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AN OLD MOOD RETURNS TO CENTRAL ASIAN LITERATURE^{*2}

A special lyric temper inspirits the writing of young poets who have recently made their debut upon the pages of the government press in Tashkent. Their emergence may evidence the beginning of an artistic resurrection in Central Asia's modern literary fortunes. Delicate, evocative poetry had been virtually outlawed there for decades. Emphasis upon it at this moment suggests both a departure and a return – departure from the proletarianism sponsored around the end of the 1920's and the socialist realism required in later years. The new mood likewise returns to the personal – passionate or melancholy – fantasy universally expressed in Central Asia for hundreds of years through melodic Iranian and Turkic-language verse. Some of this lyric poetry, in addition, sends back subtle echoes of traditional ghazals and rubais whose elegant structural formalities have fallen into disuse there in recent decades. In the new verse, a vocabulary encrusted by medieval writers with layers of meaning enriches contemporary language with charged words like *gulshan* (rose garden, flower bed – by extension, a delightful location, a pleasure palace) and *parishan* (distracted, perplexed, melancholy – often a lover's attribute, a mood). Good poetry in itself is generally more interesting than the details concerning its publishing, but in this particular case the printing may be equally arresting, for it signals the retreat of official censorship in the Soviet Union, which has heretofore discouraged this innovation in minority-language writings. The new literary phenomenon of the 1960's has seen Rauf Parfi, Miss Mukarrama Muradova and Miss Dilaram Tajiyeva of Uzbekistan, Miss Gulistan Shamuratova of Karakalpakstan, and others, bring some of their attractive poetry to public attention for the first time in the "thick" magazines. One of these young writers has been uncompromisingly introduced to connoisseurs among some seven million Central Asian readers (out of approximately thirteen million Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kirgiz, Tajiks, Turkmens, and Uzbeks in the USSR) as a promising lyricist.

"Rauf Parfi captures and delineates some particular situation in a person's intricate spiritual world in every verse. This is a difficult creative process, but this difficulty is not evident in Rauf's lines-it is as if they were smoothly effortless, flowing, natural, heart-felt. In these poems there is neither public declaration, exhortation, illustration, nor didactic bareness. They have been created from the world of the poet's taste."³ To anyone familiar with the bureaucratic tone prevalent in Central Asian literary criticism of former years, that analysis will be a revelation.

The following short Uzbek-language poem by Rauf suggests the extent of the renovation in literary feeling. Unlike the traditional four-line poems, which rhymed aaba or aaab, these quatrains present a pattern of alternating and sometimes irregularly interrupted rhyming common in Western prosody. Their iambic rhythm, too, ignores the Arabic *aruz* system or old Turkic syllabic metre in favor of accented feet. The author occasionally adorns his thought gently with antique conceits as he sets himself in imagination before the blue-green tiles of ancient Bukhara. Here, with frequent

¹ Olimning quyidagi maqolasi "The American Slavic and East European Review" jurnalining 1957-yil aprel sonidan olingan.

² By "Central Asia" is meant the huge area immediately north of eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Singkiang (China) called, in the USSR, "Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan."

³ Asqad Mukhtar, "Aq yoli!" Sharq yulduzi, No. 1 (1966), p. 137.

resort to personal pronouns and endings, he chooses to state his attachment, through links both historical and private, to a particular locality. Thus, he reinforces his identification, not with an abstract brotherhood of social class, but with an intimate, individual milieu. The poem is untitled:

*Bukun bir tush kordim.
Tushimda Bukharada yurgan emishman.
Yuksak minaralar bashimda,
Ayaqlarim astida gulshan.*

*Today I had a dream. In my dream
I seemed to stroll in Bukhara.
Tall minarets above my head,
Beneath my feet a rose garden.*

*Bukharada yurgan emishman,
Men-la birga yurarmish Quyash.
Erir emish, aqar parishan
Muz asridan aman qalغان tash.
Yuksak minaralar bashimda,
Menga hasad bilan baqarmish.
Asrlar bir damday qarshimda
Zangar alaw bolib aqarmish.⁴*

*I seemed to stroll in Bukhara,
Along with me strolled the Sun.
It seemed to melt, a flowing perplexity
An unhurt stone left by the ice age.

Tall minarets above my head
Seemed to gaze at me with envy.
The centuries momentarily before me
Seemed to flow like pale blue fire.*

These lines contrast noticeably with typical efforts from the “realism” of the previous Soviet era or the earlier proletarian epoch, both of which obliged writers to apotheosize tractors and factory noise while propagandizing the Party and the state, to the cost of literature as art. The opening stanza from the first chapter of Ziyad and Adiba (1959), roughly comparable in both theme and structure to the poem above, differs from it in other important respects. Most of all, the older work lacks the playful inventiveness, the deftly treated fugual quality and the overtones evoked by Rauf Parfi’s borrowing of selected archaisms. Instead, loanwords in the ensuing citation feature the Russian gudok (factory whistle) omnipresent in literature of the period:

*Tashkentim-yashil shahar
Ajralmas yapraqlardan.
Kelganu unga bahar,
Ketmay qalغان bag‘lardan.
Asman-zangari shisha,
Quyashdan nur quyuni.
Baghlarida hamisha
Erka qushlar oyini ...
Korpuslar tepasidan
Uchadi tangi saba.
Kuch tola yangrar birdan
Gudoklar sachgan sada.
Ey, mening jandash shahrim,
Ey, qadimiy Shash shahrim –
Sen qaytadan yasharding,
Qaytadan osdi qadding....⁵*

*My Tashkent is a green city
Never barren of leaves.
Spring has come to it,
And not left the gardens.
The sky is pale blue glass,
A whirl of sun’s rays.
In its gardens forever
The games of playful birds
From over the outlying buildings
Flies the dawn’s breeze.
Full strength suddenly sounds

A voice poured out by the whistles.
Oh, city of my heart,
Oh, my old Shash [Tashkent] city –
Once again you came alive,
Once again your stature grew.*

The distance separating the two foregoing examples of verse in temperament and time is by no means so great as the chasm dividing the poetry of today and twenty-five years ago, but the differ-

⁴ Rauf Parfi, “Today I had a dream” pp. 140-141.

⁵ Mirmuhsin (Mirsaidov). Ziyod va Adiba. - Toshkent: Badiiy adabiyot, 1959. P. 7.

ences developing since 1959 may be the more telling ones., Proletarian poetry of the early 1930's became insistently impersonal, though sometimes focusing, like the lines above, upon locality. Such verse was often tagged as "lirika" (lyric poetry) in an unsuccessful endeavor to redefine the very genre, but these rhymes affected an extreme manner which disqualified them for purely literary classification, though it may have suited their content, as one excerpt from a magazine of the Uzbek Association of Proletarian Writers will show:

<i>... O'zbekiston</i>	<i>... Uzbekistan</i>
<i>Qura yatir</i>	<i>Is building</i>
<i>Yangi bir jahan</i>	<i>A new world</i>
<i>Faqir, traqaq</i>	<i>Poor, fragmented</i>
<i>Yayiq yakka khojaliq</i>	<i>Scattered solitary farms</i>
<i>Kohkhoz boldi, sovkhoz boldi</i>	<i>Became a kolkhoz,</i>
<i>Bakht kuldi,</i>	<i>became a sovkhov</i>
<i>Mazi guli artiq soldi</i>	<i>Fortune laughed,</i>
<i>Qumliq</i>	<i>The past flowered places withered needlessly</i>
<i>Qaqaq</i>	<i>Sandy Arid In the deserts snow-white gold</i>
<i>Sahralarda appaq altin</i>	<i>[i.e., cotton] Blossomed.</i>
<i>Achildi....⁶</i>	

Remote from the proletarian scene, the changes of heart and style expressed in today's fresh poetry have been reflected to a limited degree also in contemporary prose, especially among pieces of shorter fiction. The same cannot be expected in the larger literary forms which, from the outset in Central Asia, have generally served to indoctrinate mass audiences rather than search for beauty. The indigenous novel, drama, and epistolary novel, begun by Mir Jaqib Duwlat-uli's Kazakh Unlucky Jamal (1910), Mahmud Khoja Behbudiy's Uzbek The Parricide (1913), and Sadridin Ayniy's Tajik The Happy Family (1917), were purposeful didactic works advocating reforms in family life and public schooling. An early narrative novelette, Hamza Hakim Zada Niyaziy's Uzbek New Happiness (1915), and short stories like Abdullah Qadiri's The Pederast (1915), preached against specific social ills. Later Communist demands for literature with a message, therefore, did not conflict with custom in the employment of these genres. Similar prose works have steadily gained numerical importance and a following at the expense of poetry's onetime monopoly.

Nevertheless, as in earlier centuries verse itself has continued to appear in a variety of forms.

In view of the considerable activity covering most fields of letters, recent slender contributions to a renewal of personal spirit in Central Asian literature, valuable as they may be, are mainly qualitative. Those few poems must be viewed alongside an annual published output of four to five hundred volumes of literature plus numerous literary journals, all in local languages, as well as against the background of a magnificent legacy. Clearly, the usual short lyric compositions can never bulk as large as their robust competitors. The real influence of the delicate revival depends not upon size, however, but upon response toward it in writers' and intellectual circles still monitored by Party functionaries. The youthful poets are now being used by older living writers to make a trial of the literary-political atmosphere, testing the acceptability of lyric verse. If it does not undergo official suppression once again, precedent suggests that the genre will return to a prominent place in the changed literary life of the area.

⁶ N. Akhundii, "Bolsheviklar olkasida" Qurulish, No. 1/2 (1931) P. 34.

**English-language sources for information about Central Asian literature
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