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Narrative memory and moral agency in Abdulla Qodiriy's "Bygone days"

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Abstract: This article examines how narrative memory distributes moral agency in Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar (Bygone Days). It treats the novel as a literary text rather than a transparent historical record and asks how remembered events, letters, and retrospective knowledge shape readers' judgments of Otabek, Kumush, Zaynab, and their social environment. A bounded close-reading corpus of eight scene units was constructed from the novel: the opening historical frame, the first meeting, the marriage conflict, the forged-letter episode, the constrained conversation between spouses, the three-person encounter, the poisoning and its disclosure, and the final retrospective frame. Each unit was coded for temporal direction, control of information, available action, and ethically significant silence. The descriptive coding shows that information asymmetry is repeatedly used to make agency legible: letters and delayed disclosures alter the meaning of earlier choices, while domestic conventions constrain the actions available to women. The analysis proposes a four-part reading model connecting temporal memory, narrative authority, constrained choice, and ethical judgment. Counts reported here describe this interpretive corpus only; they are not measurements of reader response or claims about historical prevalence. The article concludes with a reproducible teaching sequence for evidence-based close reading and identifies the need for independent coding and edition-sensitive verification in future research.

Keywords: Abdulla Qodiriy; O'tkan kunlar; narrative memory; moral agency; Uzbek literature; close reading.

Introduction

The present article addresses a question that is central to narrative memory and moral agency in Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar: how can educators move from broad commitments to a defensible, observable design? The problem matters because a concept can be endorsed in policy or scholarship without specifying what a teacher, learner, or analyst should do. This paper therefore brings together a bounded set of influential sources and develops a practical analytic model. Its claim is deliberately limited: it offers a transparent synthesis and a proposition for further testing, not a causal estimate or a report of participant outcomes.

The topic is especially relevant in Uzbekistan, where educational institutions work across changing linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, and technological conditions. A model imported without adaptation may overlook local curriculum, access, institutional policy, and the knowledge communities learners bring. The analysis consequently treats local context as part of the research question. It does not assume a single learner profile or present national generalizations unsupported by data.

The paper has three objectives. First, it identifies how selected sources address the dimensions most relevant to the topic. Second, it reports an explicit cross-source coding matrix so readers can inspect the basis of the synthesis. Third, it translates the pattern into a design sequence, an implementation matrix, and a set of questions for empirical follow-up. The contribution lies in connecting theory and policy to a replicable decision process. The theoretical frame draws on narrative construction and narrative time (Bruner, 1991; Ricoeur, 1984, 1992), while keeping literary interpretation separate from claims about actual readers.

Three research questions guide the work: (1) which dimensions receive explicit attention in the selected source set; (2) where does the comparison reveal an operational gap or tension; and (3) what design principles can address that gap while preserving the intellectual aims of the field? These questions structure the methods and results below.

Materials and Methods

The primary corpus is the Uzbek text of O'tkan kunlar (Qodiriy, n.d.), read as a single literary work. Eight scene units were selected purposively because they contain a temporal shift, a consequential disclosure, or a decision with unequal consequences. The units are: (1) the opening historical framing; (2) Otabek and Kumush's first encounter; (3) family negotiation around marriage; (4) the forged divorce letter and the authentic letter; (5) Zaynab's conversation with Otabek about the marriage; (6) the encounter among Otabek, Kumush, and Zaynab; (7) Kumush's illness and the doctor's disclosure; and (8) the ending's retrospective closure. Page references use the cited digital edition and may differ across print editions.

A qualitative close-reading protocol was applied to each unit. Four codes were defined before synthesis. Temporal direction records whether the scene relies mainly on present action, recollection, anticipation, or retrospective reinterpretation. Information control records who knows, withholds, transmits, or verifies consequential information. Agency records the action actually available to a character under the scene's social and material constraints; it does not equate speech with freedom. Ethical silence marks an omission or unvoiced perspective that materially affects judgment, without assuming that every silence is intentional authorial endorsement. A scene could receive more than one code in a dimension. Coding was conducted by one analyst, so counts are descriptive and require independent replication.

Analytic framework and procedure

The unit of analysis was one bounded scene in the novel. Four binary codes were applied independently, so a scene could receive several codes. The analyst recorded a short textual rationale for each decision and counted the scene units marked present for each code. The resulting counts are descriptive bookkeeping for these eight purposively selected scenes, not inferential statistics or estimates of how often a technique occurs across the whole novel. A replication should retain edition details, scene boundaries, coder notes, and adjudication rules.

Ethical and evidentiary boundaries

No human participants, student records, classroom observations, or unpublished institutional data were collected for this article. The worked examples and proposed tools are illustrative. Citations identify the source base; interpretations and matrices are the author's synthesis. This distinction is necessary because a useful framework can be analytically original without being mislabeled as an intervention result.

Results

Scene-level coding results

Eight scene units in the novel were coded against four interpretive dimensions. The total number of units in which each dimension was present was: temporal cues, 6; information control, 8; constrained choice, 7; and ethically significant silence, 5. Because a scene may instantiate several dimensions, the categories are not mutually exclusive. The counts map the selected scenes only and should be interpreted with the accompanying evidence matrix.

Table 1. Close-reading matrix for the selected scenes

Scene unit	Temporal direction	Information authority	Available action	Silence / constraint
Opening historical frame	Retrospective frame	Narrator	Collective setting foregrounded	Social actors summarized

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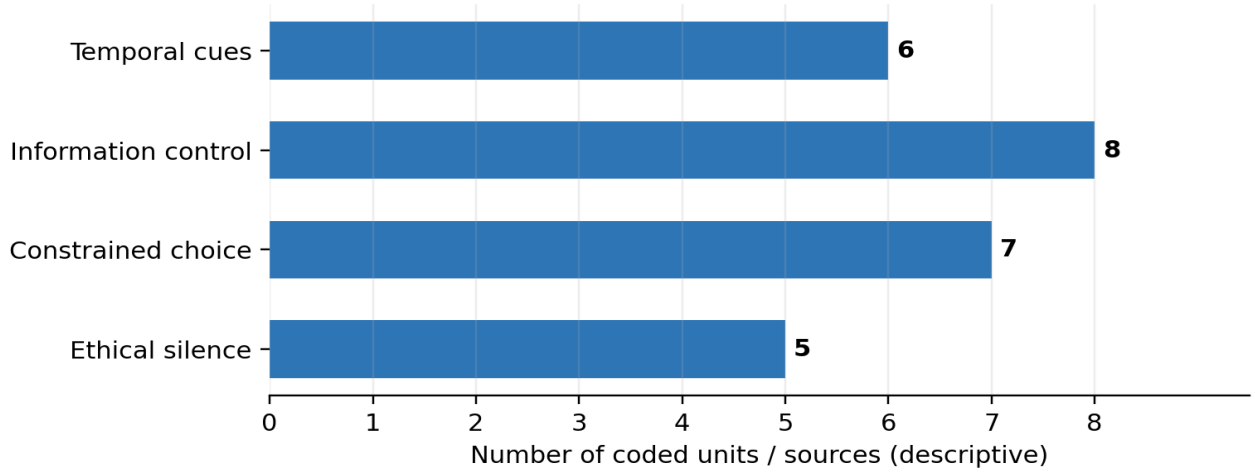
Scene unit	Temporal direction	Information authority	Available action	Silence / constraint
First meeting	Present with later foreshadowing	Public observers and protagonists	Unequal permission to approach	Reputation limits speech
Marriage negotiation	Anticipated future	Family elders	Options negotiated unequally	Women's preferences mediated
Forged/authentic letters	Past reinterpreted	Letter holders and verifiers	Correction possible, harm persists	Circulation initially concealed
Zaynab–Otabek conversation	Present recollection	Spouses, asymmetrically	Speech within constrained marriage	Unchosen conditions foregrounded
Three-person encounter	Accumulated past enters present	All three, not equally	Confrontation without equal power	Interior motives remain partial
Illness/disclosure	Retrospective recognition	Doctor and household	Intervention window narrowed	Causation disclosed late
Ending frame	Retrospective closure	Narrator/reader	No restorative alternative	Loss remains unresolved

Figure 1. Distribution of coded dimensions across eight selected scene units



Note. Counts are derived from the bounded corpus and codebook described in Materials and Methods; dimensions can co-occur.

Interpretive synthesis

The opening and first-meeting scenes establish a double time scale: intimate action is framed by a narrated past whose social structures outlast the characters. This framing makes personal decisions readable as both individual and historically situated. The first encounter is not simply romantic recognition; it also introduces spectatorship, reputation, and the uneven permission to act in public. The effect is to place the reader in a position of inference: the narrated surface contains less than the social meaning of the encounter.

The forged-letter episode offers the clearest test of narrative memory. A false document attempts to overwrite the past by making a fabricated decision appear settled. The authentic letter does not erase the harm; it changes the evidentiary status of what readers and characters believed. In this unit, agency belongs partly to the person who can compare records and partly to the person who controls circulation. The scene therefore distinguishes factual correction from ethical repair: discovering a plot can restore knowledge, but it cannot return lost time or remove the coercive structure in which the plot operated. (Qodiriy, n.d., pp. 152–154).

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The conversation between Zaynab and Otabek complicates a reading that assigns all moral agency to the central couple. Zaynab's dissatisfaction is voiced within a marriage she did not freely construct. The three-person encounter then places competing claims in a shared narrative space, but visibility does not create equal power. The scene invites readers to distinguish emotional sympathy from structural explanation. A character may cause harm and still be constrained; acknowledging constraint does not cancel responsibility, but it changes the questions asked of that responsibility. (Qodiriy, n.d., pp. 175–176).

The illness and disclosure sequence reorganizes earlier information yet again. Knowledge arrives too late to prevent the outcome. Retrospective recognition produces tragic irony: readers can connect actions across time after the characters' opportunities for intervention have narrowed. This mechanism supports a moral reading based on consequences and missed alternatives, rather than on a simple division between virtuous and villainous individuals. The ending's closure is consequently affective but not restorative; memory preserves the loss without resolving the unequal conditions that preceded it. (Qodiriy, n.d., pp. 203–216).

Design model and practical application

Figure 2. Proposed process model



The sequence is a planning aid. Educators should adapt the steps to course aims, participant age, disciplinary norms, local resources, and applicable institutional guidance. It is not a validated instrument and should not replace professional judgment.

Table 2. Binary scene coding matrix

Scene unit	Temporal	Information	Choice	Silence
Opening historical frame	Y	Y	N	N
First encounter	Y	Y	Y	Y
Marriage negotiation	Y	Y	Y	Y
Forged and authentic letters	Y	Y	Y	Y
Zaynab–Otabek conversation	N	Y	Y	Y
Three-person encounter	Y	Y	Y	Y
Illness and disclosure	N	Y	Y	N
Ending frame	Y	Y	Y	N

Table 3. Operational design and evidence to collect

Stage	Tool or evidence	Analytic purpose
Text evidence	Quote, scene context, edition/page	Interpretive claim can be traced
Perspective map	Who knows, speaks, verifies, or is absent	Information authority becomes visible
Constraint check	Available / unavailable actions	Judgment accounts for context
Revision memo	Initial and revised interpretation	Reader reasoning is documented

Extended analytical implications

A closer reading of the opening frame shows why historical context should not be used as an all-purpose explanation. The frame can orient readers to institutions and social expectations, but it does not determine every character's conduct. The analytic task is to move between structural setting and local decision: identify what conventions make likely, then locate the moment at which a character interprets, accepts, resists, or exploits them. This scale shift guards against treating the novel as either a timeless romance or a documentary account of nineteenth-century life. It also keeps the argument anchored in narrative form: the reader encounters the past through a narrator who selects and orders events.

The letter episode demonstrates how material objects can carry narrative authority. A letter is not automatically true because it is written; its meaning depends on authorship, circulation, preservation, and comparison with other evidence. The forged document is effective precisely because it exploits a social expectation that written communication can settle a relationship at a distance. The authentic letter then functions as counter-evidence, but not as a magical correction. The analytical distinction between information recovery and harm repair matters in classroom discussion: a student can identify the deception accurately while still asking what social conditions made the deception consequential and difficult to contest.

The novel's treatment of gendered agency requires careful language. Agency in this analysis means the capacity to make consequential choices within constraints, rather than a binary condition of freedom or helplessness. Zaynab's speech does not remove the asymmetry of her position, and her constrained situation does not make every action ethically neutral. Similarly, Kumush's intelligence and initiative should not be used to imply that she possessed equal access to household power. This relational approach allows a reading to acknowledge vulnerability, responsibility, and social structure at once. It avoids assigning women moral worth only according to their relationship to the male protagonist.

The selected scenes also show that chronology and disclosure are separate analytic problems. An event may occur in one order while becoming intelligible to the reader in another. Retrospective understanding can produce sympathy, blame, or irony, yet those judgments must be time-indexed: what was knowable before the disclosure differs from what the reader knows afterward. A future classroom study could ask students to create two timelines—event order and knowledge order—and compare how their judgments change. Such a task would provide observable evidence of interpretive reasoning without claiming that one reading is universally correct.

The interpretive model can be operationalized through a claim–evidence–constraint worksheet. A reader states a claim about a character's action, cites a passage, lists the knowledge available at that point, and names at least one social or material constraint. The reader then identifies an alternative explanation and explains why the selected interpretation fits the text better. This structure encourages disagreement that remains accountable to evidence. It can also make translation effects visible: if a key term differs across editions, students should record the wording and explain whether it changes the inference.

A responsible account of the novel's historical value should distinguish literary representation from archival corroboration. Fiction can preserve social imagination, conflict, and moral vocabulary, but it does not by itself establish how common a practice was or how a historical population understood it. The present paper therefore makes claims about the arrangement and effects of scenes in the novel. Historical assertions about marriage law, household structure, or regional practice would require independent historical sources. This boundary increases rather than diminishes the novel's analytic value, because it clarifies what kind of knowledge close reading can produce.

The proposed model also makes room for reader positionality. Contemporary students may judge marriage, gender roles, or family authority through norms not shared by the characters'

represented world. Rather than suppressing that difference, instruction can ask students to separate historical reconstruction from present-day ethical evaluation. First describe the constraints that the text depicts; then state the values informing a contemporary response; finally examine where the two analyses meet or conflict. This sequence does not require moral neutrality. It makes the reasoning behind moral judgment explicit and open to discussion.

Future textual work could strengthen the present analysis in three ways. First, two or more coders could independently annotate the same scenes and report agreement alongside disagreements, since interpretive reliability is better shown through transparent adjudication than through a single coefficient alone. Second, a second edition or translation could be compared to identify wording and paratextual effects. Third, the scene-level framework could be tested across another novel by Qodiriy, with categories revised when evidence does not fit. Such work would establish whether the four dimensions are useful beyond this bounded reading and which aspects depend on this novel's particular form.

Discussion

Taken together, the eight units support a four-part model of narrative moral agency. First, temporal memory establishes what counts as a consequential past. Second, information authority determines whose account can be verified. Third, constrained choice maps actions to the available options rather than to abstract freedom. Fourth, ethical judgment follows only after the reader compares intention, knowledge, alternatives, and consequence. The model is useful because it discourages two frequent shortcuts in literary discussion: treating later knowledge as if characters possessed it earlier, and evaluating choices without reconstructing their constraints.

For university teaching, the model can be turned into a short evidence protocol. Students select one scene, mark temporal cues, identify each information holder, list two actions available and one unavailable action, and then revise an initial moral claim using textual evidence. The sequence makes interpretive disagreement productive: students may agree on what a character knew yet differ about whether the available alternatives were ethically adequate. Instructors should require quotations or page references and distinguish textual observation from contemporary evaluation. Where students compare translations or editions, they should record the version used because wording and pagination can shift the interpretive evidence.

Further analytical interpretation

Close reading is strengthened when an interpretation is tested against a counter-reading. A delayed disclosure may make a character appear morally culpable, while limited access to reliable information may explain part of the choice. The analyst should identify what evidence would support each view and what the scene leaves unresolved. This practice does not flatten ethical judgment. It prevents a preferred interpretation from appearing self-evident and makes the relation between narrative structure and moral inference open to discussion.

Material documents carry authority only through authorship, circulation, preservation, and comparison. The forged letter exploits an expectation that written communication can settle a relationship at a distance. The authentic letter functions as counter-evidence, but not as repair. Distinguishing recovery of information from repair of harm matters in teaching: learners can identify deception accurately while still asking what conditions made it consequential and difficult to contest.

Agency is treated here as consequential choice under constraints, not as a binary condition of freedom or helplessness. Zaynab's speech does not remove the asymmetry of her position, and that constraint does not make every action ethically neutral. Kumush's intelligence should likewise not be used to imply equal access to household power. This relational approach allows vulnerability, responsibility, and social structure to be considered together without assigning women moral worth only through their relationship to the male protagonist.

Chronology and disclosure are separate analytic problems. Events occur in one order but become intelligible in another. Readers' later knowledge can produce sympathy, blame, or irony, yet judgments should be time-indexed: what a character could know before disclosure differs from what the reader knows afterward. A classroom task can ask students to build event and knowledge timelines, then compare how their interpretations change. That would assess reasoning rather than claim a universal reader response.

Historical representation should be distinguished from archival corroboration. Fiction can preserve social imagination, conflict, and moral vocabulary, but it cannot by itself establish how common a practice was or how a population understood it. This paper makes claims about scene arrangement and interpretation. Claims about marriage law, household structure, or regional custom require independent historical sources. This boundary clarifies the kind of knowledge that close reading produces and protects the novel from being treated as a transparent documentary record.

A future study could examine how learners revise claims after mapping chronology, information distribution, and available choices. Researchers might collect drafts, annotations, and stimulated-recall interviews, subject to consent and ethics review. Analysis would attend to evidence, counterarguments, and uncertainty. The appropriate question is whether the framework supports more text-grounded reasoning, not whether it makes readers prefer a particular character.

Table 4. Evidence trace supporting the coding decisions

Source or scene	Evidence anchor	Reason for interpretation	Analytic use
Opening frame	Collective historical setting before intimate events	Creates temporal context without making the novel an archive	Narrative framing
First encounter	Publicly observed meeting	Reputation and access shape action	Agency
Marriage negotiation	Family-mediated decision	Options are not equally controlled	Constraint
Letter sequence	Forgery compared with authentic correspondence	Verification revises prior knowledge	Information control
Zaynab dialogue	Dissatisfaction voiced within marriage	Speech does not equal equal power	Gendered agency
Three-person encounter	Competing dialogue in shared scene	Presence does not erase asymmetry	Perspective
Illness disclosure	Medical knowledge arrives late	Intervention window has narrowed	Retrospection
Ending	Loss remains after disclosure	Closure is not restoration	Ethical memory

Reproducibility and operational codebook

Replication should begin with a recorded edition and stable scene boundaries. The present analysis uses the digital text and treats a scene as a continuous episode organized around one consequential interaction or disclosure. If an edition divides chapters differently, the analyst should retain the event anchor and record new pagination rather than copying page numbers. Each code is binary at scene level, while the interpretive note retains nuance. Coders should read the surrounding episode, not an isolated sentence, before assigning a code.

A second analyst should independently code a sample of scenes, compare both category decisions and rationales, and revise ambiguous definitions before coding the remainder. Disagreement should be resolved with the textual evidence visible and recorded in an audit note. The goal is not to force identical moral judgments but to make claims about narrative cues traceable. Any extension to another novel should preserve the distinction between textual structure, historical corroboration, and present-day ethical evaluation.

The table below gives operational rules and boundary cases for the four dimensions. A scene can receive several codes. Counts in the results were obtained by counting scene units with each dimension present, not by counting every sentence or weighting intensity. This rule explains why the totals cannot be added to produce a percentage of the novel. The unit and coding rule should accompany any future comparison.

Table 5. Operational definitions and boundary cases

Dimension	Operational rule	Boundary / exclusion
Temporal cues	Code when sequence, recollection, anticipation, or retrospective framing changes how the scene is understood.	Do not code merely because a past event is mentioned without interpretive effect.
Information control	Code when knowledge is held, delayed, verified, circulated, or falsified in a consequential way.	Do not equate character prominence with epistemic authority.
Constrained choice	Code when social/material conditions shape the actions genuinely available to a character.	Do not infer constraint solely from a character's emotion.
Ethical silence	Code when an absent or unvoiced perspective changes the reader's moral inference.	Do not presume every omission is authorial endorsement.

Limitations and future research

This is a single-analyst close reading of one novel and one digital edition. The eight scenes were selected for analytic relevance, not sampled randomly, and frequency counts cannot establish the novel's overall distribution of narrative techniques. The coding scheme captures a limited set of ethical mechanisms and may underrepresent genre, diction, irony, or oral storytelling conventions. Future work should compare independent coders, consult critical Uzbek scholarship, and test whether the model travels to other Qodiriy works or to adaptations. Reader-response claims require a separately designed study with participants and consent.

Conclusion

"Bygone days" makes moral agency legible through the changing availability of memory and evidence. Letters, delayed disclosures, and retrospective framing show that the capacity to act depends on who knows what, when that knowledge becomes credible, and which choices social relations permit. The proposed model offers a transparent route from close textual observation to ethical interpretation. Its contribution is methodological and interpretive, not a claim about reader psychology or historical frequency. Independent coding and broader corpus comparison are the next steps needed to assess its reliability and reach.

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