Resentment toward Kenja takes root in Saidiy's heart, steadily growing strong.

June Meeting One day in June, Ehson arrives from Moscow to visit Saidiy. They embrace warmly, but Saidiy feels distracted. Ehson talks at length; Saidiy pretends to be happy, yet struggles to respond. At last, when asked about love, he feels relieved and confesses – he misses her, though she does not return his feelings. Still, he hopes for help and marriage. Curious, Ehson asks to meet her, and Saidiy promises to show her at the theater the next day.

A Meeting at the Theater At the theater, when Saidiy sees Muniskhon, he takes Ehson's hand and presses it to his heart. His heart is pounding. Muniskhon is there with her friends, and she and Saidiy exchange a nod. Ehson admires her beauty, saying that he saw her in Moscow with her brother when she was younger, and now she has become even more beautiful. He also mentions that he spoke with her brother and argued over a certain issue.

But He Is Right Saidiy and Ehson return to the apartment. Pretending not to recognize Muniskhon's brother, Saidiy asks about their meeting in Moscow. Ehson explains that when Salimkhon was there, he invited students from Uzbekistan and welcomed them warmly. He also met Muniskhon. They spoke at length, and when the discussion turned to nations, East and West, Salimkhon claimed that Europeans believed intelligent people could not arise from the yellow and black races. Ehson objected, insisting such prejudice was only the view of bourgeois scientists. However, a student who had studied in Berlin supported Salimkhon, which sparked a heated discussion. At this point, Saidiy exclaims, "But he is right!" Ehson does not like this.

A Quiet Rift The next morning, Saidiy avoids speaking to Ehson, while Ehson eagerly talks about his life in Moscow and his circle of friends. When he asks what Saidiy has accomplished, Saidiy shows him his published works but also admits how often they were rejected. Ehson advises him to write "about serving the cause of building socialism," saying only then will the editors accept his work. Saidiy criticizes the editor Kenja, which displeases Ehson, since Kenja had been his friend in Moscow. A quiet rift forms between them. When Ehson leaves for Moscow, Saidiy does not come to see him off.

Floating Ambitions After dropping out of university, Saidiy feels adrift. Unable to work as a teacher and not yet a famous writer, he decides to become one. He believes it is not necessary to read or study; it is enough to appear often before the authorities. He regularly attends the meetings of Abboskhon, an influential official who takes him under his protection, and there he is warmly received. He also gains respect in literary circles, now sitting on the presidium at writers' meetings among eminent poets, authors, and critics.

Under Domla's Roof One day, Murodho'ja Domla invites Saidiy to his home and offers him wine. Saidiy accepts and comes to visit. Domla greets him warmly, praising his talent and insisting he needs proper conditions to realize his potential. Saidiy eagerly agrees. Domla then offers to provide such conditions, and Saidiy, delighted, begins visiting him more and more often.

The Scheme of Domla Murodho'ja Domla has a daughter, Sorakhon. She was his only child; though unattractive and foolish, he cherished her deeply. Hoping to secure her future, he dreamed of marrying her to a gifted young man who, with guidance, could succeed and enrich the family. Saidiy seemed ideal. To separate him from Muniskhon, Domla sought to cool his feelings. Once, over drinks, he maligned her, claiming she was seeing Ilkhon. Saidiy burned with jealousy.

The New Editor Murodho'ja Domla also works as an editor at the newspaper, but he is dismissed for opposing the government's land reforms. Abboskhon and Salimkhon then proposes Saidiy as his replacement. With Saidiy's arrival, the newspaper became more active, and he begins contributing articles himself. His financial situation improves, but Kenja frequently criticizes him, and enmity soon grows between them.

A Share of Gratitude Saidiy's sister's husband is in trouble. He has lost his land to collectivization, and his shop is burdened with heavy taxes. Desperate for help, he finds an investigator – a friend of Saidiy – lying drunk on the street. He brings him home and takes care of him. Grateful, the investigator promises to reconcile him with Saidiy, with whom he has quarreled. Through his connections, Saidiy helps his uncle resist the taxes and start a new business, from which he expects his share.

An Invitation Saidiy writes an article praising Murodho'ja's work in linguistics. Pleased, Murodho'ja invites him to live in his house, and Saidiy agrees. There he meets Sorakhon, Murodho'ja's daughter, and is urged to befriend her. Afterward, Muniskhon often laughs whenever she sees him. Curious, he asks why, and she teases, "And how does Sorakhon communicate with you?" Saidiy stays silent but inwardly resolves to prove how much he dislikes Sorakhon.

A Dangerous Prototype Abboskhon invites Saidiy to write an article about the women's liberation movement, asking him to emphasize its negative consequences. The heroine is to be an unattractive woman who, while furiously demanding freedom, ultimately becomes a woman of easy virtue. Saidiy uses Sorakhon as the prototype, already imagining Muniskhon's laughter. He fears that Murodho'ja Domla, seeing the heroine's portrait, might recognize his daughter. But Domla never suspects a thing.

An Unwanted Match Muniskhon learns from her mother that her brother intends to marry her to Mukhtorkhon, a frequent guest at their gatherings. She dislikes him – boring and effeminate. Boldly, she asks Salimkhon: "Do I not have the right to choose?" He admits her right but reminds her that, after their father's death, he is responsible. Love, he warns, may turn bitter after marriage, while Mukhtorkhon is steady and safe. After long hesitation, Muniskhon reluctantly accepts.

Lost Dreams, New Ambitions Saidiy has lost all his dreams. The driving force behind everything he did was the hope of winning Muniskhon. Now, with that hope gone, he no longer knows what to strive for – yet he refuses to stop. He is determined to become an outstanding writer who will captivate everyone. Surrounded by people harmed by the new government, he dreams of expanding their circle and creating states where entrepreneurs can act freely, and where wealth is not considered a vice.

Shattered Hopes Saidiy is preparing to marry Murodho'ja Domla's daughter, Sorakhon. When Muniskhon learns of this, she is devastated. Unhappy in her own marriage, she had believed that one day Saidiy would prove himself worthy, return to her with pleas, and she would leave her husband to accept him. Instead, hearing of his wedding pierces her heart. Alone, she cries bitterly, confessing her love for Saidiy aloud.

Between Them, Only Barriers Munis returns from the university, her steps unconsciously leading her to Saidiy's editorial office. He is startled to see her. Pretending she has come for instructions for the circle, she accepts them and turns to leave. Saidiy follows her outside and asks about her husband. She involuntarily winces. He remarks that she seems unhappy in her marriage. Munis denies it, but tears well in her eyes. Saidiy tells her she is to blame for everything. She accuses him, reminding him that she was once in his arms, but he let her go. Saidiy replies that her love still glimmers in his heart, but not everything depends on him – Salimkhon, Mukhtorkhon, and Murodho'ja Domla stand between them. At his words, Munis loses all hope.

A Lavish Wedding, A Heavy Silence Saidiy's wedding ceremony was lavish, with many guests from different provinces, including Tatarstan. Yet beneath the abundance, a note of sadness lingered among them. Most of the guests were hardened in their opposition to the Soviet regime, but they were beginning to lose hope for any change in power.

The Weight of a New House After his marriage, although he already owns a large house, Saidiy decides to build a new one. Since construction demands heavy expenses, he takes on several jobs. Alongside editing, he begins teaching and translating. Exhausted, he feels the weight of impending loss in his soul, as though the tightening grip of the Soviet regime reaches even into his home.

A Dream Deferred The house is finally finished, but Saidiy keeps working tirelessly. His dream of becoming a writer has to be postponed. At home, his mother-in-law is never satisfied, constantly provoking her daughter and accusing Saidiy of not earning enough. One day, he receives a letter from Ehson, who writes that he has completed his studies and become a doctor. Reading it, Saidiy feels disheartened, dissatisfied with himself for not yet achieving recognition as a writer.

The Bitter Meeting Tired of endless arguments over money, Saidiy goes out on his bicycle, but it soon breaks down. Unable to fix it, he continues walking until he suddenly meets Muniskhon. Overjoyed, he stops her, yearning for the past. She offers to help and leads him into a small apartment. Closing the door, she takes off her outerwear and, smiling, calls him closer. Saidiy freezes, then embraces her, but she pulls away, sensing no passion in him. Anger flares within her, and she bursts into tears: "Am I worse than your ugly wife? So many admirers desire me! Who do you think you are – no longer handsome, incapable even of becoming a writer?" Saidiy bitterly agrees, then suddenly slaps her. She falls, and he turns away, leaving.

Unbearable Days in Murodho'ja's House Saidiy's life in Murodho'ja's house has become unbearable, his wife is constantly jealous, his parents demand that he earn more, one day Saidiy can't stand it and faints. On such days, Saidiy's sister suddenly comes to visit him, her husband kicked her out, taking the children away. Her legs hurt and her eyesight is failing. She has nowhere to go and starts living with Saidiy, complicating the already heated situation.

Murodho'ja Domla's Scheme Saidiy is dismissed from his post, accused of abusing his position by publishing too many of his own articles and collecting royalties. Murodho'ja Domla suggests that Saidiy and his daughter live separately. He has a plan: he wants his son-in-law to buy a house in his daughter's name, since Saidiy is of no further use to him. Later, he intends to divorce his daughter from Saidiy altogether.

The Note of Unhappiness Saidiy is relieved to live apart from his wife's family, for he still nurtures the hope of becoming a great writer and one day winning Muniskhon. But her sudden death shatters his dreams. She has shot herself, leaving behind only a note: "The whole world was full of happiness, only I was unhappy." No one knows the true reason. Her husband had vanished for months before being arrested for ties to the *Basmachi* (a national liberation movement). Yet this cannot explain her death – for Muniskhon knew nothing of it, and even if she had, she would have rejoiced, for she despised him.

A Refuge in Return Saidiy is deeply depressed, he is frightened by the impending danger. Due to the construction of the road, Murodho'ja Domla is going to demolish the house in order to get more space in return. Murodho'ja Domla must increase the number of residents. He forgives Saidiy to return to him, which he liked, since he sees a refuge there, where he can hide.

Fatigue and Fear Murodho'ja Domla returns from the village deeply shaken. Collectivization is gaining the upper hand, and one by one, people from Saidiy's circle were being arrested. Fear grips Saidiy. The next morning, Murodho'ja Domla leaves for somewhere, and Saidiy enters the office, intending to sit at his

desk. But an overwhelming fatigue suddenly overcomes him. He goes instead to visit his ailing sister. She speaks eagerly of folk remedies for her legs, but her desperate thirst for recovery only irritates him.

The Storm Within Saidiy sits motionless in a chair. Murodho'ja Domla had gone to a meeting. His mother-in-law entered, complaining that the wind had torn off the tin roof and something needed to be repaired. He gave no reply. Irritated, she slammed the door behind her. "Foolish woman," he thought bitterly, "when the storm of history has swept across the entire country." Dark thoughts seized him. He considered ending his life. Staring into the mirror, he struck it hard, shattering the glass.

Snow over the Flame He wanders into the street, aimless. He sees Domla being led away by guards, then another comrade from their gatherings, but does not stop. Snow begins to fall. Ahead, he sees a burning flame. He rushes toward it but stumbles and falls. The snow quickly covers him. The fire dissolves into a mirage – Muniskhon's face, his dream of becoming a great writer, and the vision of an independent homeland.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

SAIDIY

Saidiy is a complex figure who resists simple classification as either a positive or negative hero. At the outset, he appears as a young man in love, aspiring to achieve fame in the eyes of his beloved. Yet, even as he nurtures these dreams, he stands as a passive observer of the sweeping transformations brought by the new political order. In the reality of the 1930s, however, such passivity is less a personal flaw than an inevitable condition: Saidiy does not support the Soviet regime, but open resistance is impossible. As a result, he is gradually swallowed by the cycle of the ruling system, his fate shaped more by historical forces than by individual will.

Dreamer Saidiy is driven by an inner fantasy of heroic love. When he first meets Muniskhon, he imagines himself as her savior, proving his worth through some great act of devotion. Later, he dreams of securing her affection by becoming a renowned writer. Even after Muniskhon's moral lapse – her offer to become his mistress – he continues to idealize her, surprising even himself. His romantic imagination shapes his emotions far more strongly than the realities around him.

Conformist When Saidiy agrees to marry Sorahon, the complete opposite of his dream (Muniskhon), his decision is driven by the promise of stability and ease. This choice reveals his longing for security in a world of uncertainty. Yet it also leaves him dissatisfied, torn between unfulfilled personal desire and the material comforts he reluctantly accepts.

Passive Despite his ideals, Saidiy remains largely passive in the face of social and political upheaval. Living in the 1920s, he cannot openly oppose the Soviet regime, yet he never fully embraces its values. Instead, he drifts on the margins – neither adapting to the system nor actively resisting it. This passivity reflects both his inner disillusionment and his inability to turn thought into decisive action.

Conflicted Saidiy's ethical sense often clashes with his desires. He rejects Muniskhon's offer of an illicit relationship, not because his love has weakened, but because he seeks purity in devotion. His refusal reveals his attachment to an idealized morality, one that resists compromise even as his environment pressures him toward pragmatic choices.

MUNISKHON

Muniskhon differs from the traditional image of a beloved in Uzbek literature. Nature has endowed her with all the qualities necessary for happiness: beauty, charm, intelligence, and wealth. She also enjoyed an unusually free upbringing for an oriental girl of the early twentieth century, unbound by many of the restrictions typical of that era. Yet, despite these advantages, she lacks determination and inner strength.

Proud Aware of her own worth, Muniskhon places herself above others. Even when she feels attracted to Saidiy, this sense of superiority does not leave her. From the beginning of their relationship, she convinces herself that they are "just friends" and believes she can end it whenever she wishes, since she considers him unworthy of her. Only after marrying a man, whom she cannot love does she finally admit, too late, that she truly loved Saidiy.

Indecisive Muniskhon consistently lacks resolve in critical moments. When her brother announces her marriage to Mukhtorkhon, she is horrified and resolves to resist. Yet after speaking with him, she quickly yields, unwilling to face the consequences of defiance. Despite her outward confidence and relatively free upbringing, she ultimately reveals an inner weakness and inability to assert her will.

Contradictory Eventually realizing the gravity of her mistake, Muniskhon becomes consumed by the desire to correct it. She tries to win Saidiy back, but her efforts are in vain. In despair, she turns to betraying her husband, and as the author remarks, “Her beauty, having passed through various embraces, has almost faded.” Finally, she even offers herself to Saidiy, only to face rejection. Although she feels the moral truth behind his refusal, she does not admit it to herself. Her character embodies contradiction: a longing for pure and elevated love coexisting with choices that continually undermine it.

MURODHO’JA DOMLA

Murodho’ja Domla is a representative of the bourgeois intelligentsia of the early 20th century. Although the writer, following the ideology of the ruling regime, portrays the character in darker tones, behind his sometimes-comical appearance hides a strong and purposeful nature. He is a skilled linguist and knowledgeable historian, whose reflections on social and political questions are frequently well-founded. Yet in family life and everyday matters, he often reveals a down-to-earth, at times even grumbling, disposition.

Opportunistic Murodho’ja displays a calculating pragmatism, guided less by moral principles than by personal gain. Seeing Saidiy as an opportunity – talented, attractive, and vulnerable due to his lack of financial stability – he positions him as a suitable husband for his plain and inept daughter. Once the marriage is secured, Murodho’ja forces Saidiy to work tirelessly, extracting every possible benefit from it. However, when Saidiy loses his job, Murodho’ja abandons him without hesitation, suggesting they live separately and even buy a house in his daughter’s name, already planning divorce as a profitable solution. His pragmatism is thus revealed as opportunism devoid of loyalty.

Brave The author presents him as a figure of defiance who, unlike others discontented with the regime, refuses to disguise his opposition. His consistent willingness to voice criticism, even in the form of bold articles and public statements, places him in repeated conflict with authority. These episodes underscore not only his personal courage but also the narrative function he serves: embodying the risks of intellectual honesty in a repressive environment.

Paradoxical Despite his wealth and intelligence, Murodho’ja Domla is a paradoxical figure. While he demonstrates intellectual depth and social standing, he is also stingy and petty in everyday matters. He scolds his wife for not being able to milk only “four cows”; when she reproaches Saidiy for his lack of money despite his hard work, Murodho’ja pretends not to hear, though he is fully aware of the situation. He even tries to avoid paying his maid’s salary. These contradictions render him not only paradoxical but also comical in the eyes of the reader.

EHSON

This character is a representative of the new generation that created the Soviet regime. Socially, Ehson occupies a privileged position as the son of a poor man who died fighting the *Basmachi* (the anti-Soviet insurgents in Central Asia). Firmly committed to the “cause of socialism”, he is uncompromising toward its enemies. Within the novel, he follows the ideologically “correct” path and is deliberately contrasted with the “lost” Saidiy.

Purposeful From the very beginning, Ehson’s path in the novel is marked by a clearly defined goal: to obtain higher education and become a doctor. He even encourages Saidiy to pursue university studies. Unlike Saidiy, he keeps his emotions in check, subordinating personal desires to his ambitions. When their conversation turns to girls and marriage, Ehson responds pragmatically that such matters can wait until his education is complete. His purposeful nature, however, sometimes borders on cold pragmatism, making him appear less humane.

Dogmatic Ehson does not tolerate views that deviate from the ideology of the regime. He categorizes people ideologically as either “good” or “bad.” When Saidiy shows him Muniskhon, he praises her beauty but

immediately recalls a conversation with her brother, whom he had met in Moscow and criticizes him for his bourgeois-capitalist views. He also mentions a student who studied in Germany and shared Salimkhon's opinions, emphasizing that he disliked this student entirely. This portrays Ehson as a potential servant of the regime, likely to become an informer under Stalinist rule.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class In the novel, class distinctions are not immediately pronounced, as the consolidation of Bolshevik power had already diminished the traditional divide between rich and poor. Nevertheless, the new social order generated different tensions: the wealthy concealed their status out of fear, while the lower classes increasingly asserted claims to rights and resources. Importantly, representatives of the lower strata – peasants and domestic workers – are not idealized; rather, they are frequently depicted as ignorant, illiterate, and at times aggressive. Such nuanced representation underscores Abdulla Qahhor's commitment to an objective narrative mode, one that resists simplistic dichotomies of virtue and vice and instead reflects the complex social realities of the early Soviet era.

Illustrative Moment: The *Komsomol* commission convenes to investigate land ownership in the village. Two peasants appear before them. The first, a trembling middle peasant, hastily insists he is poor. The second, a wealthy man, looks exhausted – dressed in a worn *chapan* (traditional robe), his face pale, eyes bloodshot from sleepless nights. When asked his name, he replies, “Niyozmat Do'stmat o'g'li” (Niyozmat, son of Do'stmat). At once, Yo'Ichiboy, a young poor peasant, interrupts mockingly, demanding the full name and adding “*Hajji*” (Muslim who went on pilgrimage to Mecca) – a title that, in the 1930s, carried dangerous religious and class connotations. When Niyozmat underreports his land, the hall erupts in murmurs. One of the poor peasants at the meeting announces Niyozmat's full holdings, provoking even louder laughter. Niyozmat asks Yo'Ichiboy, “We have one God, one Prophet – why speak that way?” Yo'Ichiboy snaps back, “Then let the land and water be one too.” Laughter erupts in the room, though Yo'Ichiboy remains stern. The exchange reflects how collectivization exposed hidden contradictions and turned villagers into accusers, deepening class divisions.

Gender The novel highlights shifting gender norms during the *Hujum* campaign, a Soviet “attack” on traditional customs that promoted gender equality in Central Asia. Muniskhon embodies this change – she dresses in European style, studies, plays piano, meets men openly, and hosts Saidiy. These details reflect Soviet gender policy in the 1920s–1930s. Yet they remain largely external markers, for Muniskhon herself is an exception, coming from an enlightened, wealthy family. Other female characters remain bound to patriarchal dependence: Saidiy's sister, expelled by her husband, a woman whose husband was imprisoned, and who was sexually harassed by the investigator. Even Muniskhon is not entirely free when it comes to marriage.

Illustrative Moment: Muniskhon learned from her mother that her brother planned to marry her off to Mukhtarkhon, a dull, unattractive, middle-aged man. Horrified, she confronted Salimkhon, who insisted that Mukhtarkhon was a good match. “Do I have a choice?” she asked. Salimkhon smiled. “Do you have someone else?” “No,” she replied, “but...” He cut her off, claiming he knew what was best. “A woman is, first and foremost, a mother. She does not need to choose a man for that.” Muniskhon countered, “And men? They are fathers too. Why do they choose?” Salimkhon argued, “The right to love belongs to men; a woman must earn it. Nature cannot be changed by law. If a woman has twenty husbands, she bears one child, but a man with twenty wives can father many.” His reasoning faltered, exposing contradiction. Muniskhon protested, “But you once declared women equal to men!” He dismissed her coldly: “That was only a report. This is reality.” In the end, Salimkhon enforced his will, and Muniskhon was forced to marry Mukhtarkhon. This episode shows that, despite official progress in women's rights, traditional patriarchal attitudes remained deeply rooted, revealing how gender inequality persisted beneath the surface of reform.

Intellectuals In the novel, the author distinguishes between two types of intelligentsia: the so-called “bourgeois nationalists” and the Soviet intellectuals. The bourgeois nationalists oppose the Soviet regime and dream of an independent state; in the novel, they are portrayed in negative tones. Under the conditions of the 1930s and Stalinist censorship, the author could hardly depict them otherwise. Yet he remains faithful to realism when conveying their political, artistic, philosophical, and social views. By contrast, the Soviet

intellectuals – Kenja and Ehson – are shown in positive tones, but their portrayal is artificial and stilted. They echo the slogans of the era while lacking true depth of intellect.

Illustrative Moment: Saidiy attends a meeting of writers and literary scholars, where the works of young authors are being discussed. The famous critic – and Saidiy’s former teacher – Abbaskhon speaks: “When we look at a painting of a naked woman, we enjoy not her nudity, but her image.” He then addresses the previous speaker: “You yourself admitted his poem is high art. That means it can be appreciated without reference to ideology. To do so is to prove oneself ideologically sound!” At this, the hall begins to stir with discontented noise. This episode underscores the absurdity of reducing artistic value to political conformity and highlights the difficulty genuine intellectuals faced in defending art’s autonomy under the Stalinist regime.

POLITICS

Conflict The novel portrays the clash between Soviet supporters and opponents disillusioned by the regime. Bolshevik policies in the Soviet Republik of Uzbek sparked widespread unrest, with national leaders, intellectuals, writers, and professionals criticizing central violence. In retaliation, the regime enacted repressions, escalating to mass terror in the 1930s. These historical realities shape the novel’s world, where the protagonist navigates relationships with opposition figures, experiencing the tension, fear, and consequences of dissent under the early Soviet system, reflecting broader social and political upheaval. Under ideological pressure, the author depicts opposition figures negatively – as dishonest, drunken, or criminal – yet their critiques of the state, capitalism, race, art, and politics remain thoughtful and reasoned. In contrast, supporters of the regime are shown as virtuous, honest, and patriotic, but these traits often feel forced, serving political propaganda more than reflecting real personality. The novel thus contrasts authentic, intelligent reflection with artificial, ideologically imposed behavior, showing how ideology shapes the portrayal of characters.

Illustrative Moment: Murodho’ja Domla published an article cautioning that collectivization would be a lengthy and complex process. His position provoked sharp criticism, with several counter-articles appearing, most prominently by Kenja, who branded him a counter-revolutionary and argued that collectivization could be achieved swiftly. At an intelligentsia meeting, the atmosphere grew tense. Kenja concluded by declaring that Murodhoja’s article was not a mere mistake but “a crime against the workers,” a statement met with loud applause. Attempting to defend himself, Murod’hoja pleaded to be heard, but the crowd silenced him. The chairman, Abboskhon, sought compromise, affirming the value of dissent: “If you cannot call something bad, how can you know that it is good?” Yet the audience remained hostile. Under pressure, Murodho’ja admitted guilt, clarifying that he had only emphasized collectivization’s difficulties, though his words were dismissed. The episode foreshadows Stalinist repression, when ideological absolutism eradicated tolerance for independent or critical thought.

RELATIONSHIPS

Love is a central theme of the novel, yet Qahhor deliberately strips it of traditional romantic idealism. At first glance, the story appears conventional: the beloved woman marries another, and the rejected lover suffers. However, Qahhor portrays love not as a transcendent force but as a complex interplay of fantasy, social hierarchy, and pragmatism. Saidiy’s passion is bound to a romantic illusion: upon first meeting the girls, he imagines rescuing Muniskhon in a moment of crisis and thereby proving his heroism – a fantasy that persists until the end of their story. Muniskhon, meanwhile, despite her feelings for him, elevates herself above him owing to her higher financial and social status. Ultimately, both yield to external pressures: Muniskhon obeys her brother’s will, and Saidiy accepts Sorahon [sp?] for the comfort her marriage offers. Yet their enduring attachment exposes the persistence of unfulfilled desire. In this way, Qahhor rejects sentimental depictions of love, exposing its entanglement with material realities and its tendency toward compromise. Even in the tragic conclusion, where romantic colors linger, the author insists on darker shades that reveal the fragility of human desire under the weight of reality.

Illustrative Moment: After speaking with her brother, Muniskhon tries to quiet her doubts. “Perhaps Mukhtorkhon is not as weak as I imagined,” she tells herself. Looking at his photograph, she thinks, “If he gains a little weight, maybe his hands won’t seem so fragile.” Later, when her mother praises his wealth, Muniskhon imagines a marble castle with a pond full of goldfish, then recoils in fear: “No, God forbid!” But

her brother silences her hesitation: "I'll think for you; you don't need to." She feels like a prisoner led to a cell, powerless to resist. Not long after, she meets Saidiy for the last time. Both are worn down – Muniskhon from forcing herself to accept Mukhtorkhon, Saidiy from trying to forget her. She weeps, he drinks. Saidiy asks, "Is it true? Are you happy?" She forces a smile: "Yes." Though he does not believe her, the words wound him. He grips her wrists: "Between us..." But Muniskhon interrupts: "Enough. We were only friends." This scene conveys Qahhor's broader critique of love under social constraint: individual desire is subordinated to family authority and material considerations, exposing the incompatibility between personal emotion and social expectation.

Marriage The novel features two couples: Muniskhon and Mukhtorkhon, and Saidiy and Sorakhon. Both marriages are unhappy. Though both Saidiy and Muniskhon are inclined toward romantic love, they yield to circumstance. Muniskhon, trusting her brother's promise to secure her happiness, forces herself to marry a man she despises. Saidiy, in turn, marries Sorakhon, whom he does not love, for practical reasons. Both choices prove mistaken: Muniskhon finds no happiness in the marriage her brother arranged, and Saidiy gains neither the physical nor spiritual comfort he sought. The author underscores the contradiction between sincere feeling and cold pragmatism, exposing the futility of subordinating personal desire to social expectation and material necessity.

Illustrative Moment: Before her marriage, Muniskhon cherished two hopes: that her husband would eventually reveal the "bright" side her brother had promised, and that she would enjoy a life of luxury. After marriage, both illusions are shattered. Mukhtorkhon remains unchanged. What had once seemed tolerable now becomes unbearable – he smells of unwashed dishes, and intimacy fills her with revulsion: when he kisses, the sound reminds her of a lizard's squeak, and he clumsily presses against her like a bear burying its muzzle in a beehive. Outwardly Muniskhon pretends to be happy, but inwardly she wonders how much longer she can endure. Eventually, she begins to betray her husband indiscriminately. This exposes the tragedy of a family built on false feelings, and the heroine's futile attempts to conceal her unhappiness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe Saidiy's character?
2. What role does love play in the novel?
3. How is ideological pressure portrayed in the story?
4. Why is the novel titled 'Mirage'?
5. How are the "positive" characters, Kenja and Ehson, depicted?