

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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JOOSHBAY (1981) *Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997)*

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OVERVIEW

Author

Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997) was a Kyrgyz writer born in Keng-Suu, in present-day Issyk-Kul Region. Because his official birth date was unknown, he later chose May 14 as his birthday through a family tradition involving his daughter selecting a date at random.

He studied at the Agricultural Technical School in Frunze (1928–1931) and later at the Central Asian Veterinary Institute in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. He worked at the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* (1931–1936), served as a consultant for the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1937–1947), and worked as an editor at *Kyrgyz mambas* publishing house (1949–1951).

In the Soviet period, he was labeled a “nationalist writer,” but his earlier Stalin Prize recognition limited political repression against him. He supported objective study of Kyrgyz history, promoted the development of the Kyrgyz language, and openly criticized official shortcomings, leading some scholars to describe him as a Soviet-era Kyrgyz dissident.

Sydykbekov remained a major figure in Kyrgyz literature for nearly seventy years and died in Bishkek on July 19, 1997.

Literary career

He began his literary career as a poet. His first poem, *Who Are These People? (Bular Kimder?)*, was published in the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* on May 1, 1930. Soon afterward, he wrote *The Old Komuz Player (Chal Komuzchu)*, which appeared in the magazine *Chabuul*. His first poetry collection, *Struggle (Kurosh)*, was published in 1933, followed by *Heroes (Baatyrlar)*, 1936) and *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938). During this period, he also began working actively in prose.

Like many writers of his generation, Sydykbekov's early works reflected social changes in Kyrgyz society, including the new socialist system, labor, and changing social relations.

In 1937–1938, his novel *Keng-Suu (Keng-Suu)* was published in two volumes, becoming one of the first novels in Kyrgyz literature. In the 1950s, he revised it and republished it as *Among the Mountains (Too Arasynda)*, with volumes appearing in 1955 and 1958.

During this period, he also wrote *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938), the essay *Ala-Toodon Je-too* (1939), the poem *News from the Night Watchman (Tun Jarchysynan Kabar)*, 1939), and the verse tale *The Greedy Father (Ach Koz Ata)*, 1940).

His collection of stories *During the War Days (Sogush Kundorundo)*, 1943) reflects wartime unity and patriotism during World War II.

Between 1938 and 1940, he wrote the novel *Temir (Temir)*, published in 1946, depicting the establishment of Soviet power in southern Kyrgyzstan.

His novel *People of Our Time* (*Bizdin Zamandyn Kishileri*, 1948) marked a major stage in his career. It was first published in *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan* (*Ala-Too*) and later in Moscow in Russian. In 1949, it received the Stalin Prize, making him one of the leading Kyrgyz writers.

After the war, he contributed to children's literature with *Mountain Children* (*Too Baldary*, 1953). Later, after *Among the Mountains*, he wrote the major novel *Women* (*Zayıptar*). Its first part, *Batiyna*, was published in 1962, and the complete version, including *Mountain Pass* (*Ashuu*), appeared in 1966.

His later works include *Friends* (*Kurbular*) and *Confession* (*Syr Achuu*, 1977), focusing on youth, and *Yimanbay's Character* (*Yimanbay Peyili*, 1980), which continues a character from *Among the Mountains* (*Too Arasynda*).

In his autobiographical works *The Road* (*Jol*, 1982) and *Over the Mountain Passes* (*Bel-Beleste*, 1996), he reflects on his life and experiences.

Novella

Published in 1981, the novella depicts the life and folk satire legacy of Jooshbay, a legendary Kyrgyz *kuudul*, folk comedian. As a work belonging to the satire genre, it uses humor and wit to criticize social inequality, religious hypocrisy, and abuse of authority in traditional Kyrgyz nomadic society.

Background Comedian Jooshbay Borsol Uulu (c. 1840–1919)

Jooshbay Borsol Uulu was born around 1840 in present-day Tong District (Döng-Talaa village), Kyrgyzstan into a relatively well-off family. His talent for humor and sharp speech appeared early, already in his childhood while herding sheep and goats at the age of 11–12.

His elder brother Bayserke was a local village leader (*manap*), and many of Jooshbay's humorous stories involve him, as well as Bayserke's household, guests, and associates. Sources note that Jooshbay was often remembered through his relationship with this influential brother.

Although from a prosperous family, Jooshbay was not especially favored in childhood. Because of his outspoken and mocking nature, he was labeled "naughty" or even "crazy." He spent most of his early life as a herder and remained unmarried until around thirty. These experiences shaped his outlook, and his humor became a way of exposing injustice, arrogance, and social hypocrisy through satire and wit.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Jooshbay — the protagonist; a legendary Kyrgyz *kuudul* (folk comedian) with wit, satire, and mimicry

Bayserke — Jooshbay's elder brother; village headman; proud and status-conscious

Momo Hajji — Jooshbay's younger brother; exaggeratedly religious and self-righteous

Nurmoldo — local mullah; religious authority figure often mocked by Jooshbay

Momunbek — village man who helps Jooshbay find a bride

Erke — Jooshbay's wife

Borsol — Jooshbay's father

Tatyna — Bayserke's wife

SYNOPSIS

Jooshbay is a legendary Kyrgyz *kuudul*—a witty folk comedian and satirist whose life stories celebrate the power of laughter over authority. More than a mere joker, Jooshbay uses his "living talent" for mimicry and sharp-tongued wit to expose social hypocrisy and defend the vulnerable.

Whether he is performing a "black comedy" prank on his status-obsessed brother or imitating a mourning camel to trick his stubborn father into feeding hungry villagers, Jooshbay demonstrates that a *kuudul* comedian is a vital social critic.

His comedy frequently targets religious and social elites. He boldly mocks greedy mullahs for their hypocrisy regarding charity and disrupts formal rituals to prove that sincere intention is more important than rigid performance.

Even in the stressful markets of Andijan, he uses his comedic charm to protect his community from dishonest brokers.

As a master of the *Manas* epic and a keen observer of nature, Jooshbay proves that humor is a form of wisdom.

Even on his deathbed, his jokes remain intact, leaving a legacy that defines the resilient Kyrgyz spirit: a belief that laughter is a sacred tool for truth, justice, and humanity.

SCENES

Jooshbay and the Colt

Jooshbay's Concern for the Helpers After the sheep had been sheared, the villagers gathered to make felt and twist ropes. Jooshbay wanted to assist with the communal work. The women making felt and the men helping with the tasks grew hungry and asked his father to slaughter an animal for the workers. However, his father remained silent and refused. Inwardly, Jooshbay thought, "Father, since you would not slaughter an animal for the people, I will have your colt slaughtered to feed them." His mother reproached her husband, saying, "When we were making felt, you refused to slaughter an animal. Now, when others make felt, they will slaughter one and put us to shame." His father insisted that cream, bread, and milk were enough for those who had come to help.

Jooshbay's Clever Plan Upset by his father's stubbornness, Jooshbay went to the sheep yard and began crying among the sheep like a young camel calf. Hearing the unusual sound, his father asked, "Whose camel calf is crying? Go and look." Yet no camel calf could be found. Jooshbay cried again, first like a young camel and then like a mother camel calling for her calf. His father grew uneasy, thinking that a camel would not cry without reason. Secretly amused, Jooshbay thought to himself, "Do not worry, Father. Tomorrow you will slaughter the colt." Confident that his plan would work, he continued his imitation.

The Feast for the Helpers After a while, Jooshbay returned to the yard among the sheep and again imitated the cries—first like a baby camel, then like a young camel, and finally like a mother camel mourning her calf. He claimed that a white camel calf had leapt over their yurt and taken away the colt of their mare. Taking this as a sign, his mother advised her husband to slaughter the colt the following day. The next day, Jooshbay's father slaughtered the well-fed colt as a *tölöö*, a ritual sacrifice for blessing and protection. The helpers and villagers shared the meat, and the gathering turned into a joyful feast.

Jooshbay and the Guests' Knives

Jooshbay's Wit at the Gathering Jooshbay's reputation for humor spread to other communities. People decided to test him by arranging a gathering at the house of his elder brother, Bayserke. When they arrived, Bayserke wanted Jooshbay to help only with the cooking. He stepped out of the yurt, asking the guests to continue their conversation while he took care of the preparations. Taking advantage of the moment, Jooshbay quietly entered with a water jug and began pouring water for the guests to wash their hands. At that time, no meat had been cooked, and no animal had yet been slaughtered for the meal.

The Joke That Stopped the Feast As the guests began taking out their knives and preparing for the meal, Jooshbay suddenly warned Bayserke, "Come quickly, the guests are about to slaughter each other." Alarmed, the guests quickly hid their knives in fear. Bayserke returned and apologized, saying, "Please forgive him, he is foolish." But instead of anger, the guests burst into laughter, realizing the cleverness of Jooshbay's joke. They recognized him as the same witty young man they had come to test, and their surprise turned into admiration.

Jooshbay and His Father

Learning to Care for Father When Jooshbay's father grew old, he said, "My son, you will have to take care of me." One day, father and son were traveling together. Jooshbay suggested they rest for a while. While his father slept, he deliberately drove their horses across the river and pretended to be asleep. When his father woke up and saw the horses on the opposite bank, he asked Jooshbay to bring them back. "Why should I struggle crossing the river?" Jooshbay replied. "Father, climb onto my back instead."

Practice Makes Perfect As they reached the middle of the river, Jooshbay suddenly bucked and shouted, "Father, I'm getting ticklish!" Terrified, his father cried out, "Water has gotten into my boots!" After

reaching the other side safely, Jooshbay explained, "If I don't practice taking care of you little by little, I might drop you while crossing a mountain pass in the future and embarrass myself." Embarrassed by the incident, his father begged him not to tell anyone. Jooshbay replied, "If you don't tell anyone, neither will I. You already refused to let me marry because you said I talk too much."

A Groom with Extra Salt Realizing that his son had grown up, Jooshbay's father thought, "I'd better arrange his marriage before he embarrasses me in front of everyone." He advised, "Enough with your tasteless jokes. You're a grown man now." Jooshbay grinned and answered, "Very well, from now on I'll season my words with a little salt." His father told him to saddle his horse, travel among the villages, and find a bride—but from a distant village. Jooshbay objected, "Wouldn't it be easier to marry nearby? Then arguing and making up would be much more convenient." His father had no answer.

Jooshbay's Marriage Story

Momunbek's Promise Momunbek was a kind and respected man in the village who never treated Jooshbay as if he were too young. Years earlier, he had told Jooshbay that he would find him a beautiful bride. Jooshbay jokingly replied, "Will they choose me after looking at my face?" Momunbek answered, "Unless a girl has dust in her eyes and cannot see properly, anyone would gladly marry you." Now, when the time had come to search for a bride, Jooshbay took Momunbek with him. Jooshbay was a handsome young man, but he also had a talent for imitating both elderly people and young men.

Advice on Finding a Bride As they traveled, Momunbek praised Jooshbay's talents but warned him, "With your wit and humor, any girl may like you. Instead, be careful not to end up with a foolish bride." Jooshbay sighed, "Finding a bride is harder than I thought. What if I want to kiss a girl as soon as I see her?" Momunbek advised him to behave with dignity. Jooshbay then asked, "What if I narrow my eyes and twist my mouth?" Momunbek laughed and replied, "Some girls will pity you, some will laugh at you, but a sensible girl will pretend not to notice."

Searching from Village to Village Following Momunbek's plan, they traveled from village to village. Whenever they heard that a household had a daughter who had not yet been promised in marriage, they made careful inquiries about her family. In particular, they asked about the girl's mother, believing that a daughter's character, manners, and upbringing often reflected those of her mother. They also inquired about her father, lineage, and reputation, while seeking to understand the girl's own temperament and disposition. Some girls behaved proudly, while others paid little attention to the visitors. At one point, Jooshbay suggested, "Perhaps we should simply look for a bride in our own village." As they continued their search, they encountered a woman riding an ox. She recognized Jooshbay and said, "I heard you are looking for a bride."

The Bride is Found The woman directed them to a house at the edge of the village and encouraged them to meet the girl. After some time had passed, Jooshbay's father arrived with livestock to pay the bride price. The marriage arrangements proceeded, and soon everyone in the village knew that the young bridegroom would be visiting his future wife's family. As tradition required, the women of the household, especially the bride's sisters-in-law, gathered to welcome him. They were eager to observe him closely, tease him, and test his character through playful wedding customs.

The Groom under Inspection When Jooshbay arrived at his bride's village, the bride's sisters-in-law (*jengeler*) gathered to welcome and observe him according to wedding customs. Jooshbay occasionally narrowed one eye and twisted one side of his mouth. One woman whispered, "One of his eyes is crooked." Another remarked, "His mouth seems twisted." A third objected, "No, he is a fine-looking young man." Yet another laughed and said, "Our groom certainly knows how to come up with unusual remarks." Others described him as polite and well-mannered.

Jooshbay's Proper Behavior Although Jooshbay wished to display his natural wit and humor, he tried to behave with dignity. The women in his family had repeatedly warned him not to reach greedily for food, but to eat modestly and conduct himself with proper manners. As a groom visiting his bride's family, he was expected to be respectful and reserved. Determined to avoid embarrassing himself, Jooshbay fol-

lowed their advice. Even so, his playful nature remained unchanged, and he struggled to suppress his talent for making others laugh.

The Baby and Jooshbay That evening, wedding games were held while singers entertained the guests. Jooshbay and his bride exchanged playful remarks, sometimes testing each other's wit. The next day, Jooshbay was left alone in the yurt. One of the sisters-in-law brought a baby in a cradle and said, "Watch the child for a while. You should begin learning how to care for children." Jooshbay tried to remain dignified and behaved as a proper groom, sitting quietly and observing the child.

The Cream, the Boorsoks, and Jooshbay's Wit Soon Jooshbay became hungry and bored. He wandered toward the food area of the yurt and quietly reached into a container of cream. At that moment, the same woman returned and noticed his unusual expression. She asked what had happened to his eye. Jooshbay replied, "Your baby cried so much that I joined in crying, and my eye became crooked. I even wanted to give your baby some sour cream." She was unsure whether to believe him, but then saw his hand stuck in the container. "Open your fist and you will pull it out," she said. Amused by his cleverness and good nature, she eventually gave him cream and *boorsoks*, traditional fried bread. After the wedding, Jooshbay brought his bride, Erke, to his home village.

Jooshbay's Mischief at Bayserke's House

Jooshbay and the "Well-Prepared" Horses Guests of high status arrived at Bayserke's yurts. They shared genealogies, told stories, and a sheep was slaughtered for them. Bayserke, who was Jooshbay's elder brother, told him to take care of the guests' horses. Jooshbay carefully "looked after" them overnight. In the morning, Bayserke discovered that all the horses had been slaughtered. "You told me to take care of them, so I took care of them," Jooshbay said innocently. Embarrassed, Bayserke apologized to the guests and gave each of them one of his own horses to ride home. One elder only laughed and said, "Where there is laughter, there is life and blessing."

Bayserke's Furious Lesson Bayserke could not control his anger after being shamed in front of the guests. "You always find ways to disgrace me!" he shouted and began hitting Jooshbay with a whip. "Here is your laughter!" he said, striking him repeatedly. But Jooshbay calmly remarked that the whip seemed strangely soft. "Whoever made this whip must have filled it with cotton," he joked. This only made Bayserke angrier, and he continued beating him without stopping, while Jooshbay kept teasing him with humorous comments despite the punishment.

Jooshbay's Loud Comedy Unable to bear the beating any longer, Jooshbay decided to respond in his own way. His body was already covered with blows, and in pain he said, "If you make me cry, I will make you cry too." He then began to howl like a dog and cry like a camel in distress, exaggerating his voice in every possible way. His strange performance only added to the chaos in the courtyard, turning Bayserke's anger into an even more confusing and ridiculous scene for everyone watching.

Jooshbay and the Death Prank

The False Death News In Ysyk-Kol region, noble people and tribal leaders gathered for their annual council meeting. They discussed long-standing disputes over pastures, tribal conflicts, inheritance rights, and the division of land and water. Bayserke also went to attend the meeting, and money was collected for his travel expenses. When Jooshbay heard that his elder brother was leaving, he decided to take revenge while herding horses. He went to Bayserke's wife, Tatyna, and cried loudly, saying, "Destiny has struck: my brother died at the council meeting!" Shocked by the news, the entire family and tribe members gathered in mourning, preparing funeral customs.

Two Villages in Mourning Believing Bayserke was dead, the villagers dressed his wife in black and began mourning rituals. Meanwhile, Jooshbay quietly rode his horse toward the council site. When the meeting ended, Bayserke and the returning men met him on the road. "What are you doing here?" Bayserke asked. Jooshbay calmly replied, "Destiny has struck again—your wife Tatyna has died." Hearing this, Bayserke and his companions rushed back in grief. As they crossed a hill, they saw the village filled

with mourning preparations, slaughtered animals, and crying women. Both sides now believed tragedy had struck twice, and confusion spread everywhere.

The Living Dead Return As Bayserke entered the village, women were performing mourning songs, and his wife was sitting among them, tearing her hair and crying. Seeing this, Bayserke believed she had truly died and began to wail. His wife, however, upon seeing him, fainted in shock, thinking she was seeing his spirit. Suddenly, both realized they were alive, and confusion turned into shock. Bayserke immediately understood that Jooshbay had caused the entire chaos. Soon laughter spread among the villagers as they realized Jooshbay's trick, and they could not decide whether to scold him or admire him.

Jooshbay's Final Joke Bayserke demanded that Jooshbay be brought immediately. But Jooshbay had already slipped away toward the horse herd when the mourning began. When messengers found him, he refused to come, fearing punishment. Bayserke sent another messenger, promising, "I will not beat him and will forgive him in front of everyone." Jooshbay finally returned slowly, looking serious. Bayserke asked angrily, "What kind of behavior is this?" Jooshbay replied, "Brother, if I make you laugh, you are not pleased; if I make you cry, you are still not pleased. So how can I ever please you?" The villagers burst into laughter, and no one could stay angry at him.

Jooshbay Interrupts the Council with His "Sky Vision" and Lost Youth

Jooshbay at the Council According to custom, one must not contradict one's father or elder brother. Therefore, Jooshbay continued herding his elder brother Bayserke's horses without protest. One day, however, he decided that he would no longer stay silent in the fields. "I will go among the people and present my talent," he thought. He arrived at a public council where elders were discussing serious matters. Bayserke, seeing him sit there like an official, became alarmed and hoped he would not cause trouble. Jooshbay, however, sat calmly as if he did not recognize anyone and behaved like an important guest.

The Story of the Sky Vision An elder was speaking wisely while one man was casually chewing *nasvai*, traditional smokeless tobacco product. Suddenly Jooshbay looked as if he was about to speak. The elder paused and asked, "My son, do you have something to say?" Jooshbay looked up at the sky and said, "I saw a strange vision in the clouds." Everyone immediately turned to look at the sky, trying to see it. Nothing was there, and some people began to laugh. At that moment Bayserke quickly interrupted, telling him to return to the horse herd and stop disturbing the gathering of respected men.

What Jooshbay Lost Jooshbay refused to leave. "I will not go back to your horses," he said. "While I was looking after them, I lost something important." Bayserke angrily asked, "What did you lose? We already gave you a wife, built you a yurt, and provided everything." Turning to the crowd, Jooshbay said, "Isn't it a duty of fathers and elder brothers to arrange a wife and a home?" The crowd agreed, saying, "Yes, it is a duty." Bayserke again demanded, "Tell us what you lost!" Jooshbay finally answered, "I lost my youth."

The Loss of Youth and the Laughter of the Crowd Jooshbay continued, "While I was guarding your horses, I lost my youth, and I could not show my talent among people." He exaggerated his tired face, saying, "My eyes became narrow and my face twisted from herding horses." The crowd burst into laughter. The elder who had been speaking earlier said, "Jooshbay's humor is a living talent; his words are not without meaning." He praised him, saying such wit should be valued. The people then gave him blessings, wishing him a long life and that his talent would always bring joy to others.

Jooshbay, Nurmoldo and the Friday Prayer Confusion

The Mullah on the Road and the First Encounter Nurmoldo, a mullah, was riding on horseback with a beautifully decorated *kurjun*, saddlebag in which he kept the Qur'an and other religious books. As he traveled, he continued preaching about Islamic duties and the punishment of hell, speaking seriously to himself and to whoever might hear. While he was riding, he met Jooshbay, a young man known for his humor. Nurmoldo stopped and said, "Hey shameless one, is that you, Jooshbay?" Jooshbay replied calm-

ly, “Yes, it is me.” Nurmoldo immediately asked, “Why do you not greet people properly?” Jooshbay smiled and replied jokingly.

Joke about Nurmoldo and the Saddlebag Jooshbay looked at the decorated saddlebag and said, “If I saw you from far away, I might think you are a woman returning to her relatives with a decorated bag, not a mullah carrying books.” Nurmoldo became serious and said, “You are disrespectful, young man.” Jooshbay replied again, “You say women should not greet men, yet you yourself are dressed up like this.” Some villagers said he should be punished. Others laughed. Someone said, “His elder brother Bayserke should control him,” while Nurmoldo stayed silent.

Questions about Friday Prayer Nurmoldo did not answer Jooshbay immediately. He thought, “I will teach this man properly according to sharia.” A few days later, he came to Bayserke’s yurt. Nurmoldo explained that Muslims perform five daily prayers individually, but Friday prayer must be performed collectively. Jooshbay immediately asked, “Where exactly will we gather?” Jooshbay looked around and said that they had no mosque with a minaret, no proper building like in towns. He said in the village some wore turbans, others hats, while here everyone looked different. “If we gather like this, will God think we are mocking prayer?” he asked. The crowd burst into laughter. Nurmoldo replied calmly that in nomadic life prayer can be performed anywhere clean, and a turban is not strictly required.

Bayserke’s Warning On another day, after the mullah’s earlier lesson had already been heard in the village, Bayserke again called Jooshbay and reminded him firmly, “Do not miss Friday prayer.” This time his tone was more serious, as if repeating an important instruction that had already been discussed before. Jooshbay stood confidently and replied, “I am the servant of God, follower of Prophet Muhammad, I am obliged to attend Friday prayer, I am obliged, I am obliged.” He repeated the word “obliged” many times, as if strengthening his own promise through repetition.

Suspicion and Jooshbay’s “Own Prayer” Idea Bayserke looked at him carefully and said, “Do not think you are going to turn this into comedy.” Jooshbay replied calmly, “Would a Muslim turn his own prayer into a joke?” and tried to look serious. Then Bayserke asked, “Is there such a thing as your own prayer?” Jooshbay answered with imagination: “I will take ablution, go to K  k-D  b   hill, and pray: *white ram’s head, Nurmoldo’s turban, la ilaha illallah*—just like our grandmother used to pray in her own way.” Bayserke immediately interrupted him: “Forget your own prayer. Pray like everyone else.” Jooshbay did not argue, but his tone still carried playful confidence.

Oral Religion and Village Practice In the nomadic life of the Kyrgyz, Islamic rules were not always learned from books in a strict way. Instead, they were passed orally from elders to younger people, so variations naturally appeared in practice. Some villagers prayed in slightly different ways, but always with sincere intention and belief. Elderly men and women performed prayers according to what they had learned, even if not perfectly formal. At the same time, there were learned people like Nurmoldo, who knew the Qur’an by heart and could explain its meanings to the villagers. This created a mix of formal teaching and lived tradition.

The Open-Air Mosque on K  k-D  b   Hill Without a built mosque, the nomadic Kyrgyz gathered for Friday prayer on the green K  k-D  b   hill. People came in every way possible—on horses, donkeys, on foot, even carried or riding behind others—and in a short time the hillside filled with worshippers. They tied their animals at a distance and walked toward the open-air “mosque,” forming rows according to tradition. Jooshbay also arrived to fulfill his duty. In his usual style, he wrapped his leather belt around his head instead of a proper cap, and the metal parts of the belt jingled and shimmered, making him look unintentionally comic, though everyone tried to stay focused on prayer.

Jooshbay’s Misunderstood Prayer After the prayer ended, the worshippers began the traditional closing ritual. In Islamic practice, they turn their head to the right and say: “*Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*” (“Peace and God’s mercy be upon you”), then turn to the left and repeat the same phrase. This marks the formal end of the prayer. Jooshbay thought, “Why should I be greeting *Rahmatullah*? I should greet the people sitting here next to me instead.” So he turned and said, “Assalamu alaykum Akmatkary, Assalamu alaykum Duishonaly,” addressing those who were sitting beside him. A burst of laughter broke out, and then everything quickly fell silent.

Jooshbay's "Kuymak Prayer" and the Broken Prayer Ritual In the next *rak'ah*, unit of prayer, while everyone began with *Al-Fatiha*, Jooshbay started his own "prayer." He said, "Where is the *kuymak* bread? Akmatkary, you take the bread. Duishonaly, you swallow more. Let the bread finish until Nurmoldo wants it, until Bayserke wants it. Allahu Akbar." Then, when Jooshbay touched his forehead to the ground in prostration, someone nearby lightly tapped him, saying, "This is not how prayer is performed." Jooshbay misunderstood and thought, "So this is how it should be done," and tapped Nurmoldo in front of him, saying, "This is not how prayer is performed." A loud burst of laughter spread again. The metal pieces on Jooshbay's belt jingled loudly, adding even more chaos. In the end, that day's Friday prayer was completely disrupted.

Nurmoldo's Judgment and Bayserke's Anger Nurmoldo and the village leaders decided to discipline Jooshbay. In a serious, authoritative voice, Nurmoldo said, "Jooshbay, O servant of God, whoever breaks the prayer is considered a disbeliever for seven generations." Hearing this, Bayserke became angry and said, "Did I not warn you before? You didn't only ruin your own prayer, you also ruined mine and made me 'disbeliever' for seven generations!" Jooshbay lowered his head and replied calmly, "I have something to say, I am sorry." The atmosphere became tense, but people still waited to hear his explanation.

Jooshbay's Defense and the Village Reaction Jooshbay then spoke: "If I alone broke the prayer, I am ready to go to hell myself. But if all of you also made mistakes in prayer, then you will go there with me too." Jooshbay replied, "When I try to pray properly, Bayserke says 'pray the normal Muslim way.' But when I tried to do that, you all greeted Rahmatullah, the trader in Karakol, as if he were part of the prayer greeting, while I only greeted the people sitting next to me. Jooshbay also said, "You told us we may wrap our belts like a turban." Some villagers laughed, others were surprised, and they slowly dispersed back to their homes.

Jooshbay's Undiluted Manas and the Testing of Hospitality

The Unwelcoming Yurt and Jooshbay's Bold Entry On his way to Karakol, Jooshbay stopped in a village where, according to Kyrgyz custom, a tired traveler should be warmly received and hosted as a guest. Looking around, he thought, "What kind of place is this if a guest is not even invited in?" When he entered the yurt, the host paid little attention to him. Outside, a man was already slaughtering a sheep for food. Jooshbay sat down confidently, as if he belonged there, and said, "Even if you are arrogant and unwelcoming, I will still be your honored guest here." His words carried both humor and challenge.

Question of Skills and Jooshbay's Exaggerated Talents The heavy-set host finally turned to Jooshbay and asked, "What talents do you have?" Jooshbay answered without hesitation, "I am a jeweler, I tame wild horses, I make those who ignore me bow before me, and I turn foolish people into eloquent speakers." The host looked at him again and asked, "Are you serious?" Jooshbay replied proudly, "When I was younger, I used to sing at weddings for forty days straight. Now I can even perform the epic of Manas." His exaggerated confidence filled the yurt with both suspicion and amusement.

The "Undiluted Manas" Challenge in the Guest Yurt The host asked again, "Which version of Manas will you tell?" Jooshbay replied proudly, "The pure Manas, without any dilution." Then he added, "Let me tell it properly—shall I begin? I will even shake the horse's head with it." He continued joking, "When I say 'Manas, Manas,' even a big awkward man sitting here becomes cold, stiff, and unwelcoming; when I say 'Oh, Oh Manas,' he becomes even more closed and uncomfortable." Hearing this, the host became puzzled and asked, "What kind of Manas is this?" Jooshbay answered, "This is the Manas for those who do not know how to properly receive a guest."

The Epic, and Jooshbay's Identity Revealed The host laughed and said, "Then tell us the proper Manas too." Jooshbay began reciting the Manas he usually told to herders. Meanwhile, villagers gathered inside the yurt, filling it completely, and Jooshbay continued his performance until the meat was cooked. The host was impressed and asked, "Your talent is strong. What is your name?" Jooshbay replied, "My name is Jooshbay." The man suddenly looked surprised and slightly uneasy: "Are you *that* Jooshbay?" Jooshbay smiled and said, "Yes, I am the undiluted Jooshbay." The host immediately apologized, embraced him, and the next morning sent him off with a horse, as was proper hospitality tradition.

Religious Hypocrisy

Fasting Month Every year, the fasting month came, and this year it was observed in the fifth month of the Kyrgyz calendar. From the age of twelve, fasting was considered a religious duty. Children of nine would practice gradually—fasting one day at the beginning of the month, one in the middle, and one at the end—as a way of learning discipline, patience, and proper behavior. During these thirty days, people generally became more polite and restrained in their daily conduct. Religious leaders (mullahs) repeatedly reminded the community about giving “*fitr*” charity during this month, while those in authority also instructed both the wealthy and the poor to fulfill zakat and *fitr* obligations.

Charity Pressure, Poverty, and Jooshbay’s Thoughts Even those with very little wealth were often pressured to give, sometimes offering their only livestock or remaining possessions. When Jooshbay saw poor families struggling—some living with hungry children—he felt deep sympathy for them. He thought, “Have the mullahs become too greedy, or is there something I do not understand here?” After reflecting for a moment, he answered himself, “Why would there not be?” Observing these situations, Jooshbay quietly reflected on how religious duty, social expectation, and authority sometimes placed unequal pressure on both rich and poor, especially in a community where everyone was expected to comply.

Jooshbay Chasing the Dog One day Jooshbay mounted his horse, took a herding stick, and began chasing his own dog. He shouted at the dog as if it were a person: “Why are you running away? If I wanted, I could give you the halal tail fat of my own sheep hanging at the end of this rope. You are supposed to guard my livestock, why are you ashamed?” He kept talking loudly while the dog barked and ran ahead. His strange behavior made the scene both confusing and humorous for anyone who saw it.

The Witnesses, the Zakat Herd, and the Village Reaction Hearing the dog bark and Jooshbay’s shouting, Bayserke, his wife, and others came out of the house. Guests from nearby villages also stepped outside to see what was happening. “What is he doing, chasing a dog like that?” they wondered. At that moment, about twenty lambs, kids, and sheep collected as *fitr zakat*, ‘Eid almsgiving’ from a neighboring village and being driven by mullahs, their assistants, and wealthy men passed by. They all saw Jooshbay chasing the dog and were surprised by the strange and noisy scene unfolding in the village.

Jooshbay Mocks the Collectors of *Fitr Zakat* Jooshbay deliberately stepped into the path of the mullahs who were collecting *fitr zakat*. Chasing his dog, he sarcastically remarked, “Why are you ashamed? Nowadays people are no longer ashamed of swallowing tail fat.” When the mullahs asked why he was chasing the dog, Jooshbay replied that the dog had bitten a stallion the day before and had been too embarrassed to look up ever since. One of the mullahs quoted the saying, “Even if you offer tail fat to a dog that is ashamed, it will not eat it.”

Jooshbay’s Criticism of Religious Hypocrisy Seizing the opportunity, Jooshbay turned to his dog and said, “Why are you ashamed to eat tail fat when rulers and nobles feel no shame, and mullahs take zakat from the poor and helpless without shame?” The crowd finally understood the target of his satire. Unable to respond to Jooshbay’s sharp criticism, the chief mullah announced that although giving zakat brought spiritual merit, the collected zakat would be returned to its owners and could be reclaimed there. With that, the mullahs departed in silence.

Jooshbay and His Brothers

Jooshbay Questions Family Differences Whenever people gathered, Jooshbay would exclaim, “Oh dear, oh dear!” When the crowd asked what had happened, he replied, “Bayserke, my elder brother and the village ruler, my younger brother Momo the hajji, and I were born to the same mother and father, yet we are completely different.” The listeners were amused. One wise man joked, “Only your mother would know the truth of that.” Jooshbay answered, “My mother always said we were born of the same father.”

Jooshbay’s Satire of Status and Piety Jooshbay continued, “My elder brother rides one fine pacing horse in the morning and another in the afternoon. My younger brother, Hajji Momo, wraps a white turban around his head in the morning and a blue one in the afternoon. Before noon, he strokes his beard one hundred and forty-five times, and after noon, nine hundred and ninety times. When I ask why he counts so carefully, he tells me, ‘You are insulting one of God’s pure servants and burdening yourself with sin.’ As for me, unlike them, I do not ride a pacing horse every day or change my fur hats constantly; I manage

with the same hat." The crowd burst into laughter; some laughed aloud, others chuckled quietly, and some merely smiled.

Jooshbay Interprets Momo Hajji's Illness One day, Momo Hajji returned home with one of his *maasy* (soft leather overshoes) missing. His wife quickly prepared his bed and lit the fire in the hearth. Lying down, Momo Hajji repeatedly murmured, "Syr, syr" ("secret, secret"). Alarmed, his young son ran to fetch his witty uncle, Jooshbay. Upon arriving, Jooshbay quietly took Momo Hajji's pulse and remarked, "It seems that seven saints have appeared before Momo's eyes. When he regains his speech, he will tell us himself." He then suggested, "Tomorrow, let us invite the mullahs so that they may recite prayers and perform a healing blessing.

Mullahs' Arrival The next morning, people and mullahs began arriving at Momo Hajji's house to investigate what had happened. Following Jooshbay's instructions, the bedding, quilts, and floor coverings were taken out of the house and spread on the grass in the yard. The atmosphere became crowded and tense as more visitors gathered, waiting for explanations. The household was prepared for a formal visit, and attention turned toward Momo Hajji, whose condition and experience had already become the focus of everyone's discussion and curiosity.

Momo Hajji's Account During the night, Momo Hajji regained consciousness and later told his wife about a strange experience he had near his grandfather's grave. He said he heard voices speaking in both Arabic and Kyrgyz, mentioning his own name and that of his elder brother Bayserke. He also heard discussions about purity, lawful and unlawful actions, and felt that one of his *maasy* (overshoes) had been taken. He returned home without remembering the journey and only recalled waking up thirsty in the middle of the night.

Momo Hajji's "Opening of Eyes" A man came and said that Momo Hajji had "opened his eyes," meaning he had once again been regarded as a spiritually elevated and miraculous figure. Hearing this, he kissed the hem of Momo Hajji's robe, and others followed his example. The chief mullah said that this was a sign of God's favor toward Momo Hajji.

At that moment, Jooshbay said: "Last night, as I was returning and reached near the graveyard, I heard voices saying, 'You are a tyrant who oppresses people, not a hajji.' My ears were ringing, and I saw someone flee in fear, leaving behind a single *maasy* (leather overshoe). They said it was given to me," and he placed the single *maasy* in front of them

Jooshbay's Intervention As people began to interpret Momo Hajji's experience as a divine sign, Jooshbay interrupted the gathering. He said that while passing the cemetery at night, he heard a voice accusing a man who misled people and claimed false piety, and saw someone fleeing in panic, leaving behind a single overshoe. He then produced the missing *maasy* in front of the crowd. With this act, Jooshbay exposed the situation and challenged the crowd's readiness to accept the event as a miracle without question.

Jooshbay, Pasture Life, and God

Jooshbay and the Signs of Nature Jooshbay was known as someone who understood the secrets of nature well. He could predict weather changes and the character of the coming year. When he said, "This year will be rainy, and winter will come early," most people did not believe him, saying it was just Jooshbay's usual joking. He also warned that there would be heavy "yellow snow" and advised people not to migrate too early, but no one listened, since those who moved to the summer pastures earlier gained better grazing land for their livestock.

The Consequences of Ignoring His Advice Eventually, everyone migrated, and Jooshbay also moved from the winter settlement because he could not remain alone. He settled on a low plain. In the afternoon, the sky became overcast and heavy yellow snow began to fall. Both animals and people suffered from the cold; mares with their foals trembled, and sheep and goats froze. The next day the weather cleared, but many mares had died. People regretted not listening to Jooshbay. He, however, did not mock them, and those who lost their horses prepared and shared meat with the community.

Jooshbay's Defense and the Crowd's Laughter Jooshbay was once invited by a man and treated to a feast, where his relative also mocked him. They said, "If we had simply prayed to God, you offended Him by calling Him old, and now the harm of your words has struck our mares." Jooshbay replied, "My seven ancestors and my father all prayed to God, so are you saying God has not aged since then? If He has grown old, it is because you prayed to a different god, and your horses died. I prayed to the true God, and He protected my horses." Everyone laughed, and from that day on they said they would listen to Jooshbay's words.

Jooshbay in the Andijan Market

Highlanders Learn to Trade in Andijan Year after year, the highlanders gradually learned to drive livestock to the Andijan market for sale. Instead of hiring someone and giving away half the profit, they chose to take their animals and sell them themselves. Jooshbay also gathered livestock from others and set out with fifty animals. Some people were reluctant to let go of their animals, but they needed salt, bread, and clothing for their families. Without trade, they would fall behind others in everyday life.

Jooshbay Teaches Self-Reliance in Trade Although the Kyrgyz highlanders were accustomed to counting their livestock as wealth, they also desired silk shirts and cotton coats. Jooshbay encouraged them to take responsibility and personally drive their animals to market instead of relying on intermediaries. In this way, he taught them a more direct form of trade. As they prepared for the journey toward Andijan, he spoke to his companions like a senior mullah, offering advice and moral warnings about honesty in trade and daily life.

Jooshbay's Advice While traveling with his companions toward Andijan, Jooshbay continued giving advice. Some of those around him joked that he would even behave like a great mullah among the dishonest merchants in the market. Jooshbay replied that he would manage as he could, but added, "Do not encourage me toward what is unlawful." Andijan is a city in the Fergana Valley, in present-day Uzbekistan, historically known as an important commercial center linking mountain pastoral communities with urban trading networks. Someone said that in Andijan he could even stand against pickpockets, highlighting its reputation as a busy marketplace where many people and goods circulated.

Journey from the Kyrgyz Mountains to Andijan Many days passed before they could reach Andijan from the Kyrgyz high mountains, crossing difficult mountain passes along the way. Those who had long experience in selling livestock at the market were able to sell their animals easily, but the newly arrived highland Kyrgyz often struggled and became exhausted. Middlemen and brokers worked primarily for their own profit, taking advantage of the situation. For Jooshbay and his companions, who were bringing livestock for the first time, the livestock market felt like a confusing and overwhelming place, almost like a maze.

Struggles in the Andijan Market Some Kyrgyz people could not withstand the heat of Andijan and began to regret, thinking they should have sold their livestock back in their own villages. The Andijan market felt completely different from what they were used to, and Jooshbay and his companions were constantly thinking about how they could sell their animals more quickly and leave. When they tried to sell their white livestock at a fair price, they became angry at low offers. Jooshbay had already observed in the Karakol market how middlemen and brokers made profit between buyers and sellers.

Jooshbay's Selling Talent Jooshbay told his companions, "Do something and sell our livestock so we can escape this noise." They replied, "If so, then listen to me without interruption." The highland Kyrgyz agreed, saying they would obey him. Jooshbay prayed, "May God, who has grown old, help me," and then stepped into the market. With a loud voice he began calling out, "We Kyrgyz have brought livestock from Ysyk-Kol region! Our animals are fat, fed on clean mountain pasture grass!" His shouting immediately attracted the attention of people in the busy market.

Jooshbay Rejects Secret Bargaining When a broker approached and stretched out his hand, Jooshbay secretly clenched his fist inside his sleeve, causing the man to hesitate and withdraw, asking what that gesture meant. Jooshbay declared, "We will trade openly; we do not bargain in secret sleeves." When asked about the price, he stated it clearly, adding that the money meant for the broker would remain in

their own pockets instead. After this, buyers began to arrive, saying, "Let us see your livestock, your sheep.

Jooshbay's Persuasive Market Speech Jooshbay said, "I cannot lower the price of my animals that have grazed on the grasses of Ysyk-Kol pastures." He began listing different types of mountain grasses, proving that the livestock had grown fat on pure pasture. At times he puckered his lips, at times he widened his eyes, making the crowd laugh while persuading buyers. By noon, he had already sold all the sheep. Next came the horses, which were to be sold at another market. People were astonished and said, "This Jooshbay is truly an extraordinary man."

Jooshbay's Horse Trade and Reputation Fifteen horses were also sold. Jooshbay praised their animals, saying they were like the foal of Manas's horse, and spoke highly of them, claiming they had never been unsold in any market before. When he insisted on 41 som without lowering the price, the broker offered 30 som, but Jooshbay repeated 41 som. When the broker raised it to 31 som, Jooshbay still said 41 som. When asked, "Do you only say 41 som?" he replied, "Why wouldn't I say it—45 som!" The crowd burst into laughter, and locals were surprised that such a livestock trader could exist among the Kyrgyz. Jooshbay felt proud that his actions were being spoken of everywhere.

Jooshbay's Final Years

Jooshbay in Old Age and His Last Illness Jooshbay lived a celebrated life among the people. His sharp and witty words remained in everyone's memory, and he was respected throughout his life. In his old age, Jooshbay became ill, while his wife Erke continued to receive and see off visitors. Even while sick, he continued to make people laugh. Those who knew he was ill came to visit and ask about his condition. As his strength weakened, people gathered around him, offering prayers and expressing gratitude for his life.

Jooshbay's Final Words and Legacy In his final moments, Jooshbay spoke with humor and said he was on his way to the next world, where there is both paradise and hell. He joked that if he accidentally ended up in hell and did not like it, he might return. He also told people not to follow him in crowds to see paradise, but instead to respectfully accompany the elderly from time to time. Those present said that even in death, his humor did not leave him. Thus, Jooshbay passed away, and his words remained as a lasting heritage among the people, passed down from generation to generation.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Jooshbay

Jooshbay is the vibrant protagonist of the 1981 novella, representing the peak of Kyrgyz folk satire. As a legendary folk comedian, he is more than a mere entertainer; he is a social critic whose wit serves as a weapon against hypocrisy.

Operating within the nomadic traditions of the Kyrgyz people, Jooshbay navigates a world of rigid hierarchies and religious formalities. His character embodies the "voice of the people," using laughter to dismantle the arrogance of the elite. Through his sharp tongue and clever tricks, he transforms the daily struggles of highland life into a theater of justice, resilience, and humanity.

Satirical Jooshbay is a fearless critic of social and religious hypocrisy. He targets those who use status to benefit themselves, such as his elder brother Bayserke or the mullah Nurmoldo. By mocking the "showy" piety of his brother Momo Hajji or the greed of zakat collectors, Jooshbay highlights the gap between religious appearance and true morality. His satire is not meant to destroy but to reform, forcing society to look at its own flaws through the lens of absurdity. He serves as a mirror, showing the elite that their power is hollow without genuine honesty and compassion for others.

Performative A defining trait of Jooshbay is his extraordinary talent for mimicry and physical performance. He is a master of "character acting," capable of imitating the cry of a camel calf to trick his father or using exaggerated facial expressions to charm buyers at the Andijan market. This physical come-

dy is essential to his identity as a comedian, allowing him to manipulate situations to his advantage. Whether narrowing his eyes to test a bride's sisters-in-law or disrupting a prayer with jingling belt buckles, his performative skill turns every interaction into a staged spectacle that demands the community's attention and shared laughter.

Altruistic Beneath his mischievous exterior, Jooshbay possesses a deep sense of justice and compassion for the poor. He often uses his wit to provide for others, such as when he tricks his father into slaughtering a colt to feed hungry village workers. He feels deep sympathy for families pressured by religious taxes and uses his humor to shame the greedy into returning what they took. His comedy is rarely selfish; it is almost always aimed at correcting a wrong or easing the burden of his neighbors. This selflessness makes him a hero of the common people rather than just a jester.

Resilient Jooshbay is deeply rooted in Kyrgyz traditions, possessing a wisdom that rivals the elders he mocks. He is a skilled performer of the *Manas* epic and has an intimate understanding of nature, correctly predicting weather patterns when others fail. His humor is not a distraction from reality but a profound way of engaging with it. Even on his deathbed, he uses wit to face the ultimate unknown, joking about returning from hell if it is uncomfortable. This strength proves that for Jooshbay, laughter is a sacred, enduring philosophy that defines the strength and cultural identity of his resilient people.

Parallels: Satirical Legacies: Comparing Jooshbay and Nasreddin Hodja

Jooshbay and Nasreddin Hodja represent two of the most celebrated satirical figures in Turkic and Central Asian folk literature, yet they are separated by seven centuries and distinct cultural landscapes.

Nasreddin Hodja, known in Central Asia as Apendi, traditionally lived during the 13th-century Seljuk period in Anatolia, while Jooshbay is a 19th-century figure emerging from the nomadic Kyrgyz society of the Issyk-Kul region.

Despite this significant temporal gap, both characters share a universal mission: using humor and wit as tools to expose social hypocrisy, challenge authority, and defend the dignity of ordinary people.

The most striking difference between the two figures lies in their social positions and satirical methods. Nasreddin Hodja occupies an ambiguous social role, sometimes portrayed as a judge, mullah, or teacher, which grants him access to elite circles. His humor is primarily verbal and philosophical, relying on paradoxical logic and clever wordplay to outsmart kings, scholars, and greedy merchants in a settled, urbanizing society.

His famous story of the pot that gave birth exemplifies this approach, using the opponent's own logic to expose their greed.

In contrast, Jooshbay operates as a clear outsider to the elite, functioning as a comedian whose satire is deeply rooted in physical mimicry, vocal imitation, and theatrical performance. His imitation of a mourning camel or his disruption of Friday prayers demonstrate a more embodied and performative comedic style.

Their cultural contexts also differ significantly. Nasreddin's stories reflect the cosmopolitan environment of medieval Anatolia, where Islamic scholarship, urban markets, and multicultural interactions shaped his humor.

Jooshbay's world, however, is defined by the vast pastures, tribal politics, and oral traditions of the Kyrgyz highlands. His satire targets the specific tensions of nomadic life, such as the conflict between traditional customs and Islamic formality, or the exploitation of highland communities by urban merchants.

While Nasreddin challenges the mind with philosophical arguments, Jooshbay challenges injustice through the living tradition of the *Manas* epic and the raw energy of folk performance.

Together, they embody the enduring power of laughter as a universal language of resistance and truth.

Bayserke

Bayserke is the elder brother of Jooshbay and the respected headman of their village, serving as the primary representative of social authority and traditional hierarchy in the novella.

While Jooshbay embodies the chaotic and liberating force of satire, Bayserke represents the serious, structured world of adulthood and governance.

His role is often that of the straight man, whose attempts to maintain order and dignity are constantly undermined by Jooshbay's unpredictable pranks. Through Bayserke, the narrative explores the burdens of status and the frustration of an authority figure who cannot control the sharp tongue of a jester.

Authoritative As the village headman, Bayserke is deeply invested in his role as a leader and a guardian of community standards. He expects obedience not only from the villagers but especially from his younger brother. His authority is tied to the nomadic customs where elder brothers and fathers hold absolute power over the household. When Jooshbay disrupts this order, Bayserke often resorts to formal discipline or physical punishment to reassert his control. However, his authority is frequently revealed to be fragile, as it relies on a dignity that Jooshbay's laughter easily pierces, making him a sympathetic yet rigid figure.

Status-conscious Bayserke is profoundly concerned with his public image and reputation among the tribal elite and religious leaders. Much of his anger toward Jooshbay stems from the shame he feels when his brother behaves foolishly in front of honored guests or council elders.

Whether he is hosting noble leaders at his yurt or attending a regional meeting, Bayserke's primary goal is to appear as a successful and dignified man. Jooshbay's pranks, such as the false death news or the well-prepared horses, are direct attacks on this status, exposing the absurdity of prioritizing social appearance over genuine human connection or honesty.

Conventional Bayserke operates entirely within the boundaries of tradition, religious ritual, and established social norms. He is the one who insists on proper Friday prayers, formal hospitality, and the respect due to mullahs like Nurmoldo.

Unlike Jooshbay, who questions the meaning behind rituals, Bayserke follows them because they are the foundation of his society. He views Jooshbay's unconventional behavior as a threat to the stability of the village. His conventional nature makes him the perfect target for satire, as he represents the rigid, unyielding structures that folk humor seeks to soften and humanize through laughter.

THEMES

Humor: Satire as a Subversive Power

In the novella, satire is presented not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a subversive and transformative power capable of challenging the rigid structures of 19th-century Kyrgyz nomadic society. Through the character of Jooshbay, the comedian, the narrative demonstrates that wit and laughter are potent tools of resistance that can dismantle the arrogance of the elite, expose hypocrisy, and speak truth to power where formal dialogue often fails.

The primary function of satire in the story is to level social hierarchies. Figures of authority, such as Jooshbay's elder brother Bayserke, rely heavily on public dignity, status, and the strict adherence to tradition to maintain their power. Jooshbay's humor—ranging from elaborate pranks to sharp verbal critiques—acts as a "moral leveler" by stripping away this self-importance.

By making a village headman or a noble leader look ridiculous, satire proves that no individual is beyond reproach. It creates a space where the "little man" can humiliate the powerful, proving that intellectual agility and a sharp tongue are often more influential than political or familial rank.

Furthermore, satire serves as a weapon against institutional hypocrisy, particularly within religious and social rituals. Whether Jooshbay is mocking the performative piety of Momo Hajji or disrupting the formal rigidity of a Friday prayer, his satire forces the community to confront the gap between outward appearance and inner sincerity. In this sense, satire acts as a social corrective; it uses irony to demand accountability and moral honesty.

Ultimately, the power of satire is its ability to protect the vulnerable. Jooshbay uses his wit to secure food for laborers and protect highland traders from exploitation. In a society defined by tradition and hierarchy, satire becomes the ultimate form of freedom—a sacred tool that preserves human dignity and ensures that justice can be served through the liberating force of laughter.

Illustrative moment: When a group of high-status guests arrives at Bayserke's house, they are excited to meet Jooshtbay and listen to his famous, witty stories. However, Bayserke is obsessed with his own dignity. He dismisses Jooshtbay's talent as mere nonsense and tries to hide his brother away by ordering him to help in the kitchen, acting as if Jooshtbay is nothing more than a common servant.

This attempt to silence him backfires completely. Jooshtbay decides to use this moment to show that satire is his true power. When Bayserke tells him to "take care" of the guests' horses for the night, Jooshtbay takes the command with a dark, literal twist and slaughters all of them. By doing this, he completely destroys the dignified image Bayserke was trying to project.

Past: The Tension Between Lost History and Lived Tradition

The author reflects on a profound historical turning point: the transition from the ancient Kyrgyz runic script (bitik) and Tengrism roots to the introduction of Islam and the Arabic script. This shift represents a significant moment in history; while it brought a meaningful new faith and spiritual direction, it also caused the gradual loss of an independent writing system and left much of the early Kyrgyz identity unrecorded.

In the novella, this historical gap is reflected in the way Jooshtbay navigates the religious landscape of the 19th-century highlands. He exists in a world where the formal, urban structures of Islamic civilization—such as mosques, minarets, and madrasas—are physically absent, replaced by the open sky and the rich oral traditions of the nomadic people.

Jooshtbay does not oppose Islam itself; rather, he questions the way certain individuals attempt to impose rigid, urban religious formalities on a nomadic society that lacks the infrastructure for them. A clear example occurs during the discussions about Friday prayer. Jooshtbay sincerely asks where the community will gather, noting that they have no mosque or proper building on the pastures. His question is not disrespectful toward the faith but rather highlights the practical gap between the realities of highland life and the expectations of those who learned their religion in settled communities.

By questioning figures like Nurmoldo, Jooshtbay does not reject their faith but challenges their failure to adapt religious practice to the lived experience of his people. His satire becomes a bridge between the lost history of his ancestors and the present reality.

He proves that even without an independent script or stone buildings, the spirit of the people remains alive through sincerity, humor, and honest intention. Ultimately, this theme suggests that while much of history may have been lost or forgotten, the true character of a nation survives in its authentic traditions, its oral heritage, and its deep, personal connection to faith and identity.

Illustrative moment: Jooshtbay describes to his brother Bayserke how their grandmother used to pray. He calls it "her own prayer" and explains that she would go to a quiet place, speak to God in simple Kyrgyz words that came from her heart, and only at the very end would she say "*la ilaha illallah*," the one Arabic phrase she knew and held sacred. Jooshtbay suggests that he could do the same: take ablution, go to K  k-D  b   hill, and pray in this familiar, personal way.

This moment clearly reflects the tension between lost history and lived tradition. Because there were no schools or madrasas in the nomadic highlands, most people never received formal religious education. They did not know the proper Arabic pronunciation of Islamic prayers or the correct sequence of ritual movements. Instead, they learned their faith orally from their elders, receiving fragments of Arabic mixed with Kyrgyz expressions that had been passed down through generations without correction or formal guidance. Their grandmother's prayer was not a rejection of Islam but a sincere adaptation born out of necessity and isolation.

Religion: Hypocrisy vs. Sincere Faith

In the novella, the tension between religious hypocrisy and sincere faith is explored through Jooshtbay's satirical gaze. The narrative provides a sharp critique of "showy" religious performance, suggesting that when faith is reduced to outward display, it loses its ethical core. This is most clearly seen in characters like Momo Hajji, whose obsessive bead-counting serves as a theatrical mask of holiness, and the mullah Nurmoldo, whose rigid focus on formal rules often overshadows the actual spirit of compassion.

Jooshbay's interventions—such as his disruption of formal prayers or his mocking of expensive turbans—are not acts of irreverence toward the divine. Instead, they are deliberate attempts to strip away the vanity that often clings to religious authority. For Jooshbay, rituals become empty gestures when they are used to establish social superiority or to facilitate the exploitation of others. A poignant example is his confrontation with the zakat collectors, where he uses satire to expose how religious duty can be twisted into a tool of greed that harms the most vulnerable members of the community.

Contrasting this performative religiosity is the concept of sincere faith, which the novella roots in honesty and human connection. This "quiet" faith is exemplified by Jooshbay's grandmother, whose prayers were recited in her own language with simple, heartfelt words. The novella suggests that true spirituality does not require grand architectural minarets or perfectly recited Arabic; rather, it thrives in the heart through deeds of mercy and a refusal to judge. Ultimately, the theme emphasizes that the value of one's faith is measured by its humanity.

Illustrative moment: After returning from the cemetery without one of his overshoes (maasy), Momo Hajji pretends to be in a trance, murmuring about "secrets" and divine voices. His performance successfully convinces the village mullahs and his family that he has experienced a supernatural encounter with saints, further elevating his status as a holy man.

However, Jooshbay had actually been at the cemetery and witnessed the truth: his brother had been behaving with false piety and had fled in a state of unholy panic. Jooshbay had intentionally taken the missing overshoe that his brother left behind as physical evidence of this deception. When the community gathers in a state of religious awe to hear Momo Hajji's account of the "divine sign," Jooshbay interrupts the theatricality of the moment. He mockingly interprets the event as a visitation of "seven saints" before suddenly producing the hidden overshoe in front of the entire crowd.

Nonconformist / Outsider: Family Disgrace and the "Black Sheep"

In the novella, the character of Jooshbay embodies the theme of the "Black Sheep" within a family that is deeply invested in social standing and tribal prestige.

Jooshbay's elder brother, Bayserke, is the village headman, and his younger brother, Momo Hajji, is a self-proclaimed saint. In a society where the concept of *uyat* (shame) is a primary social regulator, Jooshbay's career as a satirist is viewed by his siblings as a continuous family disgrace. While his brothers strive to build walls of dignity and religious piety around the family name, Jooshbay's laughter acts as a force that constantly tears those walls down.

The tension in the family arises from the clash between conformity and authenticity. For Bayserke, the "disgrace" of having a younger brother who acts like a jester is a direct threat to his political authority. To the family, Jooshbay is an unpredictable outsider who refuses to play the role of the "respectable relative."

However, from an academic perspective, Jooshbay's role as the "Black Sheep" is actually a moral necessity. By being the one who is different, he is the only one capable of exposing the vanity and hypocrisy that his brothers hide behind. His "disgraceful" behavior is a subversive response to the suffocating pressure of maintaining a perfect public image.

The narrative humanizes this struggle by showing the physical and emotional cost of being the family outsider. Jooshbay is often punished, beaten, or ignored, yet he remains committed to his wit. This theme suggests that the "Black Sheep" is often the most honest member of a group; his refusal to conform is not an act of malice, but a courageous commitment to truth in a world that values appearance over reality.

Illustrative moment: A poignant illustrative moment occurs after Jooshbay's "False Death" prank, where he led his brother and his brother's wife to believe the other had died, resulting in a village-wide mourning ceremony for living people. When the truth is revealed and the chaos settles, Bayserke is humiliated and furious, demanding that Jooshbay be brought before him for punishment.

Bayserke, trembling with rage at the "shame" Jooshbay has brought upon the family, asks how he could behave so disgracefully. Jooshbay's response perfectly captures the tragedy and wit of the "Black Sheep": "Brother, if I make you laugh, you are not pleased; if I make you cry, you are still not pleased. So how can I ever please you?"

This moment highlights the impossible position of the family outsider. Jooshbay recognizes that in a family obsessed with rigid dignity, there is no room for his talent or his truth. Bayserke views Jooshbay's humor as a stain on their lineage, while Jooshbay views his brothers' rigidity as a cage for the spirit.

Social Justice and Altruism

In the novella, Jooshbay's satirical career is driven by a profound commitment to social justice and a selfless concern for the welfare of others. While he is often dismissed as a jester, his actions reveal a sophisticated form of "folk advocacy" in a society where the poor and vulnerable often lack a voice. The narrative suggests that in a landscape defined by rigid tribal hierarchies and economic disparity, humor can function as an altruistic tool to correct social imbalances and redistribute resources to those in need.

Jooshbay's altruism is most visible when he intervenes in situations of exploitation. He possesses an instinctive empathy for the "little people"—the laborers, the shepherds, and the struggling families—who are often overlooked by the tribal elite. For Jooshbay, satire is the only "soft power" available to challenge the greed of authorities without resorting to violence. His comedy is rarely for personal gain; instead, he frequently risks his own safety and reputation to ensure that the community is treated with dignity.

From an academic perspective, Jooshbay acts as a social regulator. He operates within a "moral economy," where he believes that wealth and food should be shared rather than hoarded. His altruism is not passive; it is an active, often risky pursuit of equity. Through Jooshbay, the text humanizes the struggle for justice, showing that a single individual with a sharp wit can become a champion for the common good. Ultimately, the theme emphasizes that true greatness is found in the courage to use one's talents to protect the weak and to demand a more compassionate world through the liberating force of laughter.

Illustrative moment: Jooshbay observes the mullahs and wealthy men collecting *fitr zakat* (religious alms) from the village. He watches as they drive away a herd of lambs and sheep taken from families who are clearly struggling, some of whom have hungry children. While the community watches in silent submission, Jooshbay feels a "deep sympathy" and decides to act.

He creates a chaotic and absurd scene by chasing a stray dog with a rope, shouting at it for being "ashamed." When the collectors stop to ask what he is doing, Jooshbay turns his satire directly toward them. He tells the dog it has no reason to be embarrassed about eating when "rulers, nobles, and mullahs feel no shame in taking zakat from the poor and helpless." The comparison is so sharp and the public humiliation so undeniable that the chief mullah is forced to abandon the collection. He announces that the livestock will be returned to their original owners to avoid further disgrace.

Oral literature: Spiritual Architecture and the "Live Theater" of the Steppe

The history of the Kyrgyz people is defined not by the construction of stone cities or permanent architectural masterpieces, but by a profound spiritual architecture built from "great words."

In a nomadic society, where life was defined by mobility and the vastness of the open pasture, the cultural legacy was preserved in the oral tradition rather than in brick and mortar. While settled civilizations left behind monuments, the Kyrgyz left behind the *Manas* epic and the sharp, living wisdom of the folk comedian. In this context, the novella presents Jooshbay not merely as a joker, but as a one-man mobile theater—a performer who provided the community with the drama, satire, and character acting that other cultures found in formal theaters and cinemas.

Jooshbay's art as a *kuudul comedian* represents a unique "live theater" that turned any yurt or hillside into a stage. Without the need for curtains or scripts, he used his body, his voice, and his surroundings to create "real acting scenes" that reflected the community's struggles and joys.

This performative legacy suggests that the nomadic spirit did not lack art; rather, it integrated art into the very fabric of daily existence. Jooshbay's talent for mimicry and his ability to transform into different characters served as the nomadic equivalent of cinema—a way to visualize truths and stories through the power of human expression.

Ultimately, this theme celebrates the idea that the greatest monuments are those made of language and performance, which remain alive as long as they are told and retold across generations.

Illustrative moment: Jooshbay's "live theater" occurs during the Andijan Market scene. In this bustling, chaotic environment—a place far removed from the quiet mountains—Jooshbay finds himself on a massive public stage. To protect his fellow highlanders from being cheated by dishonest brokers, he begins a sophisticated theatrical performance. He does not just sell livestock; he "performs" the sale. With the crowd watching, Jooshbay uses his entire range of acting talents. He puckers his lips, widens his eyes with exaggerated expressions, and shifts his voice to capture everyone's attention. He begins a rhythmic, persuasive speech about the mountain grasses of Issyk-Kul, turning the simple act of trading into a captivating drama. When a broker tries to bargain in secret, Jooshbay uses physical comedy: clinching his fist inside his sleeve to mock the man's greed, making the entire market laugh and turning the crowd in his favor.