



Tulips in Bloom

An Anthology of
Modern Central Asian Literature

Edited by Gabriel McGuire · Chris Fort
Naomi Caffee · Emily Laskin
Samuel Hodgkin · Ali F. İğmen

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration across multiple Central Asian languages, many of which share words and ideas but not spelling, is difficult to say the least. For people, places, and objects, such as madrasa, that have accepted English variants found in dictionaries or other common sources, we use one of the accepted English-language variants. Apart from those instances, rather than trying to create a uniform set of vocabulary to be shared across the volume's multilingual contributions—a truly impossible task—we have created a uniform transliteration system for four of the volume's most commonly used languages: Russian, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Tajik. For transliteration of words from other languages of the volume, which includes Turkmen, Uyghur, Azerbaijani, and Urdu, we have allowed authors to use a transliteration system of their choosing. The bibliographies at the end of each section use the transliteration system of the contributor's choosing for all texts regardless of language.

For Russian, the volume uses the Library of Congress Romanization system without the apostrophe representing the soft sign and without any diacritics.

For Kazakh, the volume uses the Library of Congress Romanization system without diacritics and with some modifications. The vowels ә, ө, and і are rendered as ä, ö, and i, respectively. The voiceless velar fricative x is rendered as kh.

For Uzbek, though Uzbekistan has recently accepted a new alphabet, the volume uses the 1995 Latin alphabet with four modifications. For

gʻ, the voiced uvular fricative, the digraph gh is used, and for the voiceless velar fricative x, kh is used. For the short o sound of Uzbek, oʻ, the volume uses ö. And for the glottal stop represented in the Uzbek alphabet with the backward-facing apostrophe, the volume uses an italicized forward-facing apostrophe ʻ.

For Tajik, the volume uses the Library of Congress Romanization system for Persian without any diacritics and with the following modifications. Final -ah and -ih become -a and -i, respectively. And if a vowel is “e” in Tajik, it is preserved in transliteration.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	Gabriel McGuire	
	<i>References</i>	9
2	Oral Literature	11
	Gabriel McGuire	
	<i>Introduction: Oral and Vernacular Literature in Central Asia</i>	11
	<i>Boborahim Mashrab and Sufi Mystic Poetry</i>	15
	<i>If I leave the city of Namangan</i>	18
	<i>I have come today to see my padishah</i>	19
	<i>Take my hands, oh my pir</i>	19
	<i>(I am) the madman from the bazaar of enlightenment</i>	20
	<i>It burns</i>	20
	<i>If I add thread from my soul to the strings of my satar</i>	21
	<i>Saying Ana'l Haqq (I am God)</i>	22
	<i>From the cup of love I drank sweet hadiths</i>	22
	<i>Ismaili Minstrel Poetry</i>	23
	<i>Khâja say that I am me</i>	25
	<i>Cup-bearer, enlighten our cup by the radiance of the wine</i>	25
	<i>In the garden high up stands a high sycamore</i>	26
	<i>I am Tahmîna, I am Tahmîna</i>	27
	<i>The Folktale</i>	27
	<i>Dudar Qyz, or The Girl with the Tangled Locks</i>	30

<i>The Golden Shoes</i>	42
<i>Oral Narrative Poetry</i>	58
<i>Qyz Zhibek</i>	61
<i>Kenesary-Nauryzbai</i>	72
<i>Oral Duels: The Kazakh Aitys</i>	78
<i>The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz</i>	81
<i>Notes on Sources and Suggested Further Reading</i>	94
<i>References</i>	98
3 Pre-revolutionary Written Literature	101
Emily Laskin	
<i>Introduction</i>	101
<i>The Bedilian Style</i>	104
<i>Abdulqadir ‘Bedil’—Don’t strain yourself, holding out</i>	105
<i>Khalifa Ashur Muhammad—Despair, don’t plant the seed</i>	107
<i>Abdulqadir ‘Bedil’—What color were the roses</i>	108
<i>Sadriddin Ayni—My tulip field</i>	110
<i>Native Intellectuals in the Russian Empire</i>	111
<i>Sultan Kazy-Girei—The Valley of Azhitugai</i>	113
<i>Pre-revolutionary Memoir: Dilshod Barno’s “History of the Refugees”</i>	121
<i>History of the Refugees</i>	123
<i>Genres of Central Asian Women’s Writing: Anbar Otin’s</i>	
<i>Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness and Lyric Poetry</i>	128
<i>Anbar Otin—[To Muqimiy]</i>	130
<i>Anbar Otin—Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness</i>	131
<i>Jadidism and Turkmen Encounters with Modernity: Progress for Women</i>	134
<i>Mugallym Muhammet Atabay Oglu—The Intelligence of Turkmen Women</i>	136
<i>Mät Gurban Oglu—Turkmen Girl-Selling Circles</i>	137
<i>Jadid Lyric Poetry: Two Poems by Khislat</i>	138
<i>Khislat—Study, you beautiful child, the time has treated you well...</i>	139
<i>Khislat—I, dear friends, have known the loss of a child...</i>	140
<i>Jadids and the (Pseudo)Travelogue: Abdurauf Fitrat’s Tales of an Indian Traveler</i>	141
<i>Tales of an Indian Traveler</i>	144
<i>Jadids and Drama</i>	154

<i>Mirza Jalil Memmedguluzade—The Dead</i>	156
<i>Notes on Sources and Suggested Further Reading</i>	203
<i>References</i>	207
4 Becoming Socialist	209
Chris Fort	
<i>Introduction</i>	209
<i>Soviet Persian Revolutionary Verse</i>	212
<i>Sadriddin Ayni—Revolution</i>	214
<i>Abulqasim Lahuti—Red Revolution</i>	215
<i>Sadriddin Ayni—“Red Revolution”</i>	215
<i>Early Soviet Drama and the Influence of Jadids</i>	216
<i>Abdulhamid Sulaymon oghli Chölpon—A Modern Woman</i>	218
<i>Early Soviet Uzbek Verse</i>	316
<i>Oydin—Tulips in Bloom</i>	319
<i>Zulfiya—Cotton</i>	320
<i>Collectivization and Kazakh Literature</i>	321
<i>Beimbet Mailin—The Black Bucket</i>	322
<i>From the Past</i>	332
<i>Abdulla Qahhor—Pomegranate</i>	334
<i>The Soviet Picaresque</i>	339
<i>Ghafur Ghulom—Chapter II of The Mischievous Child</i>	341
<i>Stalinist Spring Poetry</i>	350
<i>Payrav Sulaymani—May Day and MOPR</i>	352
<i>Payrav Sulaymani—You, Gardener</i>	353
<i>Mirzo Tursunzade—Spring</i>	355
<i>Uyghur Poets in a Time of Revolution</i>	356
<i>Lutpulla Mutellip—Answer to the Years</i>	359
<i>Notes on Sources and Suggested Further Reading</i>	361
<i>References</i>	363
5 Late Socialist Literature	365
Samuel Hodgkin and Ali F. İğmen	
<i>Introduction: Looking Back and Looking Abroad</i>	365
<i>Discussing Stalinist Terror in Central Asia: Abdulla Qahhor’s The Earthquake</i>	367
<i>The Earthquake</i>	368
<i>Two Easts</i>	381
<i>Mirza Tursunzade—In the Land of Slaves</i>	383

<i>Zulfiya—A Gathering of Poets</i>	385
<i>The Soviet East: A View from South Asia</i>	390
<i>Faiz Ahmed Faiz—Dagestan</i>	392
<i>Revolutionary Romanticism Beyond the Communist Bloc:</i>	
<i>An Afghan Radical Poet</i>	405
<i>Sulaiman Layeq—Sad Flame</i>	406
<i>Sulaiman Layeq—Eternal Loves</i>	406
<i>Sulaiman Layeq—Two Sentinels in Battle</i>	407
<i>Intimate Publics</i>	408
<i>Ghafur Ghulom—Pay Our House a Visit, Friends</i>	410
<i>Chingiz Aitmatov—Jamila</i>	412
<i>Nariman Jumayev—The Quiet Daughter-in-Law</i>	415
<i>Time Travel</i>	430
<i>Olzhas Suleimenov—Earth, Hail Man!</i>	431
<i>Mukhtar Magauin—Blue Haze</i>	436
<i>Notes on Sources and Suggested Further Reading</i>	438
<i>References</i>	439
6 Post-socialist Literature	443
<i>Naomi Caffee</i>	
<i>Introduction: New Nations, New Horizons</i>	443
<i>Uzbek Visions of Past and Present</i>	445
<i>Zulfiya—Shards of Memory</i>	448
<i>Isajon Sultan—Destination</i>	455
<i>Russophone Poetry and Prose: The Fergana School,</i>	
<i>the Tashkent School, and the “Young Literature”</i>	
<i>of Kazakhstan</i>	460
<i>Shamshad Abdullaev—Family</i>	463
<i>Shamshad Abdullaev—Doubled Midday</i>	464
<i>Hamid Ismailov—Lovers in Samarkand</i>	465
<i>Sandzhar Yanyshv—Tashkent as a Mirror</i>	466
<i>Evgenii Abdullaev—The Return of Nasreddin</i>	467
<i>Evgenii Abdullaev—The Kitchen, Before Plov</i>	468
<i>Vadim Muratkhanov—Homeland</i>	468
<i>Vadim Muratkhanov—Borsok</i>	469
<i>Yuriy Serebriansky—The Golden Eagle</i>	470
<i>Yuriy Serebriansky—Where did the Aral Sea go?</i>	471
<i>Yuriy Serebriansky—Apples</i>	471
<i>Contemporary Uyghur Prose</i>	472

<i>Perhat Tursun—Plato's Shovel</i>	474
<i>Halide Israel—There Are No Cows in the City</i>	486
<i>Uyghur Avant-Garde Poetry</i>	498
<i>Ekhnmetjan Osman—I Have Sent Darkness in Your Wake</i>	501
<i>Tahir Hamut Izgil—Returning to Kashgar</i>	502
<i>Perhat Tursun—Burning Wheat</i>	502
<i>Ghojimuhemmed Muhemmed—Chronicle of An Execution</i>	503
<i>Merdan Ehet'eli—Common Night</i>	504
<i>Notes on Sources and Suggested Further Reading</i>	505
<i>References</i>	507
Index	509

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Gabriel McGuire

In early spring 1930, the Uzbek poet Oydin (1906–1953) published a short piece entitled “Tulips in Bloom” in the Soviet literary journal *New Way*. “Now the spring has finally come,” the poem’s first stanza begins, then finishes, “It casts out its rays like flame, /Dons a scarf of red.” Oydin uses the image of spring to speak not of the calendar year but rather of the dawn of Soviet power. As the poem continues, spring is figured through the image of tulips bursting into bloom, but these tulips are themselves metaphors for the young Central Asian women of the Soviet future, the “tulips” who, laughing, “in factories, sovkhoses, and kolkhozes,/ Burst forth, overflow, flame out.” Oydin’s poem is itself a kind of blossoming of literary possibilities latent within the diverse field of Central Asian literature: the tulip as a plant is native to the steppes of Central Asia; the tulip as metaphor equally deeply rooted in the Persianate literary tradition; the refiguring of the classical poetics of spring renewal as a celebration of Soviet power a device found elsewhere in the works of Persian-language Soviet-era poets. Yet Oydin’s poem innovates and hybridizes even as it springs from this tradition, using Persianate imagery

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but writing in a Turkic language and in a meter typical of Turkic folk poetry and transforming the imagery of a Soviet spring into a metaphor for the emancipation of women.

The word “tulip” itself obliquely references the flower’s origin in Central Asia. A fantastic range of wild species of tulips grown in the mountain valleys of Central Asia: tulips red, white, violet, and yellow, with flowers sometimes shaped like the inverted wine glass of a classic tulip, and sometimes with star-like flowers formed from pointed petals. In the *Babur Nama*, Mughal conqueror and poet Zahir Uddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1503) mentions having counted as many as thirty-three different kinds of tulips growing wild in the fields near Kabul, including one with the scent of a rose. Cultivated tulips made their way into Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by way of the Ottoman Empire, and the name tulip appears to be a borrow of the Turkish word for turban, *tülbend*, which is itself a borrow of Persian *dulbend*, or round. The word derives from, so the story goes, the apparent similarity of the shape of a tulip to the shape of a turban, with variants of the word spreading from Dutch on through other European languages. The Turks themselves used the Persian word for tulip, *laleh*, and Oydin in her poem employs the Uzbek variant of this word, *lola*. Further to the north, the Kazakhs call tulips *qyzgaldag*, though the Persian *laleh* lingers as a name for the broader family of plants to which tulips belong.

Long before the tulip made its way to Europe, in Central Asia, and in the Near East images of tulips decorated the margins of manuscripts, were woven into carpets, painted on tiles, and served as similes in poems. A “tulip” could figuratively refer to cheeks that blushed red, or to the red of spilled blood, or to the glow of a burning ember, and examples of this imagery may be found in many of the poems translated in this anthology. The Sufi poet Boborahim Mashrab (1653–1711) speaks of his “tulip tongue” in his poem “It Burns,” an image which follows a series of lines in which Mashrab describes the act of speaking of his love for the divine as something that immolates both himself and the world around him. Sadriddin Ayni (1878–1954), in his early poem “My Tulip Field,” begins by speaking of how his “tulip field” had gone “hunting in the waste,” where the blood shed by its prey in turn makes “manifest / the tulip field in the waste.” In other poems translated here, tulips conjure not fire or blood but rather the green renewal of spring. Much like Oydin’s “Tulips in Bloom,” Mirza Tursunzada (1911–1977) employs spring imagery in his 1937 ghazal “Spring” as a way to celebrate the

rise of Soviet power, as does Payrav Sulaymani (1899–1933) in his 1930 poem “You, Gardener.” In these works, tulips are one among many classical images used to conjure the sense of the Soviet state as ushering in a soon-to-be eternal summer.

The diverse resonances of “tulip” within Central Asian cultures underscores the need to ground the study of the region’s literature in an appreciation of Central Asia as a distinct literary space, rather than merely as a shadow of other literary traditions. The poems, epics, folktales, short stories, and novels of Central Asia draw upon a rich and regionally specific stock of literary allusions, poetic imagery, and plot devices. This anthology is borne from the volume’s translators and editors’ collective frustration at the challenge of teaching Central Asian literature in a way that honors this distinctive history. Central Asian literature is rarely taught as its own subject and rarely included within World Literature curricula, but might be found spun off into classes on Soviet or Russian literature, a position that risks over-emphasizing ties with European literature while ignoring the role of Turkic or Persian precursors (or perhaps acknowledging them only through hazy invocations of “nomadic” or “Muslim” details in the text.) Even those who wish to incorporate Central Asian texts into their classrooms are challenged by how astonishingly few translations of Central Asian authors exist; what translations do exist are too often made by way of Russian rather than directly from the languages in which they were first written. Many scholars have also fallen into the trap of relying upon a few exemplary texts or authors from Central Asia without regard for how they fit within the larger literary constellations of which they were a part, or have relied for their knowledge of Central Asian literature almost entirely upon faulty Soviet-era translations and assumed on this basis that the region’s literature is a sort of dim facsimile of Union-wide literary practices. This anthology is intended as a corrective to this, offering translations made directly from the language of composition, and pairing them with critical commentary that shows how writers drew upon and reimagined a diverse range of literary practices and images, hybridizing, as Oydin did, folk with classical, Persian with Turkic, and Soviet modernity with traditional poetic imagery.

Defining the “Central Asia” of the title is a tricky and in many ways a fruitless task, for the borders shift and flex depending on topic and era. Still, for the purposes of this anthology, the region is centered on the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, together with what is now known as

Xinjiang but which Uyghur authors refer to as the “Uyghur homeland.” To employ an older formulation, the anthology includes within its remit the cities of *mawarannahr*, Arabic for “the land beyond the river,” or Transoxiana, Latin for “beyond the Oxus,” as the region north of the Amu Darya (the Oxus) was long known. Second, it includes literature of the peoples of the *desht-i-kipchak*, or the Kipchak steppe, as the grasslands to the north of the Syr Darya were called in Persian. And lastly, it includes literature from *altishahr*, or the six cities, as the Uyghur cities of Xinjiang were called. Yet the anthology spills beyond these boundaries, too, including works from the Caucasus and from Afghanistan, as well as an excerpt from the memoir of a famous Urdu-language poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who tells of his visit to Dagestan, a north Caucasian autonomous republic. In this way, the anthology emphasizes parallels and similarities between the literature of different regions, while also addressing how these literatures are the products of polyglot and cosmopolitan literary cultures that do not fit into neatly compartmentalized national canons.

Chronologically, the anthology is roughly divided into five main sections, though the attentive reader will see authors, styles, and literary references echoing back and forth between the different parts. The anthology begins with a section on oral literature which, although it contains texts recorded as recently as the 1990s, itself begins with the earliest writer to feature in the anthology, the seventeenth-century Sufi poet and mystic Boborahim Mashrab. The anthology then continues with a section on pre-revolutionary written literature. The third section, “Becoming Socialist,” translates texts from the 1920s through the Stalin era, while the fourth, “Late Socialist literature,” covers the literature of the thaw on through the Brezhnev era. The final section, “Post-Soviet Literatures,” includes translations of writers from the 1990s up to the present day.

The first section, oral literature, offers a brief glimpse into the vast and varied storehouse of Central Asian oral literature. The section begins with Mashrab, before proceeding to Ismaili minstrel poetry recorded in the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan in the 1990s, a tradition which similarly draws on Sufi imagery. This is followed by two folktales, the Uyghur story “Golden Shoes,” a version of the Cinderella plot-type recorded in the 1950s, and a Kazakh folktale about a female heroine named Dudar Qyz that was recorded in the late nineteenth century. Next come excerpts from two long narrative poems, one from the Kazakh verse romance *Qyz Zhibek* and one from a narrative retelling the life and death of the

nineteenth-century Kazakh rebel Kenesary Qasymuly (1802–1847). The section concludes with a series of excerpts from perhaps the most famous of Kazakh oral duels, the confrontation between Sara, a young female singer, and Birzhan, an older and more famous male singer. A common thread throughout these pieces is the difficulty of dividing the oral from the written. Many of the pieces collected here are translated from chap-book style versions printed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These texts were often the work of figures who themselves simultaneously inhabited the role of scribe and singer: Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikyslamuly (1854–1937), the source of both the version of *Qyz Zhibek* and the version of the oral duel between Birzhan and Sara excerpted here, represented the oral duel as a faithful record of the two singers’ voices but claimed the verse romance as his own composition. The written literature compiled here was in turn often the work of writers who drew upon deeply on folk narrative traditions: the Uyghur author Halide Israel, whose short story “There are no cows in the city” appears in the final section of the anthology, became famous for a novel about the folktale “Golden Shoes.”

The second section, “Pre-Revolutionary Written Literature” offers a series of texts that showcase the sociality of written literary practices in the nineteenth century as well as the upheavals wrought by the social, political, and technological changes of that era. For centuries, the written literature of Central Asia had been based on manuscripts, as scribes copied and recopied existing works. Some of the texts in this section are rooted in this manuscript culture, while others emerge from the advent of print technology and the new kinds of sociality it helped bring about. The section begins with a poem by the seventeenth-century poet Abdalqadir “Bedil” of Delhi (1642–1720), followed by emulations of his poem written in the nineteenth century through to the twentieth century, highlighting a literary culture of emulation and of debate. Also included in this section is an excerpt from a memoir by Dilshod Barno as well as a poem and an essay by her student Anbar Otin. These are texts that reveal the networks of writers and the literary culture of their time as well as showcasing the place of women writers within those literary networks. The section also includes a series of writers and texts that speak to the changes brought by the Russian empire: Sultan Kazy-Girei’s “The Valley of Azhitugai” was written in Russian by an Adyghe author who served in the Russian Army, published in a literary journal edited by Alexander Pushkin, and takes as its theme the sense of dislocation and alienation felt

by an indigenous narrator as he returns to his homeland in the uniform of a Russian officer. The section closes with a series of different texts written by Muslim modernist reformers, or *Jadids*, as they came to be known. The Jadid writings translated here encompass the genres of the newspaper editorial, didactic poetry, pseudo-travelogues, and stage dramas, and range from Uzbek through Turkmen and on to Azeri language texts. In these examples, the Jadids write in response to Russian colonialism, turn to genres novel to Central Asia and known in many cases through the medium of Russian, yet in deploying these genres look not to Russia but rather to a vision of modernity articulated through the language of Islam and often fused with the plots and expressive language of indigenous folk and vernacular literary traditions.

These shifts in genre and style gained in speed and scale following the Bolshevik revolution and the eventual consolidation of Soviet power in Central Asia, a process explored in section three of the anthology. In 1918, Soviet authorities confiscated all the printing presses in the region. In place of the patchwork of official and of private presses that had incubated everything from popular editions of *Qyz Zhibek* to jadidist polemics, a centralized and state-controlled publishing space rapidly emerged, one that assisted in the construction of Soviet modernity through the printing of textbooks and primers, pamphlets and proclamations, but also of poetry and prose intended to form new and now Soviet “national” literatures. In pursuing this project, the Soviets initially relied upon an alliance with native intellectuals, and these native intellectuals in turn often relied upon literary devices and poetic languages indigenous to the region. The section opens with a series of ghazals written in praise of the revolution by Sadriiddin Ayni (1878–1954) and Abulqasim Lahuti (1887–1957); here as in the spring poetry of Payrav Sulaymani, Mirza Tursunzade, and Oydin, metaphors and poetic devices drawn from classical Persian poetry are mixed with Soviet imagery. Abdulhamid Sulaymon oghli Chölpon (1897–1938), in contrast, utilizes the genre of drama in his play *A Modern Woman*, but offers up a critique of female oppression rooted as much in Jadid discourse as in Soviet. This section also includes multiple examples of poetry and prose from writers who were part of the first Soviet generation, like Zulfiya (1915–1996), Beiimbet Mailin (1897–1939), Ghafur Ghulom (1903–1966), and Abdulla Qahhor (1907–1968), each of whom found distinct ways to pursue the task of writing Soviet literature. These projects found audiences outside of the Soviet Union as well: the Uyghur author Lutpulla Mutellip (1922–1945) attended Russian and

Tatar language schools in the Ili region of Xinjiang, read the works of Turkic and Russian-language Soviet poets, and involved himself in leftist political projects in Xinjiang that looked to the USSR as a cultural and political model. His 1944 poem “Answer to the Years” can be read as part of a political and cultural dialogue between Soviet Central Asia and the Uyghurs of Xinjiang.

Many of the writers translated in section three died in Stalin’s Great Terror (1936–1938), which swept up first the native intellectuals who had made common cause with the Bolsheviks after the revolution and then swept up the writers from the first Soviet generation. Section four opens with Abdulla Qahhor’s novella, *The Earthquake*, a harrowing account of the social isolation and sexual harassment experienced by the wife of a famous Uzbek author after his denunciation and arrest. Though this novella was unpublished, its exploration of the contradictions and traumas of the Great Terror still points to the ways in which the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years were a time of increased autonomy for literature in the Central Asian republics. The translations included in this section include not only Qahhor’s Thaw-era reckoning with the trauma of the purges, but also works by Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008) and Nariman Jumayev (1925–1984) that experiment with and update plots and tropes characteristic of Stalin-era Socialist Realist fiction. Central Asian writers also played a role in Soviet cultural diplomacy, deployed as ambassadors in attempts to build ties with authors from South Asia and elsewhere. Mirza Tursunzade and Zulfiya reflect on this mission in poems translated here, while the Pakistani author Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984) offers a complementary view from South Asia, recording his experience of a trip to the Caucasus where he was hosted by Dagestani authors. The section closes with two works by Kazakh authors: Olzhas Suleimenov (1936–) celebrates the triumph of Soviet technological modernity, while Mukhtar Magauin (1940–) follows a scholar who, burying himself in the archive, strives to make sense of the bewildering maze of texts and stories to be found there.

The final section of the anthology offers a window into Central Asian literature from the era after the fall of the Soviet Union. The section begins with a poem by Zulfiya, whose career as a writer spans the early Soviet and the post-Soviet—her works are also to be found in sections two and three. Yet this section of the anthology also includes multiple poems by writers who were part of new post-Soviet literary groups like the Ferghana and Tashkent schools in Uzbekistan or the cultural organization Musaget in Almaty, Kazakhstan. These writers primarily write

in Russian, but they themselves might be Uzbek, Tatar, Kazakh, Polish, or Russian, and the Russian they use is riddled with images and turns of phrases rooted in Central Asia. In both their language and in the subject matter of the poems themselves, these writers take up the way the Soviet project scattered different peoples across the Central Asian space, exploring both the alienation and the unexpected moments of identification this history allows. Similar experiments and innovations are to be found in the multiple translations of Uyghur poetry and prose included in this section, whose accounts of the dislocation and alienation, surveillance and exile, that characterize the contemporary Uyghur experience of state capitalism form a bitter counterpart to Lutpulla Mutelip's earlier "Answer to the Years."

This anthology does not have any ambition of becoming *the* anthology of Central Asian literature; rather, the authors and editors intend the volume as merely *an* anthology of Central Asian literature. The texts here gathered are offered not out of some misplaced ambition at the comprehensive or the definitive, but rather in the hope that they will give some sense of the richness and depth of the literary cultures of Central Asia. As such, the anthology is unapologetically uneven in its coverage: some regions and languages are represented by multiple entries, while others receive only a few; some authors have multiple examples of their work translated, while many major writers are omitted altogether; the cultural diplomacy of the Brezhnev era receives great attention, while the literature of the second world war (a topic that would merit multiple anthologies in and of itself) receives only glancing mention. The anthology is thus best read not in isolation but rather alongside other existing translations of Central Asian literature, and to assist with this, the section "notes and further readings" at the end of each of the major sections includes suggestions for works of scholarship and for other translations that would complement the material in the anthology.

Gabriel McGuire¹

Suggested Further Reading: For a popular account of the history of the tulip, see Celia Fisher's *Tulip* (2017). For more expansive and detailed discussions of the literary history summarized here, see the introductory essays later in this volume. For the history of Central Asia in

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general, recent volumes by Shoshana Keller (2020) and Adeeb Khalid (2021) offer wide-ranging discussions of the time periods covered by the anthology. Although there are few translations of contemporary Central Asian literature into English, two recent publications have made substantial contributions. Zaire Batayeva and Shelly Fairweather-Vega's *Amanat: Recent Women's Writing from Kazakhstan* (2022) includes an impressive selection of translations of prose literature from the post-Independence period. Danielle Ross and Meiramgul Kussainova's *Voices from the Steppe: A Thematic Sourcebook of the Kazakh Steppe and the South Urals* (2023) is another important contribution, including translations of poetry and prose alongside non-literary texts. In addition, many of the prose works of Uzbek writer Hamid Ismailov have been translated into English by major translators, including Robert Chandler, Shelley Fairweather-Vega, and Donald Rayfield. Finally, the novels of the Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov are also available in excellent English translations.

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CHAPTER 2

Oral Literature

Gabriel McGuire

INTRODUCTION: ORAL AND VERNACULAR LITERATURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

The oral literary texts that begin this anthology offer a brief glimpse into an extraordinarily rich tradition that continues to be a vital part of the region's expressive culture in the present day. Perhaps the most famous narrative of Central Asian oral literature is the *Manas*, the Kyrgyz epic poem centered on the life of the titular hero Manas and his descendants, yet *Manas* is only one among many oral epic texts, and oral epics only one facet of a tradition that includes elegies and wedding songs, odes and songs of insults, fairy tales and tales of tricksters. The texts translated here include examples of lyric and minstrel poetry, elegies, folktales, excerpts of romantic and historical epics, and a famous oral duel between two Kazakh *aqyns* (bards).

With contributions from Nathan Light, Gabrielle van den Berg, Musapir, Akbar Amat, Meiramgul Kussainova, and Eva-Marie Dubuisson

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The oral literature of Central Asia has both fed into and fed upon the region's traditions of written literature. The first texts translated here are poems of the Sufi dervish and poet Boborahim Mashrab (ca. 1653–1711), which were likely publicly performed both by Mashrab and by others, who would mix their poetic recitations with short narratives about the dervish's life. These tales were later written down, recopied, and then circulated in hundreds of versions in a manuscript tradition that existed alongside continued oral performances. The character of Mashrab himself as imagined in these texts similarly mixes the oral and the written: he apparently performs his poems publicly; on his first day of school he asserts that the letter *alif* is all he need to know as it stands for Allah and Allah's unity, yet the biographical narratives also have him reciting long ghazals that display a complete knowledge of the Arabic alphabet. Still later, the works of Mashrab would become part of Central Asia's emerging print culture when Islamic publishing houses using lithographic presses began to appear in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The poems of Mashrab excerpted here are all taken from a lithographic edition of his work published in Tashkent in 1900.

These Islamic publishing houses were first established in Kazan but by the turn of the century could also be found further south, in the cities of present-day Uzbekistan. The various presses printed an eclectic mix of educational texts, Islamic devotional literature, and vernacular translations of classics of Persian literature. Print renditions of popular oral literary narratives were also common, and these publishing houses thus became a key institution in the entextualization of oral narratives. The print versions were often based on transcriptions initially made by native intellectuals whose madrasa education allowed them to find work as itinerant schoolteachers in the villages and herding camps of rural Central Asia. Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly (1854–1937) exemplifies this pattern: he was born in 1854 near the city of Aulie Ata (present-day Taraz) in south Kazakhstan, was taught to read by the village mullah, later studied at a madrasa where he learned Arabic, Persian, and Chaghatai, and after leaving the madrasa worked as a teacher in the Zhetisu (*rus.* Semirechye) region of present-day Kazakhstan.¹ He also occupied himself with the oral literature of the Kazakhs, traveling throughout central and southern

¹ His name translates into English as “Zhusipbek the Qozha, the son of Shaikhyslam,” with Qozha indicating he belongs to a sacred lineage, one whose members claim descent from Arabs who brought Islam to the steppe. He is henceforth referred to as Zhusipbek

Kazakhstan, meeting with famous singers, and preparing a remarkable corpus of oral literary texts for publication in Kazan. Zhusipbek Qozha was simultaneously an editor of these traditions and a member of the community of singers; his published materials range from works he represents as transcriptions of other singers' words, to narratives he presents as his own iterations of oral epics, and on to texts that were original compositions in the genre of oral literary duels. His transcriptions of the "The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz" and of the oral epic *Qyz Zhibek*, together perhaps the two most famous examples of Kazakh oral literature, became the canonical versions of both texts during the Soviet era and are the source of the excerpts translated here.

The nineteenth century and early twentieth century also saw the first scholarly collections of the oral literature of Central Asia. Sometimes these collections were the work of Russian-educated members of the indigenous intelligentsia, like the Kazakh Shoqan Walikhanov (1835–1865), who was the first to transcribe a performance of *Manas*, or the Bashkir ethnographer Abubakir Divaev (1855–1932), who collected an impressive anthology of Kazakh texts during research journeys to the north of the Syr Darya, in present-day south Kazakhstan. In other cases, the texts were compiled by European scholars like Wilhelm Radloff (1837–1918). Radloff was born and educated in Germany, but found work as a schoolteacher in the town of Barnaul, in the Altai region of Siberia. Radloff used Barnaul as a base for a series of summer expeditions throughout the Altai region, eventually including travel to the Zhetisu region in Kazakhstan. On his travels, Radloff collected an astonishing range of material on the languages and oral literatures of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, publishing what came to be an 18-volume anthology of Central Asian oral literature, the *Proben der Volksliteratur der Türkischen Stämme Süd-Sibiriens*. He devoted the third volume of the *Proben*, published in 1870, to the oral literature of the Kazakhs, including examples of shamanic songs, wedding songs, elegies, and religious texts, as well as a whole series of narrative poems. The volume further included thirteen *erteği* (folk tales), one of which, "Dudar Qyz, or the Girl with the Tangled Locks," is translated here in full. With its female warriors, flying horses, and body horror, the tale is an artful combination of two plots identified in the Arne-Thompson-Uther index of international tale-types

Qozha, in keeping with the Central Asian practice of identifying notable figures by their first name and honorific.

as ATU 514 The Shift of Sex and ATU 531 The Clever Horse. The tale is perhaps the best known of the Kazakh folktales in Radloff's anthology and was widely republished in Soviet and post-Soviet collections. Yet the republished versions are often heavily bowdlerized, with the violence and sexual slapstick of Radloff's version edited out.

In the twentieth century, Soviet scholars took up the project of recording and transcribing oral literary texts. The excerpts of the historical epic "Kenesary-Nauryzbai" included here were taken from a narrative collected during a 1939 ethnographic expedition in the north of Kazakhstan organized by the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR. The poem narrates the life and death of the Kazakh rebel Kenesary Qasymuly (1802–1847), who in the mid-nineteenth century led an armed revolt against the Tsarist empire. The epic was sung by an *aqyn* named Qashqynbai Qaraev, but Qaraev himself sings in the voice of a famous nineteenth-century *aqyn*, Nysanbai Zhamanqululy (1822–1888), who was a part of Kenesary's entourage and who narrates the tale of Kenesary's final defeat. Qaraev's version of "Kenesary-Nauryzbai" is only one of many songs devoted to Kenesary; the works of Radloff include examples, while an alternate version of "Kenesary-Nauryzbai" specifically may be found in Zhusipbek Qozha's publications. Qaraev's own repertory also included a second text devoted to the rebellion, "Kenesary-Abylai."

Through the Soviet era and into the twentieth century, people continued to turn to oral literary forms to reflect upon and critique the political and social upheavals through which they lived. The Uyghur folktale "The Golden Shoes" is similarly both a traditional tale—an example of the international folk tale-type ATU 510A, or Cinderella—and a story whose themes of suffering gracefully endured can be read as an oblique commentary on the history of the Uyghur people under Chinese Communist Rule. "The Golden Shoes" was published in a Uyghur literary journal in 1958, evidence of the ways in which oral literary forms migrated into the new mediums of mass print, much as they had earlier co-existed with manuscript and lithographic printing.

These new modes of circulation did not erase traditions of public performance. The Ismaili minstrel poetry in this section was recorded in the early 1990s, almost a 100 years after *Qyz Zhibek* or the poetry of Mashrab had become print artifacts, and it evidences a still vibrant performance tradition in the high Pamirs of southeast Tajikistan. Singers perform in private homes, at weddings, and at funerals. Their works are

sometimes folk compositions, but at other times they reach back to traditions of written literature, referencing figures from classical Persian texts like the *Shahnameh* or citing famous Persian poets as the original authors of sung texts.

Gabriel McGuire²

BOBORAHIM MASHRAB AND SUFI MYSTIC POETRY

The popular Sufi dervish and poet Boborahim Mashrab, also known as Rahim Baba Mashrab, Shah Mashrab or Divana-i Mashrab (“Mashrab the madman”), was born in Namangan, ca. 1653, and executed for his spiritual excesses by Mahmud Atalik Biy in Balkh in 1711 (Hartmann 1902, 186–88; Papas 2010, 128–133). Mashrab is an enduringly popular anti-nomian trickster figure, who constantly challenged authority and violated public decorum while at the same time calling on people to attend to their moral and religious obligations. His life story has been made famous through his biography, known under titles such as *Divan-i Mashrab* or *Qissa-i Mashrab*. His poems continue to be widely known and performed as songs and ritual recitations, and his biography exists in hundreds of manuscript copies (Hofman 1969, 125–132). Mashrab’s poems have long circulated in both oral and written forms, and early performers probably added oral narratives about Mashrab’s life that were later codified in written form in one or more versions. Uzbek scholars have identified two contemporaries of Mashrab who seem to be the source of early written accounts of his life, but the popular biographies with hundreds of his poems do not name specific authors.

Mashrab’s poems mix Sufi and religious knowledge and imagery with descriptions of events in his own life, and the biography contextualizes the poems through detailed narratives. These well-known contextual narratives about the events associated with many of his poems suggest that Mashrab himself and perhaps his companions told the narratives when they recited his poems. Nonetheless, the contextual stories, like the poems themselves, clearly also include imagined accounts and retrospective elaboration, either composed by Mashrab or by those who created the biography. Within the biography, the poems express Mashrab’s inner

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experience as a dervish. There are also some verses said to be spoken by others, such as Mashrab's mother or his Sufi pirs (masters). The biography is hagiographic in style, and versions usually begin with Mashrab still unborn and speaking from his mother's womb to berate her for "stealing" dropped fruit in the market. The story then shifts to his first day in school when he asserts that alif is the only letter he needs to learn because it stands for Allah and Allah's unity. Other poems are collated thematically but not always logically: for example, after Mashrab asserts as a young boy that he needs only learn alif, most versions claim that he recited one or even two long ghazals that demonstrate his knowledge of the whole alphabet.

During the Soviet period, Mashrab's biography was suppressed due to its glorification of Sufi practices and knowledge. A few Mashrab verses entered popular music already in the Soviet period through film and popular performance and continue to be well known, for example, *O'tkan Kunlar* (Ozodlik Radiosi, 2014). Since 1991, Mashrab's verses have become increasingly popular in song and religious recitation in Uzbekistan, and his works have been extensively republished, as scholars there have sought to establish a complete canon of his works. More relaxed policies on religion seem to allow for more public performances of his works, and a few religious reciters, such as Yunuskhon Domla, Hofiz Bobo, and Muhammad Sharif Qori, can be viewed in YouTube recordings reciting Mashrab's poems.

Popular performers have also added his verses to their repertoires. The famous Uzbek singer Yulduz Usmanova (2017) created a stage show that includes a character portraying Mashrab as an aged dervish who appears while she sings Mashrab's ghazals accompanied by a large orchestra. The dervish then joins with an ensemble to perform a stylized sama dance. The most prolific popular performer of Mashrab's verses was Kamoliddin Rahimov (1943–2015), who, like Mashrab, came from the city of Namangan. Rahimov performed around 20 songs based on Mashrab's ghazals, with tunes featuring traditional Central Asian musical instruments, modes, and rhythms (Rahimov 2021). In Xinjiang, Mashrab's poems provide the texts for many songs in the Uyghur Muqam tradition, and Mu Qian (2018) has drawn on extended field research in the Uyghur city of Khotan to reveal the central place Mashrab still holds

as a spiritual role model of the dervish *ashiq* madly in love with God. Despite this, scholarship on Mashrab and publishing of his works has been very limited in China.

The first poem included here, “If I leave the city of Namangan,” describes Mashrab’s departure from the town of his birth, emphasizing internal and external dialogues and tensions. On his travels Mashrab eventually arrived in Kashgar and began an important relationship with Afaq Khoja, the ruler of the Altishahr region under Galdan Khan in the 1690s. “I have come today to see my padishah” is spoken to Afaq Khoja, with Mashrab saying he wishes to pay respects to Makhdum-i Azam, Afaq Khoja’s great-grandfather. Following his positive reception by Afaq Khoja, Mashrab asks in “Take my hands, oh my pir” that he be taken as a *murid* (disciple).

“(I am) the madman from the bazaar of enlightenment” and “It burns” are less topical and more lyrical poems devoted to Sufi imagery. “It burns” is perhaps the most widely known of Mashrab’s poems and usually performed to a characteristic tune. “If I add thread from my soul to the strings of my satar” is found in short versions throughout Central Asia but appears in a longer version in East Turkestan tradition, identifying the names of most of the twelve Muqams (*maqamat*) that are part of the current Uyghur tradition.

Of the final two poems, “Saying Ana’l Haqq” is in Persian and revolves around the phrase *Ana’l Haqq*, meaning “I am God,” the words spoken by the mystic Mansur al-Hallaj that led to his execution. While his executioners interpreted his statement as blasphemy, Sufis interpret al-Hallaj’s “I am God” as an assertion of the Sufi annihilation of ego. This image was a recurrent theme in Mashrab’s life, and his execution closely resembles that of al-Hallaj. “From the cup of love I drank sweet hadiths” was one of the last poems Mashrab recites in his biography. Set shortly before his execution, it suggests he is claiming close connections to Islamic prophets, and a role as revealer of Allah’s words.

Nathan Light³

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If I leave the city of Namangan

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

If I leave the city of Namangan, will anyone miss me?
If I die in a foreign town, will anyone miss me?

Where are my people, my companions and kin on this road?
Tears well up in my eyes, will anyone miss me?

I have drunk the wine of love, and I boil like a cauldron.
I have left the fleeting world, but will I be missed?

I am struck by passions and chase the mysteries of love.
I have made myself insane, will anyone miss me?

I have not the strength to stay, nor the drive to go.
Love's fire fills my heart, will anyone miss me?

I cannot make up my mind to stay in Namangan, or leave.
If I roam the furthest reaches of the world, will anyone miss me?

No one knows the sad condition of poor Mashrab,
If I head out from here, will anyone notice I have gone?

I have come today to see my padishah

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

I have come today to see my padishah Makhdum-i Azam.
Like his dog I have come to scratch at his door.

On the Day of Judgment the angels will appear,
And your alchemical glance will turn my copper into gold.

The fame of your greatness will capture the world.
Your slave Mashrab has come to say prayers of love and remembrance.

Take my hands, oh my pir

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

Take my hands, oh my *pir*, my strength is waning.
Put me on the road, oh my *pir*, my ecstasy is weakening.

I came today to pray to my *hazrat*,
I am a dejected orphan, my happiness is fading.

Loving Afaq Khoja gave me the name Mashrab,
I would die at your doorstep without sorrow.

(I am) the madman from the bazaar of enlightenment

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

(I am) the madman from the bazaar of enlightenment,
And from the wineshop of God's love.

My moan burns the two worlds.
And graces the people of love with wealth.

My eyes could not see the two worlds.
Since I was entranced by the sight of the beloved.

He made my heart a kingdom of ruins,
He will be the pearl of my soul's treasure.

I abandoned all that is ungodly.
This (profane) world is alien to that (sacred) one.

Mashrab the madman was astonished.
When he saw the graceful figure of the beloved.

It burns

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

If I speak of my love, the world and my soul will burn,
If I reveal the secrets of this love, even the vaults of heaven will burn.

If a spark of love's fire touches someone, they moan.
And their heart and liver burn in impatience.

With no home I burned ceaselessly in separation from you,
If I grasp your fire and say "beloved" my tongue burns with delight.

It is a terrible day, oh love, when separated from your sight,
My sighs turn earth and heaven into smoke.

What tongue, oh love, can describe you,
My tulip tongue, weeping eyes, and weak bones all burn.

I am devastated by this pain, and you show me no concern.
In secret pain, far from the world, my heart burns.

This pain of Mashrab, oh love, I beg that you give to no other.
If I sigh at the Last Judgment, Heaven will burn forever.

If I add thread from my soul to the strings of my satar

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

If I add thread from my soul to the strings of my *satar*,
With its lamentations I could possess a faithless heart.

Playing in a *maqam* form and *maqam* mode, I will make the *maqam* reach
the heart,
If destitute in the street of the beloved, I would play to them.

They say that the fathers of the *maqams* are Husayni and Ajam,
On the frets above those I will play Bayad.

Remembering God the truth most high I will play continually.
If I knew my beloved was miserable, I would play Nava.

Come, oh Mashrab, offer the cup, we immerse ourselves in drunkenness,

In one hand I hold the bowl of the tanbur, in the other I hold the bowl
of wine.

Saying Ana'l Haqq (I am God)

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

Saying *Ana'l Haqq* I was created to embrace divine revelation.
I always drink wine from the blood of Mansur [al-Hallaj].

The night of grief is full of my candle light and the smoke of my sighs,
I blame the sun and long for the doomed stars of my love.

I do not seek anything from infidels, nor have hopes from Islam.
Because I am an idolater of love, I cannot tell the Kaba from a pagan
temple.

In the wilderness I am the sighs of Majnun, in the river I am the tears of
Farhad.
There is no other madman like me, a lover in the land and the sea.

The salt of the beloved inflames my wounds and my sighs are sparks.
I am a merchant of love, selling goods of pain and medicine of sorrow.

I have become the prophet of melancholy, the madman Mashrab,
On the last day I will intercede for all those mad with love.

From the cup of love I drank sweet hadiths

Boborahim Mashrab

Translated by Nathan Light

From the cup of love I drank sweet hadiths,

I revealed the power of Allah from his notebook.

Oh executioner, put the rope of the people around my neck,
People do not know my value, I am a jewel in blood.

From seeking pearls of grace, I turned to seeking annihilation.
I will be killed by Mahmud, and be emperor of paradise.

In every limb I suffer great pain,
As if you sent Gabriel to bring me the prophet's love.

I turned my steps to the path of love, and burned the soles of my feet.
Don't blame me, I am from the ones who burn.

I am renouncer like Jesus, and dwell in the abode of revelation with Moses.
I am the sword that Muhammad placed in Ali's hands.

In my heart is the flood that afflicted Noah.
I am a spark of hell, I am an ember from the sparks.

The words of Mashrab always reveal God's truths.
I come from the middle of the letters "No by God."

ISMAILI MINSTREL POETRY

Badakhshan is a sparsely inhabited region in the high Pamirs of southeast Tajikistan, bordered to the east by China and to the south by Afghanistan. Badakhshan's inhabitants are isolated first by the region's formidable geography; as Ismailis, they are further isolated by their adherence to a Shi'a religious tradition. In 1992 and 1993, Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg traveled through Badakhshan, recording the music and texts of a minstrel tradition of sung poetry that survived in the region's mountain villages. These poems are sung to the accompaniment of different musical instruments, including the *daf* (a circular frame drum), various types of lutes, and even the accordion, and performed in the private space

of the home as well as in the more public spaces of weddings or funerals. The poems represent a multitude of often overlapping genres, including ghazals, folk songs, narrative poems, and stanzaic poetry, but the more salient division is between secular and religious poems. Religious poetry is sung in the context of *madâh* (literally, praise), a word that refers both to the poetry itself and to a performance tradition in which multiple different genres of religious poetry were strung together in a performance that might last for hours.

The singers loosely distinguished between *khalqî* (popular or folk) poems and the *shiʿr* (literary poetry) attributed to classical Persian poets. In some cases, the *shiʿr* poems can be clearly linked to the poetry of these authors; in other cases, the attribution appears to be apocryphal. The ghazal “Khâja say that I am me” uses the imagery of birds, arrows, and intoxication to describe a self-shattered by the experience of the divine, a common theme of the ghazals included in *madâh* performances. Ghazals that describe a state of ecstatic divine love are most often attributed to Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), the founder of the Mawlawiyya order of Sufi dervishes, and this poem is no exception: the penultimate line includes the *takhallus* (pen name) of Rumi, Shams, though the attribution appears to be apocryphal. The second ghazal included here, “Cup-bearer, enlighten our cup by the radiance of the wine,” ends with an attribution to Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (d. 1390), but in this case the poem is indeed derived from one of Hafiz’s works. The poem similarly centers on love, though here it is ambiguous if the love Hafiz describes is divine love or its earthly mirror.

Khalqî are either anonymous or the work of recognized local poets. The category includes folksongs, laments, wedding songs, and stanzaic poetry, genres distinguished both by performative context and by formal aspects. The folk song “In the garden high up stands a high sycamore” resembles a ghazal in its theme, but its local origin is marked by the repeated references to Rushon, the district where the song is performed. The folk song “I am Tahmîna, I am Tahmîna,” similarly takes up the theme of love, but here the inspiration is classical Persian poetry as the poem drafts a lament for one of the key characters in Abolqasem Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*.

Gabriel McGuire

Khâja say that I am me

Performed by Sarkorî Dawlatmahmadov, Ghulomsho Safarov, and
Shukrixudo Shukrixudoyev

Translated by Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg⁴

Khâja say that I am me, that I am not me, that me is not I
My soul is He in my body, I am not me, me is not I
Light the fire of Love, burn the prudence of livelihood
The darkness of night has become day, I am not me, me is not I
I am the arrow, I am the bow, I am old, I am young
This is me, that is me, I am not me, me is not I
I am His white falcon, I am the shadow of his willow
I am the path of His hope, I am not me, me is not I
I am His drunken camel, I am the wine from His hand
I am the thumbstall of His arrow, I am not me, me is not I
When my camel became drunk after drinking wine he got low
Screaming he fainted, I am not me, me is not I
Shams came in and brought me back to consciousness
He said: speak of good and evil, I am not me, me is not I.

Sponj, August 4, 1993

Cup-bearer, enlighten our cup by the radiance of the wine

Performed by Jonbozi Dushanbiyev and Sarkorî Dawlatmahmadov

Translated by Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg

Cup-bearer, enlighten our cup by the radiance of the wine
Minstrel, tell us that the things of this world go as we wish
We have seen in the goblet the reflection of the beloved's face:
Oh you, unknowing of the pleasure of our endless drink
Never dies he, whose heart became alive by love
Our continuance is confirmed in the cashbook of the world
How much are the glances and coquetry of the high-statured
When our cypress comes out, waving like a fir-tree
Oh wind, when you pass the rose-bed of the beloveds

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Think of presenting our message to the sweethearts
 Say: Why do you forget our name on purpose?
 The time when you will not remember our name will come by itself
 Intoxication by the eye of the beauty who binds our heart is fine:
 For that reason our reign has been given over in drunkenness
 I am afraid, that one the day of Reckoning the lawful bread of
 The shaykh does not bring in a higher price than our forbidden water
 The green sea of heavens and the ship of the crescent moon
 Are drowned in the beneficence of our Hâjî Qawâm
 Hâfiz, pour out every moment a teardrop from your eye
 Then maybe the bird of reunion will incline to our trap.

Sponj, July 22, 1992

In the garden high up stands a high sycamore

Performed by Xayrullo Ruzadorov, Ulfatsho Komilov, and
 Ozodmuhammad Safarmahmadov

Translated by Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg

In the garden high up stands a high sycamore
 The lips of my beloved are sugar and candy
 The sun rose from the mountains of Rushon
 How I waited, my beloved did not come
 In front of the fortress grass is growing
 The girl from Rushon has run away from us
 In the hallway two apples are rolling
 I take on, with a bite of my teeth
 In the kitchen garden there is a silken skirt
 Make a cigarette, smoke him and be gone
 In the courtyard, your stature is like a twig
 What do you ask from us, we wrote our name
 In the house a unique moon is sitting
 What question do you have, don't you know it?
 In the tent is a girl named Zulayxâ
 Her food consists of sweets and *halwâ*
 In the courtyard, your stature is like a twig
 Ask how we are, we are boys
 Move her hand, her sleeve is empty
 You are a newly risen plant, let me not see you hurt.

Derushon, August 14, 1992

I am Tahmîna, I am Tahmîna

Performed by Madazim Bahromov and Mirsaid and Firdaws Alibaxshov

Translated by Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg

I am Tahmîna, I am Tahmîna: from pain and grief I am split in two
 I am sad because of Suhrâb: my breast has become a jewel-case of grief
 My Suhrâb, my *mihrâb*, my sun, my moonlight
 In this lonely world my only one, my unfounded one
 In the field in which he was roaming, he became covered in blood and earth
 He was born by Rustam's love: he was killed by Rustam's anger
 He said to me "I'll find the trace of the great Rustam"
 With that sign from his father he went and disappeared without a sign
 from the sea and the earth
 The bloom of my time has gone, the abundance of my garden has gone
 The sword that Rustam hit him with passed through his armor and soul
 He fell from his saddle like a star from the highest sphere
 My white milk became a flood of blood from his body on the earth
 What is left of my existence, a tomorrow without purpose
 Whose hand will take up the bier on the day of my death?
 Alas for black fortune, alas for Rustam and fate
 The world became old like my heart, oh grief, oh lament!

Tusiya, July 27, 1993

THE FOLKTALE

Images of male authority are a commonplace of Central Asian oral literature. Families long for male heirs, daughters are rewarded for their loyalty to fathers and husbands, and sons are celebrated for asserting authority over their own mothers. "Dudar Qyz," a folktale the German scholar Wilhelm Radloff included in his 1870 collection of Kazakh oral literature, begins with a scene that in other tales underlines the value of the patriline. In the opening scene, Dudar Qyz's parents are refused a seat at the Khan's table on the pretext that they lack children, a motif that similarly initiates the narrative of Bogach Khan in the thirteenth-century *Book of Dede Korkut*, as well as appearing in many of the epics dedicated to the Noghai leader Edige. Yet "Dudar Qyz" differs from these texts in that this scene sets the stage for the birth not of a son but of a daughter,

a detail that foreshadows the ways in which the tale traffics in the disruption and inversion of gender norms. Soon, Dudar Qyz will expel women from the female space of the birthing tent in favor of her father, usurp her father's prerogative of negotiating her marriage, and eventually claim her father's weapons as her dowry.

The plot of "Dudar Qyz" combines elements of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale-types ATU 514 The Shift of Sex and ATU 706 The Maiden Without Hands. In ATU 514, a king or queen has three daughters, one of whom disguises herself as a man, goes to war, and causes another king's daughter to fall in love with her. Stories of this tale-type usually end with the daughter's magical transformation into a man, but "Dudar Qyz" has a different resolution: she reveals her breasts to her adopted older brother Töstik and suggests he marry both her and the Khan's daughter, whose hand Dudar Qyz had won due to her martial skill. From this point on, "Dudar Qyz" becomes in some ways a more conventional story, with a plot based on ATU 706, The Maiden Without Hands. In this tale-type, a king marries a girl who has been mutilated by her family, she gives birth, but is then forced into exile when an enemy alters a letter from the king. The motif of the altered letter plays a central role in "Dudar Qyz," forcing her to raise her son alone on the steppe, but the physical mutilation that gives the tale-type its name is here experienced not by Dudar Qyz but by her husband, who loses his legs in his long wandering in search of wife and child. "Dudar Qyz" became perhaps the best known of the Kazakh folktales in Radloff's anthology and was widely republished in Soviet and post-Soviet tale collections. Yet the republished versions are often heavily bowdlerized, with the violence and sexual slapstick of Radloff's version edited out.

Hejerkhan, the hero of the Uyghur folktale "Golden Shoes," initially appears to be a more passive figure than Dudar Qyz. "Golden Shoes," one of the most famous Uyghur folktales, is well-documented in collections of oral literature and is still told today. The translation here is based on a version published in *Tarim*, a Uyghur literary journal, in 1958, that was told by an elderly woman named Kheynisakhan to the journal's editor, Dawut Turekhmet. The story's plot is the tale-type ATU 510A "Cinderella," and the Uyghur tale, like the European versions, castigates a stepmother and her daughter for their greed and laziness while rewarding Hejerkhan for the skill and patience with which she approaches the drudgery of household labor. Yet the story is also deferential toward

female authority within the home, as Hejerkhan is rewarded for the courtesy and kindness she displays toward the old woman who becomes her patron. In the Kashgar region of Xinjiang, the eminent anthropologist and expert in Uyghur folk culture Rahile Dawut reported that the tale was sometimes recited as part of the Sufi women's ritual of *Büwi Seyshenbe Anam Khetmisi*, a practice in which women gather at night to cook a collective meal. The ritual is literally translated as "Rite of the Sacred Tuesday Mother," and the old woman in the story was herself sometimes called the "Tuesday Mother." The women interpret the tale as communicating the ideal of *Japakesh*, whereby enduring misfortune with grace and moral courage grants merit in this world and rewards in the next. The women Dawut spoke with told her that the Tuesday ritual underlined themes of community and female solidarity of the kind that Hejerkhan and the wise old woman model in "Golden Shoes."

Outside of oral circulation, the Uyghur writer Halide Israel's novel *The Golden Shoes* gave the folk tale a second life in written literature. Her novel is part of the broader genre of "scar literature," or texts that attempt to reckon with the traumas of the Cultural Revolution. Published in 2016 and an immediate and massive success with the Uyghur community, the novel tells the story of three students at Xinjiang University who stage a theatrical performance of the folktale to great acclaim, only for their performance to be denounced during the Cultural Revolution as fanciful and ideologically aberrant. All three are exiled to the countryside, and the novel traces both their fate and that of their children and grandchildren, who survive but progressively lose their knowledge of Uyghur language and culture. For many readers, the novel seemed to share not only the title of the folktale but also the theme of *Japakesh*. The hardships suffered by the Uyghurs as a people were to be thought of as parallel to the harsh lot of Hejerkhan. Though the novel ends on an optimistic note, with one character expressing a dream of one day again performing the play on stage, the book itself was banned within months, and the author and editors were all arrested. Rahile Dawut similarly disappeared after her arrest in 2017. It has recently been revealed that she has been sentenced to life in prison. In a painful echo of the ending of "Golden Shoes" itself, the words of the story survive even as the people themselves disappear.

Gabriel McGuire, Musapir

Dudar Qyz, or The Girl with the Tangled Locks

Translated by Gabriel McGuire

Long ago, there lived a *bai*, a wealthy man, who had a vast herd of horses but neither son nor daughter. The *bai* let the horses wander freely, yet wolves never ate them, thieves never stole them. One day the khan of a neighboring land asked, "Why is it that wolves never prey upon his horses and thieves never steal them, while my horses are both eaten by wolves and stolen by thieves?" His men replied, "The childless *bai* has a great dappled stallion who will not let wolves prey upon his horses, who will not let thieves take them." The khan sent one of his men to the *bai* with the command, "Give me the dappled stallion!" But when the man returned, he said the *bai* had refused to surrender his stallion.

The khan announced he would hold a *toi*, a great feast, but he proclaimed, "I will not let those without a son sit at the feast, I will not pour mare's milk out for those without a daughter!" All the people came and gathered at the *toi*, until finally the wife of the childless *bai* said, "Let us go too!" The *bai* replied that as the khan had said they should not come, so they would remain where they were, but in the end he said, "If we must go, let us go!" The *bai* filled a leather jug with fermented mare's milk, he lashed it on the back of a camel, his wife led the camel while he walked behind and drove it, and in this way they came to the *toi*. The two of them stood waiting outside the feast, but no one came out shouting that a guest had arrived, that a *bai* stood waiting at the door. Then the *bai* grew angry; he whipped a knife out from the sheath hanging at his side, he slashed the leather jug and let the milk spill out on the ground, and all the way home he kept beating his wife and shouting, "I said we shouldn't go to the *toi*, but you wouldn't heed me!"

When they reached their home, the *bai* took a stallion from among the horses, a bull from the cows, a ram from the sheep, and a buck from the goats. He took the stallion, the bull, the ram, and the buck out into the steppe and at the head of a broad lake he made a sacrifice of all four to God. The *bai* and his wife sat at the head of the lake and prayed God would grant them a child, saying "Oh God, keep your gifts of flocks and herds, but only give us a son, give us a daughter!"

That night the *bai* had a dream in which he was told, "Sacrifice the dappled stallion, and I shall give you a daughter!" The *bai* led his dappled stallion to his home, he bound its legs, and though his wife wept and begged him to spare the steed, he did not heed her but cut its throat.

That night they lay down to sleep and when they rose in the morning his wife was pregnant. The time for the child to be born came near and all the women of the camp gathered round and shouted that they should be the ones to cut the umbilical cord. Then a voice was heard from inside the womb, saying "Drive the women out of the yurt, I can birth myself, I have no need of them, but only send my father here, him I need."

The *bai* came, and now the voice said, "Father, father, shall I be born now?"

The *bai* replied, "My darling, of course you should."

"If I shall have charge of myself, I will come out, but if not, I shall remain here!"

Then her father said, "You shall have charge of yourself."

With that, the child came right out of her mother and fell thump on the floor. The women in the village were shocked and ran up asking, "What kind of a child is this, tell us, is it a son or a daughter?" "A daughter!" replied the *bai*. He had a sheep slaughtered, poured out mare's milk for all the guests, and made a *toi* in celebration of her birth.

The girl grew up and became so beautiful that soon the sons of wealthy men came every day in hopes of marrying her. Her father told all of the young men, "I cannot say yes or no, my daughter must answer, for she has charge of herself." The young men would come to the girl, greet her and ask, "Will you come to my home?" The girl would reply, "Certainly, I will come with you, but only if you guess my name. If you can't guess, I shall remain where I am." None of the young men could guess, for even her father and mother did not know her name.

One day her mother asked her, "How shall we call you when we don't even know your name?" The girl replied, "My name is Dudar Qyz, the girl with the tangled locks, but mind you keep this secret!"

One day yet another young man came, and the *bai* yet again replied, "I cannot say, she will say for herself if she will go with you or stay." The young man went to the girl. They greeted one another, they started to talk. "You should choose me as your husband," he said. "Guess my name, and I will come, but if you can't, I won't," she replied. But still no one could guess her name.

One day the family began to move their camp to new pastures, and the girl's belongings were loaded on a camel that a slave girl led behind the caravan. Dudar Qyz came riding past the camel on a black horse, but as she galloped past the camel's load slipped and fell to one side. Dudar Qyz didn't see, and when the slave girl called out she didn't hear, so the

slave girl yelled, "Girl, you with the tangled locks! Come and help me, the camel has slipped his load!"

Dudar Qyz rode back and said, "Did you call my name?"

"I never spoke your name; I only called out, girl, come help me!" replied the slave girl.

The two reloaded the camel and led it to where the caravan had settled for the night. After the yurt had been set up, Dudar Qyz went inside and settled down in the place of honor.

A young man came and said, "*Bai*, I have come to take your daughter!"

"That is for her to decide," replied her father.

The young man went to her and said, "Hey, girl, how do you do? I've come to claim you in marriage!"

"Then guess my name."

"Isn't your name Bailantughyn?"

"No, that's not my name."

"Then it must be Dudar Qyz," he said, and she replied that it was.

There was a great feast when the girl and the young man took each other's hands in marriage, and when Dudar Qyz's father prepared to send her off he said, "I shall divide my herds, and you shall take each and every one of my horses with you." When she went off to where the herds were grazed and began to examine the horses, she saw a bay colt that stood sweating and shivering. She began to stroke Bay Colt's mane, and then suddenly he began to speak: "Eh, Dudar Qyz, so are they sending you to get married?"

"Yes, I am being sent to my husband's home," she replied.

"And what will be your dowry?"

"My father has said he will give me each and every one of his horses."

"What do you want with all those herds? Don't take them! And if your father offers you rich furnishings, don't take them either! But what about your husband, is he a good man or a bad one?"

"Good, bad, I don't know."

"Well, if you don't know, I'll tell you. Your husband, he's a huge wolf who goes about in the form of a man. When you were traveling across the steppe, the camel your slave girl led slipped its load, and she called for your help. When you didn't hear her, she called out 'Dudar Qyz' to get your attention. The wolf was close then, devouring a corpse he had dug out of a grave, and he heard your name."

Dudar Qyz was frightened when she heard this, Bay Colt told her, "Even if your father would give you all his horses, don't take them. Tell

him that you wish for only his bow and arrows, the slave girl, the black camel, and me.”

When Dudar Qyz returned to her home, she sat down and began to weep. Her father said to her, “Don’t cry, soon you will be married!” Dudar Qyz looked at him, and he said, “My child, tell me what you would have.”

“My father, if you give me your bow and your arrows, I will take them. If you give me the slave girl, I will take her. If you give me the black camel, I will take the black camel. And if you give me Bay Colt, I will take Bay Colt.”

“The slave girl, the black camel, and Bay Colt I will give you, but my bow and arrows I will keep,” he replied.

Dudar Qyz again began to weep, and her mother scolded her father, saying “Is your bow and your arrows worth more to you than your daughter? If she needs them, let her have them!” Then her father said, “Take them, my child,” and he gave her the bow and arrows.

Dudar Qyz roped Bay Colt, and he grew into a *qunan*. She put a halter and saddle on him, and he grew to a *dönen*. She led him about, and suddenly he was a *besti*. She began to ride him, and look, he had grown to be a 6-year-old horse.⁵ She led the black camel away, and she sat her slave girl on it. She took everything that was hers, slung the bow around her neck, mounted Bay Colt, and set off for her husband’s home. Her husband told her, “I shall ride ahead. When you come to the hills, keep traveling. When you come to a lake, stop.”

Her husband ran off and left her there. Then Bay Colt asked her, “Eh, Dudar Qyz, do you know why your husband ran off and left you?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“I know,” said Bay Colt. “He has run off to turn into a wolf, but he will soon come back and then he will eat the black camel, he will eat the slave girl.”

They had gone only a little distance when suddenly a huge wolf appeared. The wolf came up and he swallowed the black camel; he bolted down the slave girl. Then the wolf ran off. He soon turned back into a young man and came riding after them, and look, it was Dudar Qyz’s husband.

⁵ A *qunan* is a 2 years old colt, a *dönen* a three year old, and a *besti* a 5 years old.

"Eh, Dudar Qyz," he said. "What has become of the black camel, where has the slave girl gone?"

"A wolf came and ate them both," she replied.

"Well, if they're eaten, they're eaten," he said. "There, where you see light glowing between the mountains, is my home. Go there. I shall go ahead."

Then Bay Colt again spoke, "Eh, Dudar Qyz, what are you thinking?"

"What should I think?" she replied.

"The woman who will come out to greet you is a wolf so greedy she could swallow seven tribes and not be sated. She will try to seize the reins from your hand, but mind you hold them fast!"

The wolf-wife came running up to the young bride and said, "I shall take the reins from Dudar Qyz!"

"No," she replied. "Don't take the reins, I'll tether my own horse, for you are the elder and I am the younger here."

Dudar Qyz dismounted, she tethered her horse by the yurt, she went in and sat beside the door. Her husband sat on a pile of bedding at the head of the yurt with his oldest wife by his side. He was sleeping now, but soon he awoke. "Eh, Dudar Qyz, come and sit by me!" he said, but she didn't go. "I won't go and disgrace the oldest wife by sitting in her place," she said. He grunted with anger at this, but still she wouldn't move. The oldest wife came running to his side and began to scratch his head, to scratch his back, until he dozed off and slept for seven days and seven nights. The *bai* sighed in his sleep, he grunted, he even bellowed. All this time Bay Colt was tied to the yurt. In the end, Dudar Qyz got up and left, saying "I shall go and tether my horse in the steppe." She went out with her bow and her arrows and mounted Bay Colt, who said, "Close your eyes now, and mind you keep them closed for three days and three nights!"

Bay Colt leaped into the air and flew for three days, for three nights, and on the third night he landed. Dudar Qyz opened her eyes, and Bay Colt told her, "Take off my saddle, loosen my bridle, let me look about." She took off saddle and bridle, and the horse seemed to shed his exhaustion with them. He rolled on the ground, he grazed on the pasture, and soon he was the same as before his flight. He galloped off, and far in the distance he saw a lone man. Bay Colt came running back to Dudar Qyz and told her, "Grab the reins and get in the saddle!" She took the reins, and they rode up to the man the horse had seen.

"*As-Salaam-Alaikum*," said the man.

"*Wa-Alaikum-Salaam*," replied Dudar Qyz.

"Who are you?" asked the young rider.

"I am a warrior, out hunting in the steppe!"

"You are a warrior, I am a warrior," said the rider. "Let me be your *agha*, your elder brother, and you shall be my *ini*, my younger brother!"

So they agreed one was the elder brother, one the younger, and the two were as blood kin. They began to hunt together and in the evening returned to the young man's home with three wild asses. The young man, Töstik Batyr, had shot one, while Dudar Qyz had with a single shot struck down two.

Töstik Batyr lived with his mother, and she asked him, "Töstik my child, who is it who comes riding with you?"

"Mother," he replied. "The one who rides with me is a warrior, a man greater than I, for while I shot a single wild ass, he shot two."

"My child, don't think you can spit in my eye, this is no man but a girl."

The younger brother slaughtered the three wild asses, brought water, boiled the meat, and cooked the meal. They ate the food, and when the sun rose in the morning, they mounted their horses and set off hunting. Dudar Qyz shot two wild asses and Töstik Batyr one. When they were butchering the wild asses, a man came up to them leading a horse across the steppe.

"I have come in search of Töstik," said the man in greeting.

Töstik Batyr welcomed him and asked, "Where are you going?"

"I have come for you," said the man.

"What need have you of me?"

"Our padishah has made a *toi*," the man replied. "He has fastened a golden coin to the top of a poplar, and he has said that he will give his daughter as a bride to whoever can shoot the coin out of the tree. If you go there and shoot the coin, you may win the girl, for they have not yet found one who can shoot this well. No matter how many people have come and had their shot, none have knocked the gold coin out of the tree. If you were there, you would shoot down the coin and win the girl."

Töstik Batyr, Dudar Qyz, and the messenger set off together and soon came to the padishah. A huge crowd of people had gathered to shoot at the gold coin, but none could strike it. Töstik Batyr shot and his arrow passed close by the coin, but when Dudar Qyz shot the coin fell ringing to the ground.

"You will be the padishah's son-in-law!" cried the people, and they raised Dudar Qyz on a carpet, brought her before the padishah, and led the padishah's daughter to Dudar Qyz's bed.

Three days passed and the time came for the padishah's daughter to set out with her husband for her new home. But as she traveled across the steppe, she told her *ini*, her younger brother, "Why have you given me to such a one as this, she's a girl, as I am a girl."

Bay Colt came to Dudar Qyz and said, "Hey, Dudar Qyz, this bride you are bringing home has been telling her brother you are a girl just like her."

Dudar Qyz asked if she should flee, but Bay Colt said, "Go to your brother-in-law and challenge him to a horse race. He won't refuse." Dudar Qyz came to the young man and said, "Let us race." The two galloped off into the steppe, but Bay Colt soon outpaced the other. Once they were well ahead, Dudar Qyz shot a wild ass, hacked off its penis, and took it away with her.

Soon they came to a lake, and Dudar Qyz said, "Hey, little brother, let's take a swim." The two of them stripped off their clothes and plunged into the water, with Dudar Qyz holding what she had taken from the wild ass in front of the cleft between her legs. She swam up to her brother-in-law, and he was happy indeed at what he thought he saw hanging there. The two came back out of the water, and Dudar Qyz, seeing she had tricked her brother-in-law, put her clothes back on and threw away the penis of the wild ass. The two mounted their horses and rode home to the padishah's daughter.

Then her *ini* spoke, "My sister, you have said this one was a girl, but it's a man! I have seen the cleft between his legs, and I have seen what hangs there!"

The padishah's daughter was delighted, and the wedding party soon reached the home of Töstik Batyr's mother. They rested there for three days, and on the fourth day her brother-in-law departed. In the morning, Dudar Qyz got up and went off alone hunting in the steppe, telling Töstik Batyr, "*Agha*, stay here and rest, I shall return in the evening."

As she rode alone across the steppe, Bay Colt spoke and said, "Hey, Dudar Qyz, shall we turn back?"

"No, the time has come for me to leave," replied Dudar Qyz.

Then Bay Colt said, "We have heard nothing from that wolf husband of yours. Tomorrow, go out hunting in the steppe with Töstik. Take him as your husband."

In the evening she returned home with two wild asses she had shot. She lay down to sleep, and in the morning rose and washed her face and hands. “Hey, *agha*, get up! Let’s go out together and shoot wild asses!”

“Very well, if we must, let’s go!” he replied.

The two rode off into the open steppe, and Dudar Qyz asked, “Hey, *agha*, who shall have that padishah’s daughter we brought back?”

“Oh, my dear, you should take her yourself,” he replied.

“But who then will take me?” she asked.

“Who will take you . . . ?”

“Hey, *agha*, I also used to be a girl.” With these words, Dudar Qyz opened her coat and showed him her breasts.⁶ He was overjoyed, and when they returned home took both Dudar Qyz and the padishah’s daughter as his wives. When his mother learned Dudar Qyz was a girl, all she said was “Oof,” and then lit a fire to warm their yurt. Soon Dudar Qyz had a child in her belly.

Then enemies came to their land, and the people gathered to drive them back. Dudar Qyz spoke to Töstik Batyr and told him not to go, but he would not listen to her words. “I shall go to fight the enemy!” he said.

“If you must, then go. But don’t even think of riding Bay Colt, for he will abandon you and return to me,” said Dudar Qyz.

But her husband would not listen to these words either, and when Dudar Qyz tried to keep the horse’s hobbles from him by holding them clenched between her legs, he wrenched them away from her and mounted Bay Colt. “Farewell, mother,” he said. “When my wife gives birth, send someone after me, and if she gives birth to a son, let him be called Altynbai!” With these words, he rode off.

A month went by, and at the end of the month his wife had given birth to a son. His head glowed gold and his body shone silver. His grandmother said, “Now it is time to send for my son Töstik! Tell him that his wife Dudar Qyz has given birth to a son, a child whose head glows gold, whose body shines silver.” She wrote all this and sent the letter off with a messenger. She mounted the man on a black racing horse, and in six

⁶ In the original Kazakh, Töstik is referred to as *agha* (uncle) at the beginning of the sentence, but as *jigit* (young man) once Dudar Qyz reveals her breasts. Throughout the section where Dudar Qyz dresses as a man, the narrator consistently refers to the characters around Dudar Qyz using kinship terms that assume she is male. The padisha’s younger brother is not Dudar Qyz’s *ini* or *agha*, but rather her *baldyz* (man’s younger in-law, whether male or female).

days' time he had journeyed a full month's ride. Then he saw a long thin stream of smoke rising up from a hollow in the ground. When he came closer, he saw a door, and behind it, a dried-up old woman with bent legs sitting there.

"My child, where do you journey?" asked the old woman.

"Have you seen soldiers make their camp here?" he replied.

"I saw them. They camped here and then went on, but I see that you are tired from your journey. Get off your horse, tether him here, and I will make you dinner," replied the old woman.

He dismounted his horse, tethered him, came into the house, settled himself, drank the fermented gruel the old woman handed him, and, saying "I shall rest just a little," dropped off to sleep.

While he was sleeping, the old woman slipped her hand in his pocket and tugged out the slip of paper there, for he was too drunk from the gruel to waken. The old woman read the scrap of paper and learned that Dudar Qyz had given birth to a son whose head glowed gold, whose body shone silver. She learned that Dudar Qyz was now in the home of Töstik Batyr. The old woman was the mother of the monstrous wolf. She slipped the paper back in the pocket of the sleeping messenger, and again he did not wake.

Finally, the young man awoke, yawned, and said, "Hey, the sun is already low in the sky. I must be on my way."

"If you must ride on, ride on," said the old woman. "But on your return, stop with us again."

The young man mounted his horse, and again set off in pursuit of Töstik. Finally, he found him, and Töstik greeted him.

"Where do you travel, young man?"

"I have come for you," he replied. "Your mother has sent you a letter, for your bride has given birth to a son."

Töstik read the letter and rejoiced at the news of his son, saying, "Now I shall return." But his companions would not hear of this and told him, "No, stay, for in only one month's time, we will have defeated the enemy and may all return together. You are our greatest warrior and hero. Stay with us, and let's humiliate our foes!"

Since his companions would not let him return, Töstik wrote a letter to his mother, saying, "Greetings, my mother. Now is the time for a *toi*. Gather all the people. And give my son the name of Altynbai!"

Again the messenger rode off, again he passed the home of the old woman on his way, again dismounted, and again fell asleep, saying, "I

shall rest just a little." When the old woman saw he was sleeping, she pulled the letter from his pocket, tossed it on the fire, and burnt it up. Then she wrote her own letter: "The messenger you sent has ridden his horse hard. Greetings to you. Gather thirty wagon loads of wood, build a great fire, then burn Dudar Qyz and her child!" She wrote this, then she slipped the letter into the messenger's pocket.

The messenger woke, stretched himself, said, "I must be on my way," mounted his horse, rode home,, and gave the letter to Töstik's mother. His mother read the letter. She sent for the thirty wagon loads of wood, but she only did half of what her son had commanded.

Dudar Qyz's son had only just been born. He cried at night, and in the middle of the night Bay Colt came.

"Dudar Qyz, are you sleeping?" he asked.

"No, I cannot sleep," she answered.

"Come," said Bay Colt. "Take Altynbai and leave."

Dudar Qyz rose, dressed herself, tied her belt, and gripped her child to her breast. She left the house and saw Bay Colt coming toward her. At the sight of Bay Colt she began to weep, for he had come all this way bound in iron hobbles, and his bones shone white where the iron had torn his flesh. Dudar Qyz freed Bay Colt from the hobbles, mounted him, and the three of them fled into the dark. Yet behind them someone came chasing. Bay Colt tried to fly but couldn't, then tried to gallop but couldn't, and all the while the pursuer grew closer.

Dudar Qyz took out a comb with fine teeth. She threw the comb behind her, saying "Let there be a forest." A forest sprung up, with trees so thick no one could pass. Now they saw it was the old woman chasing them on her bent legs, but she soon got lost in the trees. Dudar Qyz rode on, but the old woman made her way out of the trees and continued her chase. Then Dudar Qyz took out a mirror. "Be a river, wide as a lake," she commanded, and threw the mirror behind her. A river spread out around them, wide as a lake.

Dudar Qyz and Bay Colt swam out into the middle of the river. Behind them the old woman came chasing, and now she grabbed Dudar Qyz's arm. When Dudar Qyz saw this, she drew her dagger, but the old woman tore it from her hands and slashed open the belly of Bay Colt. Bay Colt kicked her with both his legs, and now at last she fell with a broken neck. They reached the far side of the river, but Bay Colt's guts spilled from the gash in his belly, and he stumbled and fell dying.

Dudar Qyz sat weeping with her arms around Bay Colt's head.

“Dudar Qyz, don’t weep,” said Bay Colt. “Cut off my four hooves, throw them in four directions, say ‘Let there be four stallions!’ Cut open my breast, throw it here, and say ‘Let there be a great white yurt!’”

Bay Colt died, and though for three nights and three days Dudar Qyz held his head and wept, he did not return to life. Dudar Qyz took a knife and cut off Bay Colt’s four hooves, threw them in four directions and said, “Let there be four stallions!” She cut off the breast of Bay Colt, threw it down where she had lain and said, “Let there be a great white yurt!” Each hoof became a stallion with a herd of horses, Bay Colt’s breast became a great white tent, and now Dudar Qyz was a *bai* herself, with mares to milk. Altynbai grew to be a man, and he watched over the herds.

One day while guarding the herd, Altynbai saw a lame man shoot a gazelle. He seized the gazelle and brought it home to his mother. The next day Altynbai again saw the lame man wandering the steppe, and this time the man called him over and placed his cap on Altynbai’s head. Altynbai wore the cap as he walked home, but when he passed the milking mares, he took it off and threw it to the side. His mother came out to milk the mares while he went inside the yurt and lay down to sleep. She came up to the mares and saw the hat resting on the ground. She grabbed it and came weeping back to the yurt. She embraced Altynbai and asked him, “Where did you find this?! Tell me!”

“I was given it by a lame man, a one-legged man alone on the steppe,” he answered.

“That man was Töstik Batyr, my husband and your father,” said Dudar Qyz. “Go and bring him to me.”

Altynbai went and took hold of his father, raised him up, slung him on his back, and carried him back to the yurt.

Altynbai’s mother ran out weeping to meet them. Altynbai let go of his father’s hands and let him fall to the ground, then mounted his horse and rode out into the steppe. In the evening he returned and found that Dudar Qyz had washed the lame man in mare’s milk, clothed him in fine robes, and filled him with rich food. They were a family once again.

Dudar Qyz asked her husband, “Hey, my husband, where were you wandering?”

“Where did I wander? Didn’t I leave to go chase the enemy from our land? Weren’t you heavy with child even then? And didn’t I tell my mother, if you give birth to a son, have a swift rider carry word to me? And so, one day a young man came riding swiftly, saying that now I had a son, and handed me a letter from my mother. In the letter she

wrote, 'Dudar Qyz has given birth to a son whose head glows gold, whose body shines silver. Return now and greet your son, Töstik Batyr!' My war-companions were gathered around me, and didn't I ask them to let me go? But they all spoke out, saying I was their greatest warrior and asking what would become of them if I abandoned them. 'Send a letter,' they said, so I called for ink and wrote, 'Make a great *toi* and let my son be known as Altynbai!' The young man placed the letter in the breast of his coat, and I bid him ride off and neither halt nor sleep till he had reached you. But now I ask of you, Dudar Qyz, how did you come to this place? What cruelties and misfortunes have you seen, and at whose hands?"

"I was resting inside the yurt when the rider you had sent returned. Your mother asked if you had come, and the young man said, 'No, he has not returned, but here is his letter.' My mother-in-law read the letter, and you had written, 'Gather thirty loads of wood, then burn the girl and Altynbai together!' I lay there weeping for my death, but then in the night Bay Colt came and together we escaped. Some stranger came running after us, in the end they caught us and slashed Bay Colt, but Bay Colt reared up, struck with his hooves, and broke their neck. As Bay Colt died, he told me to cut off his four legs and throw them in the four directions, to cut off his breast and throw it here. I did as he said, and there appeared a yurt and herds of horses. It was I who sent Altynbai to carry you home. Now I would know how you lost your legs."

"When Bay Colt abandoned me, I went out to search for him, but no matter how long I looked I never found him. I had no horse so I went on foot, my shoes wore out, their soles tore off. Barefoot I went and walked till my feet were bloody and lame. No food I had but what I could gather by hunting."

Together they packed the yurt and journeyed to their homeland to greet their kin.

"Where did you come from?" asked Er Töstik's mother, and they told her of Er Töstik's wanderings. Then his mother asked him, "My child, when your son was born, I sent a rider to fetch you. Why didn't you return, and why did you send me a letter bidding me to burn Dudar Qyz together with her child?" And he replied that he had never sent such a command.

They called the messenger and asked him, "Hey, young man, what path did you take and where did you sleep?"

"If I tell you, I will die, if I hold my tongue, I will die, so I shall tell everything," said the messenger. "I rode through the steppe until I

came to a hollow in the ground with smoke rising up from it. I made for the smoke and spoke with the old woman I found there. ‘Where are you going, young man?’ she asked, and I told her my task. ‘Let you and your horse rest here for a little,’ she told me. She gave me a cup of fermented gruel, I drank it, lay down, slept long, and when I awoke, I mounted my horse and rode on. Then on my return, again I stopped, again she poured me a cup of fermented gruel, again I drank, grew drunk, and slept. It must have been the old woman who did this, for I never stopped at the camp of another soul. I came straight here, and for myself I can’t read or write. Now, it is for you to say what my lot will be.”

With that he fell at Töstik Batyr’s feet, and Töstik Batyr pardoned him. Töstik Batyr became a wealthy *bai*, his son married a khan’s daughter and became an even greater warrior than his father, and so in the end everything they wished for came to be.

The Golden Shoes

As told by Kheynisakhan

Translated by Musapir and Akbar Amat⁷

Our story begins, as they say, with a sackful of millet and an orphan in the corner.⁸ In the village there was a woman who had two daughters. The younger one was her own child but the older one was only her stepdaughter. Her daughter was named Patimikhan and her stepdaughter was named Hejerkhan. Hejerkhan was beautiful, hardworking, and diligent. Patimikhan was ugly, lazy, and quarrelsome. She was obsessed with food and clothes. Yet the stepmother always favored her own daughter and mistreated her stepdaughter. She would scold her, saying, “Don’t stare, or I will tear your eyes out. Don’t talk, or I will cut your tongue out.” She never cared if Hejerkhan was hungry, she gave her only ragged clothes to wear, and she never combed her hair. Until the age of seven, the poor girl grew up eating nothing but scraps from the table, burnt bread, and broth without meat.

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⁸ In Uyghur, these words rhyme. Rhyming phrases are a standard way of introducing a folktale in Uyghur, marking the narrator’s breakthrough into performance.

One day the stepmother started to yell at her. "You good-for-nothing, lice-ridden girl, how long will you remain a child? Do you think bread is free? Go and fill this basket with dry grass and dung for the fire. Then take the cows to pasture and be sure they don't get mixed up with the neighbor's cattle." She sent her out to herd the cow, threatening, "If you lose a single one, I'll beat you to death." For nine years, the girl took the cows to pasture. Mornings she went out into the forest, and nights she slept in the cowshed. In the evenings she did all the cooking, washed the clothes, cut the wood for the fire, and baked the bread. Yet no matter how hard she worked her stepmother never stopped cursing at her and never treated her any better.

One day, the stepmother snuck out to see the place where Hejerkhan was grazing the cows. She saw that the girl had brought the cows to a shady place in a meadow and was herself sleeping under a wild olive tree, saying to herself, "Well, it is noon now, let me rest a little bit." The stepmother began to yell, "No wonder you brought home so little fuel for the fire, for here you sit sleeping all day, you lazy, good-for-nothing child!" She drove her home through the forest, cursing her, pulling her hair, and kicking her all the way.

When Hejerkhan took the cattle out early the next morning, her stepmother stopped her and said, "You wicked thing, when did you get so sly?" She gave her a mass of cotton and said, "Instead of sleeping, spin this cotton and bring me the thread." The girl took it and left without saying a word. Now, on top of grazing the cattle and gathering dung for the fire, she had to spin cotton. She would come home in the evening tired to the bone, yet there would be still more chores waiting for her at home. And every day the stepmother would give her larger and larger piles of cotton to spin, saying, "Who said you could rest?" Then, on top of this, the stepmother apprenticed her to a neighbor who was a master weaver. The poor girl now had to weave silk cloth all night without rest. After she had herded cattle and collected dung all day, she still wasn't able to get to bed until midnight. If she failed to spin enough cotton, she was beaten for it when she returned in the evening. Every evening she had the same chores. If she fainted from lack of sleep, there was nowhere for her to stretch out her legs. In the summer she slept outside on stones, bitten by mosquitoes and flies. In the winter, she slept in the barn among the cows and sheep and was bitten by ticks. The hardship and cruelty of her life became more than she could endure. In the night she would weep

silently. In the day, she would sing songs and cry in the forest where there was no one to hear her:

*Pah, pah, pain of mosquitos,
Pain of ticks.
Worse of all,
The pain of having a stepmother.*

*Instead of bread she gives a burnt crust,
Instead of food, she gives broth.
So bad it is,
The pain of a stepmother.*

One day when Hejerkhan was crying and singing in the forest out of fear that she might be beaten to death for not being able to finish her spinning, there was a sudden gust and a whirlwind came and lifted away the cotton. The girl cried, "Oh no, what will I say when I go home?!" She ran after the whirlwind and pleaded, "Dear whirlwind brother, my mother will beat me, please give me the cotton back!" But the whirlwind kept going and the girl kept running after it. Then she saw the whirlwind had whirled into a hole in a cliff. The girl followed and saw a yard with a garden and a house in the middle. When she came near, there was an old woman sitting inside.

The girl came quietly to the door and said, "*Assalam*, grandmother." The old woman replied, "Come in, sit in the place of honor... what hardship has befallen on you, my daughter?" The girl clasped her hands, bowed slightly, and said, "The whirlwind brother took away my cotton. When I chased after him, he disappeared into this yard." The old woman said, "Do not be afraid, my child, you will get your thread. First, cook me a meal as thick as your hips and as thin as your arms. I want noodle soup, my daughter." "Certainly, grandmother," the girl said. Then she washed her hands and began to cook. She quickly made a delicious soup, cutting the noodles as thin as hair, and put it before the old woman.

The old woman ate the food and said, "My daughter, now please wash the pot and bowls, pour the slop water into the hearth, sweep the house, and throw the dust out of the window." The girl immediately washed the pot and bowls, poured the wastewater into the slop pit, swept the house and threw the dust into a hole in the yard.

The old woman said, "Look, my daughter, my head has suddenly begun to itch, please comb my hair." The girl washed the old woman's hair, then combed it and braided it. This pleased the old woman, who said, "Thank you! Your cotton is in the jar in the corner, take it and go home at once."

When the girl reached into the jar, she saw that inside it was a brightly lit room, filled with pearls and jewels, gold and silver, and treasure of all kinds. But the girl did not bother herself with any of that and took only her cotton. She saw that her cotton had been spun into beautiful strands of thread. When she turned her back to leave, she felt something heavy on her head. She touched the back of her head and discovered that a golden tress had grown there. She bowed to the old woman and thanked her as she left. Then the old woman took two strands of her own white hair and said, "Stop, my daughter, come back. Whenever you have hardships, throw this hair into the fire, and help will come."

The girl bowed again and then set out for her home. On her way, she picked up her basket and her spindle from the forest and then drove the cows back. When she got home her stepmother said, "Curse you, where did that thing on your head come from? What kind of fool of a man did you meet? Did a crow eat your tongue? Hey, speak, you shameless hussy!" The stepmother and her daughter began to pull on Hejerkhan's golden tress. The poor girl was so scared that she told them what had happened. When the stepmother found she couldn't pull out Hejerkhan's golden hair no matter how hard she yanked, she didn't say anything more, but she made a plan in her mind.

The next day, the stepmother gave her daughter a spindle and cotton and sent her out to graze the cattle. Hejerkhan cleaned the courtyard, then fed and petted the dog and the chicken, her only friends. After that, she fed a pair of doves that used to come to the courtyard. Then she went into the garden and sat there crying. That day her stepmother did not stay in the house but kept anxiously looking toward where her own daughter had gone.

Now let's hear from Patimikhan.

Patimikhan drove the cows off into the forest, carrying her spindle. She could not bear the hot weather and cursed her mother. While she was sitting there crying, not knowing what to do with the cotton, suddenly there came a whirlwind that blew dust in her eyes and took away the cotton in her lap. Patimikhan cried and ran after it saying, "You damn whirlwind... give me back my cotton... give me back my cotton... give

me back my cotton!” She saw the whirlwind disappear into a hole in a cliff. She went after it and saw a house. She went up to the old woman there and said angrily, “Hey old woman, your whirlwind took away my cotton, give it back to me!”

The old woman shook her head and said, “Don’t be angry! Sit down! First you must make me something to eat and then you will get your cotton back.” She set her all the tasks she had set Hejerkhan. Patimikhan cooked the food slowly and whined as she did it. She was afraid that if she refused she wouldn’t be able to get her cotton back. She cut the dough to be as thick as her hip and the thin dough as thin as her arms. The old woman sipped the broth a few times and then pushed it away. Patimikhan washed the pot and bowls noisily and poured the wastewater into the slop pit. She swept the house and dumped the dust out of the window. She came back and treated the old woman rudely, pulling roughly at her hair... The old woman silently cursed Patimikhan and her mother, but out loud she said only, “Your cotton is in the jar in the corner, take it and go!” Patimikhan ran to the jar, stuck her head inside it, and saw that it was full of treasure. She greedily hid as much gold and silver in her sleeves as she could. Then she took her cotton and ran home without looking back.

As she was carrying her spindle homeward, she noticed that her scalp had begun to itch. She touched her hair hoping to find a golden tress. When she touched her head, she found it was covered with scabs and sores and mold, and that there was something sticking out and wriggling on the top of her head. She forgot all about the cows and ran home crying. Her mother came to her at once and said, “Oh, my dear daughter, why are you so late? Why are you crying? Why are you covering your head?” She uncovered her daughter’s head and saw that mold and fungus had grown all over the top of it.⁹ The stepmother sobbed and cried out, “Oh my heaven, what kind of evil person did this to my daughter!” From then on she hid her daughter inside the house. No matter what remedy she tried, no matter what shrine she visited, nothing changed. She spent all the gold and silver her daughter had stolen from the old woman’s house, and several times more money, but still no cure could be found.

Months and years went by. One day, one of the wealthiest men in the village invited every single family to his wedding feast. The stepmother

⁹ Patimikhan is suffering from the infectious scalp disease favus. People with favus are referred to as *taz* (Uyghur) or *tazsha* (Kazakh) and are common characters in Central Asian oral literature, though they more usually play the role of trickster.

wanted to go to the wedding and be gifted *zelle*, the food guests are given to take home from the feast. When Hejerkhan was taking the cows out to pasture early in the morning, the stepmother yelled from where she lay resting, “Hey Hejerkhan, come here, damn you!” When Hejerkhan came in, she said, “Hey, sleepyhead, how come you are so wide awake today! Come close, listen to me carefully. Today we are going to a wedding. You go out and lead our cows to pasture with the neighbor’s herd, then come back at once, you slow-ass!”

The girl left the cows to graze with the neighbor’s herd and came home. Then she swept the house and the courtyard, brought water, and filled the empty bowls of the dog and the other animals. After cooking porridge for the dog, she sat under the eaves stroking the head of her chicken. Meanwhile, the stepmother and her daughter got themselves all dressed up. After Patimikhan had finished getting ready, she said, “Mother, will crazy Hejerkhan just sit idle until we come back?” Her mother said, “What do you think? Is it any kind of work to sit and watch the house? Why should we let her stay here and be idle?!” With that, she brought one measure of white millet and one of dark millet, then poured them on top of a heap of sand and mixed them all together. Then she said, “Hey lazybones, separate the white from the dark millet and put them each in a different bag. If you lose a single grain, I’ll pull your eyes out. After that, go bury yourself in the house with the loom and weave two lengths of *etles* silk cloth.¹⁰ And keep a sharp eye on the house. If a single hair gets lost, I will break your neck just like a sparrow’s. If you fail to do all that I’ve told you, just wait and see what I will do to you...” She said all this, then left with Patimikhan for the wedding.

Hejerkhan said to herself, “What misfortune!” She stood there frozen, not knowing what to do. But after a while, she came to herself and thought of the kind old woman. She threw one of the strands of hair the old woman had given her into the fire and sat there wondering what would happen. At that moment, the leaves of the trees in the yard rustled and the world was filled with a whirlwind. The girl spun around and around and could not tell what was happening ... When she opened her eyes, she saw that the old woman who last year had made her cook food and had given her two strands of her hair was sitting beside her and

¹⁰ *Etles* is a patterned silk fabric woven by the Uyghur and some other Central Asian peoples. *Taqa*, translated here as “length,” refers to both the loom used for weaving *etles* but is also a measurement. Two *taqa* is enough to make a full dress.

stroking her head. The girl jumped to her feet, bowed to her, then threw herself crying into the old woman's arms and told her about all her hardships. The old woman said, "I know my daughter, I know. Whatever she has done to you, she will bring upon herself. Now stand up!"

The girl stood up and humbly crossed her arms over her bosom. The old woman said, "The orphan's heart is my heart. Let me take care of your troubles, my daughter. Take this key and open the door in the middle. Go right in and bring back the sack placed on top of the big wooden chest." When she opened the door, the girl saw that a row of doors decorated with flower designs opened by themselves one by one. The girl took the sack and came out happily. The old woman led the girl to a large earthenware tub and washed her with soap. Then she wiped her body clean, combed her hair, and took clothes for her from out of the sack. She dressed her in a silk skirt that was as soft as a cloud and as clear as glass, a vest of satin embroidered with flowers, a brocade jacket with a silk collar, and a golden hat. The old woman placed a silk headscarf on top of the hat. She dressed Hejerkhan like a fairy, putting soft-soled shoes embroidered with golden flowers on her feet, two golden bracelets on her arms, jeweled rings on her fingers, golden earrings set with emerald on her ears. She prepared a tray with oil flatbread, silk cloth woven in beautiful patterns, and exquisite ceramic bowls, wrapped it with a silk cloth and held it in her hand. She said, "Let us go, my daughter." The girl was happy but also worried and said, crying, "Where shall we go? When can I finish sorting the millet, my dear grandmother?"

"My poor, lonely girl, didn't I say not to worry? You are going to the same wedding your stepmother went to. When you arrive there, you will enjoy more honor than they will be shown. Before you return from the wedding, the millet will be sorted, the silk woven, the housekeeping all done. All will be ready. Have faith in your grandmother, my daughter, say *Bismillah* and step over the threshold and out of the house."

When the girl stepped over the threshold, a young lady came and took her hand and helped her to get into a carriage. The girl saw that horses in jingling golden harnesses stood there hitched to a golden carriage. An old man held the reins. The old woman raised her hands and prayed, "An orphan's grief, an old woman's prayer, may you have safety on your way, may your enemy be surprised! Amen, Allah is great." The girl knew only that a whirlwind came, the flowers in the old woman's courtyard bowed to her, and the leaves of the trees turned into butterflies and flew away. She did not know what else happened...

When she came to, she saw that the carriage had entered a courtyard filled with people dancing and singing to the loud music of trumpets and the pounding of drums. The hosts led the girl along a silk carpet to a richly decorated room filled with women. Everyone, the young and the old alike, stood up to greet her and bade her sit in the place of honor at the head of the table. One of the other women sitting at the head of the table asked, "What city did this princess come from?" Another said, "She must be the pampered daughter of a *bai*, a wealthy man, but who?"¹¹

The guests were given water to wash their hands, a cloth was spread before them and food was placed upon it. Fresh fruit and dried fruit of seventy-two kinds, sweets and tea were served. After that came halva and egg whites whipped with sugar, then cheese followed by noodles cut as thin as hair, potatoes stewed with meat, roasted kebabs, and rich thick broths. Hejerkhan looked around and saw that her stepmother and her daughter were sitting far away, down where guests took off their shoes. Her stepmother's wealth was as nothing compared to the women who sat in the places of honor at the wedding. Yet whatever food was served to Hejerkhan, she would send it on to her "mother" and "sister," saying, "Please bring this food to that guest." She encouraged them to eat, saying, "Please take some of this dish, and let your daughter also eat of it."

The sun was setting and soon the wedding would be over. Hejerkhan left first. She left even though everyone tried their best to make her stay longer. All the women looked after her in admiration, saying, "A beauty like her illuminates a home. And how generous she is!"

Hejerkhan's carriage went through the desert and through the forest. On her way, she came to a meadow with a large stream in the middle. She got out by the stream and sat on the grassy bank to rest for a little while. She began to play the children's game of "scattered jewels," taking a handful of water, tossing it into the sky, and letting the sun turn the drops into diamonds. As she looked at the water jewels, she was reminded of the millet waiting at home, and she began to feel anxious. At that moment the carriage driver said, "Hey daughter, horsemen are coming from afar, best to leave quickly." The girl ran and got into the carriage. The carriage raced off and disappeared in a whirlwind. In her haste, the girl let one of her golden shoes drop in the meadow by the stream.

¹¹ Under Qing rule, a *bai* was a man with wealth but no official status or rank.

Now let us hear from the girl's home.

Right after she went to the wedding, the kind old woman, the whirlwind mother, appeared in the courtyard of the stepmother. At once, Hejerkhan's dog, her chicken, and her pair of doves gathered around the old woman and pecked and kissed her feet. The old woman held a piece of dough in the palm of her hand and gave the dog a bite. Then she made small balls from it and gave them to the rooster and the doves. The dog ate the dough and began to talk, "Mother, I will be a guard to the courtyard and won't let anyone look in." Saying this, the dog began to guard the fence and the gate. The rooster flew to the rooftop, looked around, and cried out, "Cock-a-doodle-doo! The millets are mixed up... Let's come together, help the orphaned girl! Cock-a-doodle-doo!" The neighbors' chickens came from every direction and gathered in the courtyard. The dog brought a sack from inside the house, carrying it with his teeth. The chickens gathered and pecked at the grains, picking them up and dropping white millet into one side of the bag and the dark barnyard millet into the other. The doves began to speak, saying "Yes, mother, we are at your service." Then they disappeared into the sky and in an instant returned with a flock of doves. The doves landed in the garden, went behind the fruit trees, and turned into fairies. They came out and stood in a neat row before the old woman as she sat on the *supa*, the dining terrace, bowed to her, and waited silently. The old woman gestured for the chief of the fairies to come to her, and whispered something in the chief's ear. The fairies immediately went into the weaving room and quietly began to work. One dyed the threads, one combed, one pulled warp threads, one wove, one starched, and another folded the cloth. In that way, they wove two lengths of silken cloth and placed them on top of the stepmother's chest. By then the chickens had finished sorting the millet, bid farewell to the old woman, and scattered to their homes.

The fairies put away the sacks of white and dark millet, closed the doors, finished their work, and gathered in the middle of the courtyard. The old woman took out a piece of dough and, just as before, divided it into small pieces for the dog, the rooster, and the doves. She gave them each a pat on the head and said farewell. After that she led the fairies away and disappeared from the garden.

Now let us hear from the orphaned girl.

Hejerkhan found herself standing in front of the old woman's house after she disappeared from the side of the stream. The old woman said, "Come, daughter," and led her inside. The girl took out the flatbreads

she had brought from the wedding, set them in front of the old woman, and told her of all she had heard and seen. “Grandmother, I sat at the head of the table, in the seat of honor. My ‘mother’ sat with her daughter by the door at the foot of the table. Fresh fruit, dried fruit, and food were served to me first, before everyone else. I was so grateful for the clothes you dressed me in, for the honor and respect, for the hospitality, that I couldn’t eat anything. I simply took the delicious food they served me and passed it on to my ‘mother’ and ‘sister.’ My heart was full of delight, my spirits were high, and I enjoyed myself so much. Thank you.” She said this, and then looked at the ground as if embarrassed.

“You did well my daughter. Your ‘mother’ will understand this if she is reasonable. May you have good luck. And losing a shoe doesn’t matter. Now please go home.” She embraced Hejerkhan, and then the girl found herself back in her stepmother’s courtyard. She saw that all her chores had been done.

At that moment, the stepmother and her daughter shoved the gate open and strode arrogantly into the courtyard. The stepmother said, “Hey, you bastard girl, how come you’re so clean today?! Did you think it was your wedding day, that you could waste water on washing? Look at the pretty little bride!” As she said this, she burped, curled her lips into an ugly shape and sneered at her stepdaughter. Then Patimikhan said, “Who let this piece of trash wash her face and head, to make herself up as if she were getting married?! Hey, did you sort the millet? Speak up!” She came up to Hejerkhan and started to pinch her all over. But Hejerkhan simply replied, “I sorted the millet and wove the silk. After that I washed my face and hair.” She ran into the house and brought out the dark millet, the white millet, and the woven silk. The stepmother was glad she had found a way to do all these chores, and she smiled at the silken cloth.

Hejerkhan asked, “Mother, how was the wedding? What did you see?” The stepmother said, “Oh my ribs,¹² do you want to hear? Then listen.” She started to tell her story. “There has never been such a wedding anywhere. The whole town was astonished. There came many girls who were the daughters of khans. There was a girl like a princess who came to the wedding. We sat at the same feast table. If you saw her, you would say that she had no match in this world. That girl showed generosity toward us above all the other women. She was noble and dignified. Whatever

¹² An idiomatic phrase, meaning that the speaker finds something so ridiculous that their ribs hurt from laughing at it.

was set before her, she passed on to me. I ate and your sister ate as well. Everything was in abundance during the wedding. Someday I will have a wedding like that for your sister!”

“Mother, you are talking about my sister, forgetting me,” Hejerkhan said suddenly and looked at the ground. The stepmother said, “Oh my ribs, do you really think you’ll find a husband out there herding cattle? Where would you even have a wedding?” But Patimikhan cursed and said, “When will this misfortune be gone from my head?” She went on, “Take this, since we were good enough to bring it for you!” And she threw a bowl full of bones and leftover rice from the wedding in front of Hejerkhan. The stepmother told her, “Hey, drink your dirty water quickly and bring back the cows you left with the neighbors. Then go hide yourself in your room and weave silk.” With that, she and her daughter went inside.

Hejerkhan gave the bones to her dog and the rice to the rooster and the doves.

The next day when Hejerkhan went out to graze the cattle, her stepmother said, “Hey, you foul-smelling beggar, stop! Leave the cows with the neighbor’s herd and then come back at once! From now on, you’ll sit in the house and weave silk. I spoke with many women at the wedding about selling them silken cloth and we settled on a price. I was the one who made you learn the craft. I was the one who let you off herding cattle and let you sit inside! Where else do you think the likes of you could find such fortune?! Remember to be grateful and weave the cloth carefully.” After that the girl was secluded in a dark room and made to do even more work than before.

Now let us hear about the lost golden shoe.

In the city there lived a khan with a son named Prince Adel. When the prince had grown to manhood, he was introduced to the daughters of viziers, khans, and wealthy men. But every time he would say, “I’ll find a wife myself, for I will marry the one I like.” The prince had met Khizr,¹³ the wandering saint of legend, and for that reason he was destined to bring the people even greater blessings than his father had. He would

¹³ Called al-Khidr in Arabic, Khizr (the Persianized variant of the name) is described in several traditions of the Islamic world as performing various roles as a servant of God: prophet, messenger, or saint. Several Islamic scholars have identified the unnamed figure who instructs Musa (Moses) in the Quran (Surah Al-Kahf 65-82) as Khizr. Popular tradition in Central Asia holds that Khizr is a deathless saint who wanders the Earth.

make roads through the mountains, they said, and raise bridges over rivers and streams...

One day, Adel went riding out with his vizier and his companions to look at the canals bringing water to the desert. Just when the sun was about to set, they came to a dam in the river. As the prince was walking through the meadow looking at a stream, he suddenly spotted a shiny object. He thought perhaps it was a fish, but when he came close he saw that it was a shoe—the likes of which no cobbler in this world could make. The prince stood still, pressing it to his chest, overwhelmed by sweet visions and beautiful thoughts. After a while he came to himself and said, “Please go to my father immediately. I’ve fallen in love with the girl who wore this shoe. I don’t care if she is a human being or a fairy, I won’t give up until I marry her...”

Now let us hear from the girl’s home.

One day the stepmother heard people saying, “The khan’s son is going from house to house, having girls try on a shoe. He says he will marry whichever girl it fits!” The stepmother scrubbed the fungus off of Patimikhan’s head, combed out her hair, and put a silk headscarf on her with an otter skin hat on top of that. Then she put satin shoes embroidered with flowers on her daughter’s feet, satisfied that she had dressed her up beautifully. She bound Hejerkhan’s golden hair tightly to her head, pasted a lump of dough on top of it, and then made it even uglier by wrapping it all in an old rag. She said, “Keep working and don’t show your ugly face!”

At that moment, the guards and serving maids the khan had sent out to search the city arrived carrying the shoe. The stepmother dragged Hejerkhan into the corner of the courtyard, pushed her inside an old *tandoor* oven, and covered the oven up with a saddle.¹⁴ Then the stepmother went and opened the door, bowing over and over to her guests. The khan’s servants entered the house and said, “Please show us your daughters.” The stepmother brought the guests inside and Patimikhan flirtatiously took the shoe. But the shoe didn’t fit. She tried to put it on this way, she tried that way, but nothing made it fit. She cut and hacked away at her feet, but still it wouldn’t fit.

The maids left, saying, “Hey, why do you try so hard with your ugly daughter? Let’s go!” When the maids were in the courtyard, the

¹⁴ A beehive shaped oven for cooking bread, similar in principle to a pizza oven but with the opening in the top and the bread stuck to the sides of the oven to cook.

white rooster ran toward them, pecked their clothes, and crowed, “Cock-a-doodle doo! The girl is in the *tandoor*... Qee, qee, qeeq! The girl is in the *tandoor*...” The dog ran to the *tandoor*, pulled the saddle away with his teeth, and said, “Haw, haw, haw! The guests have come...Dear sister, stand up!” The maids wondered what this could be and ran over to the *tandoor*.

The stepmother whined, “It is only my stepdaughter, the fungus on her head is infectious, please don’t go near her! How could that shoe ever fit that dirty girl?”

The maids climbed on top of the *tandoor* and saw that a girl came out of it. They saw that there was a moon-faced beauty inside the rags, smiling, with golden hair on her head. When the maids put the shoe on her, it fit as if it was made for her. One of the guards hurried off to the prince to ask for his reward. The maids asked, “Sister, do you have the other shoe from the pair?” The girl looked down without knowing what to say, but Patimikhan said, “How could this poor wretch have the other shoe!” At that moment, the leaves rustled in the trees, and there came a gust of wind. They all looked around. To their astonishment, a shoe came flying in and landed directly in front of Hejerkhan.

The maids looked over at Patimikhan and began to laugh: “Look at you Patimikhan, sitting there scratching your head! You don’t fit the shoe, the match is not for you, so you won’t go anywhere, just go and don’t be ugly! *Hop, belli hop!*¹⁵ Serves you right!” At that moment, the guards brought a carriage to the courtyard. They led Hejerkhan to the golden carriage and rode away, with the rooster perched on the back, the doves on top, and the dog running along after. The stepmother beat herself on the head, her daughter scratched her head, and the two were left crying in the middle of the courtyard.

Now let us hear from the palace.

After Hejerkhan arrived at the palace, the prince married her and held a wedding feast that lasted many days and nights. But he did not invite her stepmother to the wedding. Knowing this, the stepmother suffered agony. “Wait!” she said, and she made a wicked plan with her daughter. But Hejerkhan did not make the usual Friday visit a new bride makes to her parents after the wedding. No sooner had Friday passed than the stepmother went and pretended she wanted to see Hejerkhan,

¹⁵ The literal translation of “*hop belli hopi*” is “very very good.” Here, it is used as an idiomatic phrase meaning roughly “you get what you deserve.”

“Oh Hejerkhan, my dear, why didn’t you come on Friday? I’m not complaining for myself, but didn’t you at least miss your own mother’s home?” The orphaned girl remembered her mother, and the house where she had grown up appeared before her eyes. Hejerkhan asked the prince for permission to go home. He agreed and saw the girl off.

The stepmother treated Hejerkhan with honor, saying, “Come my princess.” In the evening she said, “I’m your mother no matter what; let me wash your head and comb your hair.” Then she lowered Hejer’s head into a wooden basin and Patimikhan poured a bucket of boiling water on Hejer’s head... The stepmother put Hejerkhan’s golden hair on Patimikhan’s head as a braid, put Hejer’s clothes on her, made her up to look like Hejerkhan, and sent her to the prince’s house.

The prince did not notice and began to live with Patimikhan. Patimikhan would scratch her head in the night and when the prince asked her about it, she would say, “I’m hungry because I’m expecting a baby; that’s why I’m eating roasted corn.” During the day she would use makeup and cunning to make herself look normal.

Now let us hear from Hejerkhan.

Hejerkhan collapsed with a scream when they poured the boiling water on her head. She felt like she was crying inside, and she lost her life. In the night, the stepmother and her daughter dragged her off by her hands and feet and buried her in the garden. As the girl was being dragged a drop of blood fell from her eye, turned into a skylark, and flew away. The skylark would perch on the shoulder of the prince’s gardener and sing. When it sang, it would ask, “Is the prince getting along well with his wife?”

“Yes,” the gardener would answer.

The skylark would sing, “Chir, chir, the secret has not been revealed. Hoo, hoo, hoo! Chuku, chir.” And then she would fly away. When the gardener said, “No, they aren’t getting along well,” the skylark would sing, “Chir, chir, the secret is going to be revealed, ha, ha, ha! Chuku, chir, chir.” And away the bird would fly, laughing.

One day the prince heard about this. He called the gardener and said, “Put that skylark in a golden cage when you catch him. I will learn the secret myself.” The gardener helplessly agreed. He caught the skylark and brought it to the prince. The skylark sang every day in a weeping tone. When it sang, it would say, “Chir, chir, chir, chuku, chir, there is a hidden secret in this house...” The prince thought that he knew many interesting things and never suspected there was a secret in his house. But

Patimikhan, who had inherited her mother's wickedness, discovered the skylark's secret. She lay down cunningly, pretending to be sick. She paid seers and healers to repeat what she told them. She said, "The healer was right, I'll be cured if I cook and eat the heart of the skylark." In the end, she got her way and had the skylark killed.

The gardener's wife realized that the skylark was, in fact, the orphaned girl and cried, "My poor bird! My heart and my liver!" Then she secretly buried the feathers, flesh, and bones of the skylark by the door of the garden. A rose grew there from the blood of the skylark, and a cornflower from her feathers. Each grew a flower bud, and the two stood smelling each other's fragrance. The prince was surprised when he saw the flowers. At that moment the gardener's wife picked the blossoms and handed them to him. Patimikhan was spying on them, and she came up and tore the flower's head off. The flower's stem was snapped and fell to the ground. Patimikhan finished by saying flirtatiously, "I was only being playful."

Many days passed. The skylark's bones grew into a great and beautiful parasol tree. The prince liked the tree and would sit and look at it in the mornings and evenings. At that time, Patimikhan gave birth to a child. She was jealous of the prince looking at the parasol tree and conceived a wicked plan. She pressed the prince, saying, "If you don't cut the tree and make a cradle from it for my child, I won't stay in this house." In the end the prince called a carpenter and ordered him to cut down the tree and make a cradle.

Then Patimikhan was very happy, called her kitchen maid, and commanded her, "You keep an eye on the carpenter and quietly burn the branches and wood shavings left from the cradle. If you forget to burn so much as a single shaving, I will have you thrown in the fire and burned. Got it, you beggar?" She stayed close by and pretended to look after her child, pestering the carpenter and the maid all the while. At noon, when the carpenter asked for his lunch, the maid noticed a tiny wood shaving stuck in his beard. She said immediately, "Master, the cupboard is too deep for me to reach, please take some bread for yourself." "Alright," the carpenter replied, "But please bring me a bowl of water to dip it in." And when he reached into the cupboard to take some bread, the tiny wood shaving fell out of his beard and settled inside the cupboard.

In the end, Patimikhan got her cradle and rid herself of the parasol tree. But whenever the cradle was rocked, there came a voice, "*Ghichang ghich*, enemy moldy head. *Ghichang ghich*, wicked moldy head." The prince

heard the voice coming from the cradle many times, yet he never paid it any mind. But Patimikhan began to think.

Now let us hear from the wood shaving stuck to the carpenter's beard.

When the maid came to look, the wood shaving had become a beautiful piece of soft bread. The maid took the bread and pressed it to her face and then put it back into the chest again and again. The next day she found that the bread had become a girl and had life up to her waist. The third day she found a whole girl: Hejerkhan. The maid hugged her, kissed her, and took her out of the chest, saying, "My orphaned sister, my dear sister." The maid said that it would be better to speak than to remain silent, and she went to the prince and said, "If you don't believe that Hejerkhan is alive, come to my house and see for yourself." The prince came into the maid's house and saw a beautiful fairy wife with golden hair as before. He said, "Oh goodness, oh!" and stumbled toward Hejerkhan.

The girl said, "Please don't come close to me, otherwise I'll disappear... If your repentance is true, please listen to me and stay away!" The prince stood still as stone and obeyed. She said, "If you want to be good to me again, you'll have to gather all the people together, with the villagers on higher ground and the people of the court below. I will tell my story to that great gathering. If you repent, I will marry you right there and then." The prince swore he would do so.

The next day he assembled an even greater crowd than Hejerkhan had asked for. Hejerkhan veiled her face behind her hair, put a porcelain bowl down on the ground, bowed to the people, and wept as she told her story. The porcelain bowl overflowed with her tears. Her tears became a river and the river swept away everyone from the court, including her stepmother and stepsister. Hejerkhan was left holding the cradle. The prince stuck his head out of the river and held onto the girl's foot. He looked at the people and repented in tears...

*I sigh with pain, I sigh with pain,
My pain will catch you.
May my tears become a river,
May my fish swallow you.*¹⁶

¹⁶ These are the words of a popular Uyghur folk song

And in this way the song came to be.

The end

ORAL NARRATIVE POETRY

In 1885, the German Orientalist Wilhelm Radloff¹⁷ drew a direct parallel between the *Iliad* and the oral narrative poetry of the Kyrgyz, writing that the legendary texts of the latter evoked a time when “the epic poetry of the Trojan cycle of legends was still alive in the people’s mouths as unrecorded, genuine folk poetry.” Radloff was neither the first nor the last person to make this observation, but his writing had the notable consequence of being among the texts that inspired Milman Parry and Albert Lord’s famous 1935 expedition to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to record living epic singers in an attempt to trace the origins of Homer’s epic poetry. Radloff’s remarks were referring specifically to Kyrgyz oral epic texts, especially the *Manas* cycle, but the genre of sung oral narrative in Central Asia is by no means limited to epic tales of cultural heroes. Some tell of the travails of star-crossed lovers, others of trickster figures like K rughly, and others translate recent history into verse. The texts typically consist of eight or twelve-syllable lines and rely on devices of grammatical parallelism and simile. Many of the narratives are, like *Qyz Zhibek*, prosimetric, with sections in verse interspersed with sections in prose. *Aqyns* usually sing these narratives to an audience, and Radloff described how the presence of this audience would spur the singer on, leading them to flatter rich audiences with elaborate descriptions of luxurious goods and to appeal to poorer audiences by denouncing the greed of the wealthy. Yet these narratives did not circulate only in oral form: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the oral narrative poetry of the steppe was translated into print culture, as newly established Islamic publishing houses drew on oral tradition as a source of popular narratives. The two narratives excerpted here were both prepared by Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly and initially printed by the Karimov publishing house in Kazan.

¹⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff changed his name to Vasily Vasilevich Radlov when he became a Russian subject and converted to Russian Orthodoxy in 1859.

Qyz Zhibek is an example of a *ghashyqtyq zhyr*, a word that might best be rendered in English as “romance.” These are oral narratives that recount the fates, happy or unhappy, of lovers divided from one another by familial rivalries or simply by misfortune. The genre appears to be influenced by Persian verse romances—*Qyz Zhibek* even includes explicit references to Nizami’s *Layla and Majnun*. The narrative of *Qyz Zhibek* begins on a light-hearted note, as the hero Tölegen searches for the ideal bride, eventually meeting and marrying the narrative’s titular heroine, the fantastically beautiful Zhibek. The narrative becomes darker in the middle section, as Tölegen returns to his own family despite Zhibek warning him of a dream that foretells his death. He then begins a return journey to Zhibek despite his own father’s explicit prohibition. Excerpted here are both Zhibek’s warning, the father’s prohibition, and the scene in which Tölegen is killed on his return journey by a rival suitor for Zhibek’s hand. The final section of the narrative differs from the tradition of the Persian verse romance in its account of Zhibek’s fate. Rather than culminating in her death, the narrative concludes with a stirring account of trickery and martial prowess as Tölegen’s younger brother Sansyzbay sets out to find Zhibek. He reaches her family’s home just as Zhibek is set to be married to the khan of the “Kalmaks,” a Kazakh term for the Oirats, a Mongolian Buddhist people who often play the role of enemy in Kazakh oral literature. Sansyzbay and Zhibek contrive to escape, and Sansyzbay eventually kills the Kalmak khan in single combat. The narrative ends with the marriage of Sansyzbai and Zhibek. The figure of the Kalmak khan and the location on the Aqzhaiyq (Ural) river together suggest the poem is set in the seventeenth century, a time when an Oirat tribal confederation had moved into west Kazakhstan.

“Kenesary-Nauryzbai” is an example of a *tarikhi zhyr*, or “historical song,” a term that refers to narrative poems devoted to historical events. This version of the narrative was sung by an *aqyn* named Qashqynbai Qaraev, but Qaraev himself sings in the voice of a famous nineteenth century *aqyn*, Nysanbai Zhamanqululy (1822–1888). Zhamanqululy’s first person narration is used to tell the history of the lives and deaths of Kenesary Qasymuly (1802–1847) and his younger brother, Naurzybai Qasymuly (1822–1847), the grandsons of Ablai Khan, one of the last of the Kazakh khans. Kenesary, or Khan Kene as he is sometimes called, led an armed rebellion against the Tsarist state in the mid-nineteenth century. Kenesary’s demands included a halt to the construction of Russian forts on the Kazakh steppe and the formal recognition of Kenesary himself as

a khan, but Kenesary mixed these petitions with professions of loyalty to the Russian Tsar. When Kenesary's demands were not met, he turned to armed resistance, striking Russian forts and settlements in north Kazakhstan and then vanishing into the steppe. After his death, Kenesary was celebrated in an extensive corpus of oral literary texts, some of which narrate episodes known from history, while others cast him as the patron of star-crossed lovers, and still others take flight into fantasy, gifting him a horse that talks and flies like Dudar Qyz's Bay Colt. Zhamanqululy's account is concerned with the last years of Kenesary's life, when a series of military setbacks forced him to flee to south Kazakhstan, where he was eventually killed by Kyrgyz who were allied with Kazakhs opposed to Kenesary. Zhamanqululy's narrative is a mixture of martial details—attacks on forts, stirring battles between Kyrgyz and Kazakh heroes—and disquisitions on what the death of Kenesary meant for the Kazakh people. In one episode, a Kyrgyz and a Kazakh warrior lay out their respective grievances, as each charges the other with betrayal. Zhamanqululy's opening words emphasize his own authority to tell this tale, one grounded both in personal history and poetic prowess. As he explains, when he was only 15 years old, he defeated another *aqyn* in a poetic duel in front of Kenesary and then remained at Kenesary's side throughout the latter's campaign. This translation excerpts these opening words, together with a section of the conclusion as well as the oral duel between Nauryzbai and the Kyrgyz hero Kariböz.

In the Soviet era, Kenesary was first upheld by Kazakh intellectuals as the leader of an anti-colonial rebellion, only to later be dismissed as a feudal reactionary whose rebellion was inimical to the values of Stalin's "friendship of the peoples." In the early 1950s, the scholars Esmaghambet Ismailov and Ermakhan Bekmakhanov were both sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their publication of allegedly "anti-Soviet" works—transcripts of their interrogations focus exactly on their reliance on Zhamanqululy and other *aqyns* as guides to understanding Kenesary's rebellion. More recently, Kenesary has been celebrated in independent Kazakhstan as a figure of national liberation, honored with statues, films, and street names. *Qyz Zhibek* was similarly criticized in the Stalin era as a work that celebrated the aristocratic class, but Kazakh scholars defended the text by arguing that the doomed love of Tölegen and Zhibek was itself a critique of a feudal social order. The epic soon became an accepted part of the Kazakh Soviet literary canon, included in school curriculums, adapted into an opera libretto in the 1930s, and re-adapted in the 1960s

into a film of the same name that became perhaps the most famous work of Soviet-era Kazakh cinema. Both film and libretto neatly excised the later story of Zhibek's levirate marriage with Sanyszbai, instead ending with Zhibek's suicide on hearing of the death of Tölegen. Though this ending is not found in any of the many oral literary versions, its tone of epic tragedy neatly underlined the argument that the text contained a hidden critique of Kazakh society.

Gabriel McGuire

Qyz Zhibek

Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly

Translated by Gabriel McGuire

Tölegen remained with his bride for three months, but one day he resolved to return to his own land. In the evening he readied his horse for departure, but as he made his preparations, Zhibek fell asleep and began to dream. On waking, she called her youngest sister-in-law to her side and asked her to go to Tölegen and tell him that she wished he would not begin the journey.

Qyz Zhibek called to her side
 Her brother's wife, her closest confidante,
 Precious to her as a gold coin.
 There, where in close conference they spoke,
 No other kin she let come near.
 "Oh my sister, oh my brother's wife,
 First and best of all my kin!
 Go now to Tölegen and tell him,
 If he heeds my counsel, here he'll stay.
 Has he a mother and a father,
 An older brother or a younger?
 Or, oh God, might he be,
 An only child, a lone tree?
 Go and ask him, oh my sister,
 Who his mother was,
 What was his father's name,
 And where and how they lived.
 Tell him that as I slept, I dreamed,
 And in my dreams ill-fortune saw.
 The silver horse of Tölegen I saw

Wander with saddle empty and reins slack.
 On the banks of the Aqzhaiyq, where
 Our people roamed, thick grass grew.
 Then as a candle gutters and goes dark,
 When an unknown hand cuts it flame,
 So this vision fled from my sight.
 From the sky a goshawk swooped
 And broke the wings and killed
 The white falcon perched upon my wrist.¹⁸

Oh God, what kind of dream was
 This to show me,
 Who is indeed your servant?
 Oh sister, oh my darling,
 I know if Tölegen should leave
 He shall not return.
 The bright things of life
 I shall no longer look upon.
 If Tölegen should leave,
 God has let us see
 He shall not come here again.
 I wish God would not will
 Sorrows of such sort
 On any of his servants.
 Oh Tölegen, the son of Bazarbai,
 A lamb early born and swiftly grown,
 When, short of breath, your sister comes,
 I beg you speak no more of journeys.”

[The sister-in-law speaks]
 “Oh my dearest, my Tölegen,
 Today my sister had a dream,
 Now heed our counsel, ride not home.
 Tell me now, light of my eye,
 Who was your mother,
 What was your father’s name,
 And where and how they lived.

¹⁸ The Kazakhs used both these birds in falconry, but the falcon was of a higher status than the goshawk. This image thus foreshadows the death of a Tölegen at the hands of a man, Bekezhan, who is not his equal.

Today my sister had a dream,
 And in this dream ill-fortune saw.
 The silver horse you ride
 Wandered free, saddle empty and reins slack.
 On the banks of the Aqzhaiyq, where
 Our people roamed, thick grass grew.
 Then the candle guttered and went dark,
 Its flame cut by an unknown hand,
 And this vision fled from her sight.
 Oh my brother, my dearest one,
 If you listen to our words, you will not leave,
 Will not make us weep to God.”

[Tölegen speaks]
 “Oh sister, oh my sister!
 ‘Dreams are the shit of foxes,’
 They say, so speak no more of this.
 God created me, and
 If he says I die, I die content.
 If you would know my father’s name,
 He is Bazarbai, great among the people.
 Great as a ram among sheep,
 Bright as a gold coin threaded on a necklet.
 If you would know my mother’s name,
 She is Qamqadai, sixty years in age.
 If I should die, then after me,
 There comes my brother, Sansyzbai,
 Why then should Zhibek go in fear?
 Whether grief or joy finds us,
 Allah remains our lord.
 If you hew a lone tree,
 The roots wither, the tree yellows.¹⁹
 Yet if I should die,
 After me there will be still
 My younger brother, nine years old.
 November comes, and with it snow,
 Nor are our enemies ever few.
 Go to Zhibek, tell her she need not fear,

¹⁹ Here and in Zhibek’s speech, Shaikhyslamuly uses the idiom of a solitary and withered tree to connote a family without children.

Tell her of my younger brother, Sansyzbai,
 Let her know that if I die,
 No misfortune comes for her.
 God does not refuse
 The just prayers of his servants.
 In spring I came to this land,
 Now winter comes in turn.
 Among all our people's singers,
 First of all stands Sheghe Batyr,
 He of wide wisdom.
 If I indeed am gone,
 He shall be the guide to Sansyzbai,
 And lead him here to you."

"Now, if our souls are living,
 If our bodies are whole,
 Then with the geese in spring
 I will return," he said.
 "God send what hardships he may,
 I shall see Zhibek," he said.
 Tell Zhibek farewell, he said,
 And mounted his horse.
 Now Tölegen clasped
 His sister's hands in parting
 and, praising Allah, rode off.

After many days' travel, Tölegen safely reached his own land. His mother and father were overjoyed and held a great feast in celebration. In the midst of the feast, Bazarbai began to question his son. Tölegen told his father all that had happened. Then Bazarbai said, "My boy, when shall you return to your bride and her family?" Tölegen replied that he would depart in spring. Then his father said, "My boy, if I tell you my wishes, will you heed me?" Tölegen replied without hesitation that he would. "Grant this wish then, for I fear that you will fall a victim to the road. In the coming year, do not depart before the anniversary of your return to us. Stay with us a full year, that is my wish. Come, give me your word." Then Tölegen replied, "Ah, my father, fear of you now compels me to say that I met with no one's daughter. I saw no people greater than our own, and I returned without the blessing of a bride. If you say I am not to leave, then I must remain here. I must have no in-laws to visit." With these words, Tölegen walked out of the tent.

Then Bazarbai made the following demand of his people: "My people, that child of mine has gone off without heeding my wishes. If you hear he is preparing to leave for the land of his wife, seize him and bring him to me. And if any of you think to honor him with your company on the road, know you've thrown salt in my eyes, and that I have cursed your journey."

The people were so frightened by the old man's words that no one would aid Tölegen. They were ready to seize him if he tried to set out. So Tölegen took his saddle and riding gear and hid it in the steppe, and he led his gray horse out to pasture there too. Days passed, and finally one morning Tölegen took his falcon and set out to hunt birds. In the sky above two geese flew past cackling. He looked about and saw that it was already summer. He saddled his gray horse and loaded the saddle bags with the treasure of gold coins and bars of silver he had hidden in the steppe. Tölegen turned to his younger brother, Sansyzbai, who had been sitting behind him on the horse, and told him to go and carry word of Tölegen's departure to their family. Tölegen then mounted the gray horse and set off toward the Aqzhaiyq.

[In the following section, Sansyzbai tells Tölegen of the dangers of traveling alone across the steppe and warns his elder brother he may not return. Tölegen promises to return with Zhibek in seven months' time, but also adds that no one can escape the fate God has decreed for them. Tölegen concludes by telling Sansyzbai that if he himself should die, Sansyzbai as his younger brother will inherit the task of protecting Zhibek. Tölegen describes in detail how Sansyzbai should arm himself for the journey and enlist the bard Sheghe as his guide in the quest for Zhibek].

Tölegen, the son of Bazarbai,
Set out for the Aqzhaiyq,
Praying Allah send him strength.
Between the Aqzhaiyq and the sea
Is a full three months' journey.
Of three months' journey,
A full five and forty days
Are desert wasteland.
Within this barren steppe,
lies Qosoba, lake of the twin kurgans.
Thieves, bandits, and brigands
There have made their homes.
Tölegen, he of noble birth,

Came there one day,
 Weary and stumbling and near to falling.
 Zhibek's great beauty
 Had made a fool of Bekezhán,
 Cursed be his name.
 At Qosoba lake, Bekezhán made camp,
 Sixty companions by his side,
 Settled there and waited,
 Sure that Tölegen would come.
 Their store of food was nearly gone,
 And now the road home beckoned,
 Yet on that very day came Tölegen.

The meat of the wild ass is foul,
 And the lake water green with scum.
 Many days they traveled,
 And the gray horse, stallion born,
 Grew weary and thirsty from
 A hundred days of riding,
 Five and forty days of desert travel,
 And seventeen nights with nary a drink.
 Thirst had robbed all spirit
 From the horse of Tölegen.
 There was but little distance still to water,
 When in the noon prayer's hour
 A cloud of dust kicked up by strangers
 Met Tölegen, the son of Bazarbai.
 Horse and man rode to the dust,
 And the dust swept up to them.
 Before him sixty foes appeared,
 And encircled Tölegen.
 Tölegen, the son of Bazarbai,
 Looked ahead and looked behind.
 From noon prayer's hour they clashed,
 All through to the hour of evening prayer,
 But Tölegen remained untaken.
 Only once his horse's strength was spent
 Did the enemy dare approach him.
 Yet finally the moment came, when
 His ill-favored gray horse
 Foundered from its thirst
 And laid its head upon the ground.

Now Tölegen the son of Bazarbai,
 Surrounded by his foes and with
 A horse from whom all strength had fled,
 Called out his grief to God.
 "Oh God, great of strength,
 On the day of my death I die,
 But first I will speak.
 At the least, oh God,
 Let me slay Bekezhan,
 and I shall lay my own head down.
 If these enemies are Muslims,
 Let me speak to them.
 My horse has grown weak,
 My will has softened,
 The fires of my spirit extinguished,
 Like a hearth drenched in water.
 Did you hasten my death, oh God?
 Is it your will that my life
 Span less than eighteen years?
 Your will is great, oh God,
 Yet it was a hard fate you dealt me,
 When you made me love a distant beauty."
 With these words, Tölegen
 Reached into his quiver,
 And in a single swipe
 Clutched a handful of arrows,
 then drew his bow.
 The arrows leapt from his bowstring
 And sped into the mass of Arghyns.²⁰
 From among their thinning ranks,
 Seven more then fell.
 No sooner had he nocked another arrow,
 Even before his hand went to his quiver,
 Bekezhan, whose name be cursed,
 That sly son of the Arghyn,
 That scoundrel steeped in cunning,
 Crept sixty paces closer,

²⁰ Bekezhan is here represented as a member of the Arghyn, one of the largest and most powerful of the Kazakh lineages groups. Other versions of *Qyz Zhibek* assign him to entirely different lineages, a change that likely reflects the lineal identity of specific singers and their audiences. The Arghyn also play a key role in the *Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz*.

from the rear of Tölegen,
 and took shelter in a stand of hemp,
 slithering through the stalks.
 Close to Tölegen he has come,
 And now he strikes.
 His spirit fierce within him,
 He pulls the musket's trigger.
 Now from Tölegen, of noble birth,
 Blood spills like water.
 Lead shot, round like sheep's dung,
 Brings his fated death.
 Tölegen, the son of Bazarbai,
 His horse weary below him,
 Now found himself
 Without a hope of aid.
 The one bullet shot by Bekezhan
 Struck him in the forehead.
 Tölegen, golden to his very bones,
 His sorrows willed by Allah,
 His bloody fate the work of dogs,
 Fell from his wearied horse.
 Alone, forsaken by all,
 He wept in sorrow at his fate.
 The sixty dogs, cursed of name,
 Came crowding round his body,
 Shouting bloody threats,
 And taunting him with death.

Tölegen came to his senses and opened his eyes to look around. He saw that he lay on his back in the dirt. The brigands had stripped him naked and seized his clothes as booty. He turned his head toward Bekezhan and said, "At least bury me before you go, for are we not in some sense companions?"

"My money I sent to the city,
 But what an untimely day, oh God,
 It was when I set out for the steppe.
 I left my home and on the road
 Was met with this misfortune.
 Bury me, hide my face in the ground,
 Let me not be meat for crows and vultures,
 I who have been your companion, oh elder brother.

My tongue will spill no further sorrows,
 My money spent on a funeral shroud.
 Bury me, hide my face in the ground,
 Let me not be meat for crows and vultures,
 I who have been your companion, oh elder brother."
 Tölegen had breath within him
 For these words,
 But nothing more.
 The sixty dogs, cursed of name,
 Said nothing in return.
 Sixty brigands now split
 The spoils from a single man.
 Even Tölegen's horse turned traitor,
 For the silver horse he rode
 Drank its fill and cantered off,
 A brigand borne upon it back.

Throughout his journey Tölegen had been accompanied by six geese.
 They had arrived at the lake together, but when the geese tried to
 land, the bandits began shooting at them. Tölegen looked up at the
 geese circling overhead, at the wild creatures who had been traveling
 companions to him, and he cried out in sorrow.

"Six geese circling overhead,
 What a rich meal of meat and broth!
 If only I had arrows left to shoot.
 If you wished to land, oh geese,
 Here is a field, and here a marsh.
 Oh God, now write how fate
 Seized your slave in its teeth.
 My words to my father I would swallow,
 My words to my mother I would swallow,
 For now that I am gone,
 Who will be Sansyzbai's older brother,
 Who will tease him and dote on him?

"Six geese circling overhead,
 You who do not seek the ground.
 You are living, I am dying,
 Never ask me why I lie here.
 What could you know

Of my sorrows and my fate?
 Beasts without the gift of words,
 My own companions of the road,
 Why do you not come to me?
 When you fly on from here,
 When you reach the shore of the sea,
 If you should meet my old father, Bazarbai,
 He whose back ached as he bore me up hills,
 Whose knees ached as he carried me down,
 If he should ask of you,
 'Oh wild creatures, have you seen
 My darling, my Tölegen?' what will you say?

"When you have flown far away,
 And come close to my home,
 If there my old mother, who,
 If I asked for meat, gave me horse fat,
 If I asked for sugar, gave me honey,
 Who gave me bread spread with butter,
 Who gave me all I asked,
 Raised me in the palm of her hand,
 Forgave me every mischief,
 If she should meet you and ask,
 'Oh wild animals, have you seen
 My little foal, my Tölegen?' what shall you say?

"Still worse will it be,
 If when, close to the herds,
 My only brother—we who were
 Like two dark-feathered crows,
 Like ducklings from one nest,
 Who were suckled from the same breasts,
 Who ran kicking like wild colts,
 Who lay together in one bed,
 Who together saw so much joy,
 Who played knuckle bones together,
 But who is absent from me as I die,
 And cannot comfort me with water,
 Say farewell, or hear my last words,
 He who was the feathers in my wings,
 The hooves that bore me,

The burden that never tired me—
 My Sansyzbai should meet you and ask,
 ‘Oh wild animals, have you seen
 My older brother, my Tölegen?’ what shall you say?

“Say that his chain mail is torn,
 The links are sundered.
 Say that he will never reach
 The land to which he journeyed.
 Say he has shed his chain mail,
 With its delicate links and its gold tracery.
 Say, we do not know if he has died,
 We do not know if he yet lives
 But there by Qosoba
 We have left him.
 Blood flowed from him
 And soaked the ground.
 Say that without his leave,
 His gray stallion’s gold reins
 Were grasped by a brigand’s hands.”²¹

Tölegen had breath
 Enough for these words
 But nothing more.
 He looked towards the setting sun,
 And said, “Oh, dear God,”
 “There is no god but God,” he prayed,
 And as Tölegen set forth on death’s journey
 The stars came out.

A single bullet struck him,
 Passed through him, and
 In that moment he met
 The fate Allah had written.
 What can be said,
 Of nobles like these,

²¹ Shaiykhyslamuly represents Tölegen’s appeal to the geese as a rhetorical device. In another and earlier version, Musabai Zhirau’s performance of 1887, the geese literally carry word of Tölegen’s death to Sanyszbai.

With neither shroud nor tomb,
 No more than meat for dogs and crows,
 Their journeys broken,
 Their plans no more than dreams.

After the brigands had killed Tölegen and divided his gear, they returned to their own lands but trusted no one with word of their deeds. After eight years had passed, Bekezhan one day thought, “I shall take Zhibek for myself. First, I shall make her hear how I killed Tölegen. It will be clear, either Zhibek is mine, or she belongs to no one.”

[*Bekezhan boasts of the murder to Qyz Zhibek, and she curses him. Her six brothers appear and, recognizing the gray horse of Tölegen, seize Bekezhan and kill him. The narrative then switches to Sansyzbai, who is now seventeen and who sets out on the search for Tölegen that comprises the epic's second half and which includes Sansyzbai's victory over the Qalmaq Khan in single combat and concludes with Sansyzbai's marriage to Zhibek*].

Kenesary-Nauryzbai

Qashqynbai Karaev

Translated by Meiramgul Kussainova²²

My name is Nysanbai,
 May you not forget it.
 Unlike my father or my mother
 I am a singer.
 Bismillah, may the saints bless
 My mouth's thirty teeth,
 And bid them help my honeyed tongue.
 If I wave my hand,
 May seven men of the Kereit
 Come and help your son!
 Ask me my kin,
 I am Ashamaily Kereit.²³
 When I was ten,

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²³ A Kazakh lineage centered in the south and west of Kazakhstan, far from Kenesary's territory in the northeast.

I grasped a *qobyz*.
 At eleven,
 I knew the strength of words.
 At twelve,
 I saw the faces of the just.
 At thirteen,
 I followed in their footsteps.
 At fourteen,
 I traveled with my kin.
 But when fifteen,
 I came in quest
 Of Kenesary and Nauryzbai.
 In those days the Khan's singer
 Was a Qozha,²⁴ by name Soidaq.
 To see some lad come, *qobyz* in hand,
 Little pleased the Qozha.
 Before the khan I sang,
 Came close to him,
 And with the aid of my companions,
 The Kereit's seven sons,
 Good fortune fell upon me,
 For I did overthrow the Qozha.
 Let the righteous be your guides,
 And good fortune shall find you.
 As a son the khan honored me,
 Had me dwell in his tents,
 Beside Akhmet and Taishyq.²⁵

[*The epic describes multiple campaigns*]

Battles with the Kyrgyz

Let the blacksmith now take up
 His hammer and his tongs.
 Khan Kene's²⁶ wrath had risen,

²⁴ A member of a sacred lineage, in many cases one claiming descent from the Prophet.

²⁵ Kenesary's sons.

²⁶ Kenesary.

At the insults of the Kyrgyz,
 Now his dream was
 To drive them beyond the mountains
 And take Kumbel.
 The Ile river they forded,
 And made for the Dulat.²⁷
 The Dulat, Khan Kene thought, would join
 His quarrel with the Kyrgyz.
 So he went, but the Dulat
 Had no stomach for this.
 "A wild horse will not abide a tether,"
 Was the Dulats' curt reply.
 Now Keneke despaired
 Of aid from those he trusted.²⁸
 ...
 But at that moment God
 Granted good fortune to my Keneke.
 From Khokand there came
 A host of Dulats, thick as a pine wood.
 The warriors Belqozha, Medeu, and
 Baiuzaq, the son of Mambet, all came.
 Saying, "I am your ally, show me your enemy,"
 Their words gave Kene fresh breath.
 With this new strength,
 Now the falcons spread their wings.
 The Dulats, thick as a pine wood,
 Wait for the Khan's answer.
 He bade them mount their horses
 And join his people.
 He chose then the swords,
 Steel a stone couldn't blunt,
 Full eight hundred warriors,
 And every man a hero.
 He bade them follow
 Nauryzbai on a campaign

²⁷ The Dulat are one of the largest of the Kazakh lineages, but one that belongs to a different tribal confederacy than that of Kenesary. Kenesary gains support from some among the Dulat, but others rebuff him.

²⁸ *-ke* at the end of a name turns it into an endearment. The singer using it for Khan Kene serves to emphasize the bond between the Khan and his followers as well as underlining the singer's own proximity to the Khan.

To level four fortresses.

The Dialogue of Nauryzbai Batyr and Käriboz

Then Nauryzbai met
 One who rode out ahead of all,
 The Kyrgyz named Käriboz,
 The son of Er Qanai.
 Then Käriboz spoke,
 And this is what he said:
 “Hey, Nauryzbai, my lord,
 What harm have I ever done
 To Kenesary Khan?
 Why didn’t he say, ‘Enough,’
 And stay with honor among the Kyrgyz?
 Was there any land you left
 To the Kyrgyz, and did not seize?
 Qosshy you struck, raised a tumult
 From Shengel to Qaraqystaq.
 You seized Qalsha and bound him,
 He who was a khan, a leader of men.
 Your deeds belong back
 In the time of Ablay Khan.²⁹
 Was there ever a chance the Kyrgyz
 Would surrender their daughters to you, free of bride price?
 Up you rode, and brought war,
 Raised your flag on Kumbel.
 Our winter camps you raided,
 And our herds you took as loot.
 You settled down and drove us forth
 From lands we’d held since ancient days.
 Before now was there ever
 An envoy whose death was such torment?
 Killing Zhamanqaram
 Broke my spirit.
 What life can you grant me,
 After all you’ve done to kill me?

²⁹ Ablay Khan, Kenesary’s grandfather, was a hero to the Kazakhs but not to the Kyrgyz: he and the Kyrgyz were frequent adversaries in the eighteenth century.

Qanai and Esqozha are buried,
 What more might they pay?
 Let this calm their rage, I said,
 And yielded you my lands.
 Let this be a trophy to them, I said,
 And yielded you my herds.
 You even sought to seize
 The mount beneath me,
 The one horse I guarded,
 On whom I fled to the hills.
 Why does Khan Kene bear
 Such enmity to the Kyrgyz?
 The white-capped Kyrgyz
 Gave greatly to the Kazakhs.
 Yet you came mounted and armed,
 And struck us without mercy.
 Would you even turn aside
 If a cradle rested in your path?"

Then Nauryzbai spoke,
 And this is what he said:
 "You speak well, Käriboz,
 Once there was peace between us.
 My Kene was made a vagabond,
 When Russians seized our home.
 Then those who were his younger brothers,
 His loyal subjects, turned cold.
 Twelve warriors I sent off,
 Under the lead of Zhekebatyr,
 And bid them say, 'Grant us shelter,
 In the tall grass of lake Qoqy.'
 For twelve months they were captives
 Of your beks, Zhanqarash and Zhantai.
 Once the tents of my people were here,
 We took vengeance for this insult.
 I killed your Zhamanqaram,
 But he set his foot on that path.
 Who would dispute with God
 The fates he grants his servants?
 The guarding of one's people
 Is a task born in one's tribe.
 As for Qanai, that was my deed,

Done in the heat of vengeance.
 What now can your father pay,
 Resting in a grave I made for him?
 Don't you know, Kāriboz,
 The guilt that weighs your neck?
 If you have no respect to God,
 You will have no peace from Khan Kene.
 You promise the Russians fealty,
 And your Zhanqarash and Zhantai
 Go and tell them every news.
 You sit drinking vodka and *boza*,
 And glut yourselves on bribes.³⁰
 Your claims of innocence
 Are lies spoken in vain.
 If you promise fealty to Russians,
 Bow to alien laws,
 You will not have peace from Khan Kene,
 But punishment from Nauryzbai!"

Then Kāriboz spoke again,
 "I shall make my turn yours,
 Your words so sway me,
 I shall speak them for you.
 The highest mountain, Nauryzbai,
 Is not your equal.
 If your golden flag should fall,
 The Kyrgyz shall open your eyes.
 You seized my herds, Nauryzbai,
 And doled them out as trophies.
 Never hesitated, Nauryzbai,
 To lay my head in the grave."

Conclusion

How narrow our times grew
 Once my Keneke had gone.
 Our people's guards, our khans,

³⁰ *Boza* is a lightly fermented grain porridge.

Were lost, and we left orphans.
 My two wings both alike
 Folded and broken.
 A gilded sword with a steel blade
 That struck a stone and bent.
 Misfortunes fall upon me,
 And fear of what I saw.
 Our lords were priceless,
 were water in a time of drought.
 My sword, with its gilt hilt and steel blade,
 Never struck a stone yet still is chipped.
 The feathers are torn
 On both my wings alike.
 Kenesary, Nauryzbai,
 My lords of noble birth!
 The death the Kyrgyz brought
 Must have been your fated hour.

Torghai, Kazakhstan, 1939

ORAL DUELS: THE KAZAKH AITYS

The translation below is an excerpt from a longer text, colloquially titled *The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz*,³¹ which is an historic verbal duel between the two poets Birzhan Qozhaghululy and Sara Tastanbekqyzy. It is said to have taken place in the late nineteenth century in the east of Kazakhstan, which was then under Russian imperial control. *Aitys* is an oral and musical tradition found across the Eurasian steppe, one in which two poets battle one another, using not only words and wit but also their knowledge of cultural history. Poets—representing their home regions, ancestry, and lineages of learning—have historically held a highly respected position within society. *Aitys* competitions most often take place before a live audience, which takes an active role in the support and interpretation of poets and their message(s). *Aitys* represents an idealized performance of cultural identity and can thus serve as a platform within which it is possible for poets to voice social commentary on the conditions of their time without explicit repercussion.

³¹ The eponym *sal* here refers to his status as a bard, while *qyz* simply means girl.

There are three major features of this meeting which exemplify *aitys* performances more broadly: first, both poets represent different *ru* (Kazakh lineage groups) and must demonstrate specific knowledge of major figures and heroes within their own lineages, as well as more general knowledge of the lineage of their opponent. In this case, according to the text itself, Birzhan represents the Arghyn lineage while Sara represents the Naiman. Second, the poets must demonstrate great confidence and pride, boasting about their own abilities while cutting down their opponent. The poets use the metaphor of pure and thoroughbred steeds and of *bäige* (horse racing) to frame their competition. The poets also mix other oral traditions, such as proverbs and sayings, *bata* (wish-blessings), and *shezhire* (genealogical recitation), into their performance, further demonstrating their mastery of Kazakh oral literature. All these features are highlighted in our partial presentation of the text. The third major facet is the poets' ability to improvise commentary on conflicts or controversies in their community.

The eponymous bard Sara, according to the text, was approximately seventeen at the time of this *aitys*, and also unknown outside of her home region when she met the bard Birzhan. Birzhan, by contrast, would have been approximately 38 years old and quite well established, with a reputation across the territory of the Kazakh steppe. It was a great honor for Sara that Birzhan would travel to meet her in her home region, as he is said to have done in the year 1871. In this meeting Birzhan was effectively testing Sara—he has begun to hear of her talents and has come to see the level of her skill for himself. If Sara did well in this *aitys* against such a venerable opponent, she would cement her reputation and place in the tradition as a whole, and this is in fact what happened.

Sara sets the tone and topic of their conversation by introducing herself as the subject of the *aitys*. It turns out that Sara has been sent against her wishes to the village where Birzhan has come to meet her in order to be married to Zhienqul, the son of the village head. It would be culturally inappropriate for Sara to speak openly against either her elders or her future in-laws, and so it is necessary for *both* poets to use their special position as respected cultural figures in order to articulate their opinions on this unfolding situation, and for Birzhan to entreat those figures on her behalf. Once Birzhan understands Sara and her situation, he does in fact come to her aid. He echoes her criticism and dismay with Zhienqul and directly confronts the men responsible for this predicament, as well as the rest of the village audience and the elders who have allowed it to pass.

In this case, the poets together were able to gain resolution to a difficult social situation by using the broad discursive framework of *aitys* poetry to hold the entire community accountable for Sara's future.

The content of *The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz* was ostensibly remembered by other poets present at their meeting. According to the text, Birzhan arrived with an entourage of young men. It seems quite probable that at least some of these companions were poets or singers, able to recall the encounter. The *aitys* seems to have taken place over a few days and then circulated orally for years until it reached the poet and collector Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly, who published the first written version of the text in 1895. In its written form, the text becomes further heteroglossic, as Zhusipbek Qozha added his own poetic verses at the beginning and end of the *aitys*, effectively bracketing the turns of Sara and Birzhan. Several other versions of the *aitys* text have been published, and there has been a lively scholarly debate for more than a century on the historical accuracy of the poetic event: did the poets meet, or did they dialogue from a distance? Which poets were actually responsible for memorizing and re-transmitting the text over the many years before it was transcribed? It is possible, for example, that the *aitys* was orally transmitted between the poets—each living in different regions—over a longer period of time. A second version of the *aitys* was published in 1907 by the poet and scholar Ärip Tangirbergenov, who was the student of the well-known poet Abai Qunanbaiuly, and who had traveled to meet with Sara. Through these works and many others, *The Aitys of Birzhan and Sara* has become a touchstone or key story in the history of Kazakh (oral) literature. It is still told and retold today in many different contexts; it is this conversation and dialogue that continues to make *aitys* a living tradition.

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The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz

Translated by Eva-Marie Dubuisson, Madina Mussagazina, Lyazzat Kulmukanova, and Indira Makazhan

Narrator:

The poet Sara was Tastanbek's daughter,
 The strong one who always dared to race.
 Though a girl, still the people's strongest racer –
 We have not seen words from such a special one.³³
 The poet Sara was the daughter of Tastanbek,
 The Naimans Tolqyn and Esimbek were her relatives.
 The Sadyr and Matai were gathered to be entertained,
 She had been brought to Turysbek's *aul*.
 There, in Turysbek's encampment,
 Her poetry hummed as loud as wool beaten into felt.
 In those days there was no one like Sara,
 Seventeen years old, so adept in her wordcraft.
 Her name was known among the Arghyn and the Naiman:
 Sara, the swift racer, a descendant of Qaptaghai.
 The traveling singer Birzhan was Qozhaqul's son,
 He began to search for Sara as soon as he heard of her.
 He was of the Kerei; his battle cry was Altai-Qarpyq
 His life's work was making merry.
 His lineage was Altai-Qarpyq, his tribe was Arghyn,
 He raised a ruckus wherever he went.³⁴
 Birzhan had certainly heard of Sara;
 He too was given the gift of song.
 He set out with eleven young men,
 Isn't it his way to be generous with what God gave him?
 God gifts bards this kind of artistry,
 Every blessing given to mere mortals comes from above.

³³ The Kazakh terms *zhvirik* and *san zhvirik* refer to the fastest horse in a race. In order to preserve the overarching metaphor of the poetic competition as a horse race, we have chosen to translate this throughout as “racer” or “strong racer,” but a synonym might also be “competitor.”

³⁴ Sadyr and Matai are branches of the larger Naiman lineage group. *Er Qaptaghai* (the man Qaptaghai) was a famous Naiman; this name became a colloquial way to reference all Naiman; both uses appear in this text. Altai-Qarpyq is a branch of the larger Arghyn lineage group.

Birzhan will soon be thirty-eight years old,
 His father has fifteen hundred horses.
 Eleven companions came with Birzhan,
 Singing colorful songs boisterously as they went.
 "Sara," said Birzhan, "strong of words,
 What an *aitys* we could hold with her!
 Once we reach Turysbek's *aul*,
 Let's send a horse and rider to bring her to us.
 Sara, tame nightingale of the Naimans,
 I will make her tell her every secret.
 How could I pass by Turysbek's *aul*,
 Without calling on Sara?
 Tomorrow afternoon, my eleven companions
 Will savor the spoils of Birzhan's victory.
 As the Arghyn and the Naiman both know well,
 The song I sing is better than any Arghyn.
 Let me gather every living soul among the Naiman,
 And I will sing them ninety-two variations.
 Sara, too, they say, has a way with words;
 These days her name is well known among the Naiman.
 If we were to battle, I would not let her open her mouth,
 She may boast of herself before all, except me.
 I will capture her like the sparrow hawk takes the quail,
 If God will give me the strength."

Sara:

My name is Sara, I am the daughter of Tastanbek,
 Among Er Qaptaghai's descendants I alone stood apart,
 At thirteen I took up the *dombyra*³⁵ and started to sing,
 I alone never stumbled on the way.
 Please give me support, Er Qaptaghai, my ancestor,
 Come listen to my words, girls, if you dare.
 Of noble birth, a descendant of the Prophet,
 I came to make you hear my words.
 Oh Lord, the days of women are cursed,
 Not a single one of them has any power.

³⁵ A traditional Kazakh musical instrument in the style of a lute, often used by bards to accompany oral poetic performances.

They live like a dog who gnaws on scraps of leather
 Left on the road by a careless cart-driver.
 My father has wealth enough in livestock,³⁶
 My three uncles, scions of six villages, are wealthy,
 But even so, I am miserable,
 Like a little lamb, I was traded away, alas!
 Save God, no one gives anything to those who sorrow,
 I give my words to those who would peer into their depth.
 Oh Lord, I am just seventeen this year,
 A strong racer soaring high, none can keep up.
 Many times I spoke before the khan and the common people,
 But it was all in vain, they do not heed me.
 The bard Niyazbek came in search of me,
 But faltered—he could not match my pace.
 I matched words with that wild long-maned stallion,
 I was like a son to my father; I was his wealth.
 Then I spoke in Turysbek's *aul*,
 With Birzhan, the son of Qozhaqul.
 God guided me rightly to Turysbek's house,
 At Turysbek's house, I took my place,
 Across from seven or eight strangers.
 And then the voice of Zhunisbek rang out:
 "Who is in this house?" he asked.
 I sat, taking my *dombyra* in my hand.
 All those who had come were high-born:
 Esimbek, the good Maman, the man Sherubai.
 Then a man rode up with thirty-two traveling companions,
 I counted them, peeking from inside the yurt's felt cover.
 "*Suiinshi*,³⁷ the girl you seek is here," they said,
 Like enemies crowing over the spoils of war.
 He took his brightly-colored *dombyra* in his hands,
 With someone holding tight to his horse's reins,
 He started to sing passionately, like whipping wool,³⁸
 And I knew from his well-chosen words that it was Birzhan.
 Excited, his voice overflowed in song,

³⁶ The text refers to "four livestock," which are traditionally horses, sheep, cows, and camels.

³⁷ A word used to state a claim to a reward for having brought good news. It can also be used figuratively to suggest that something good has come.

³⁸ In other words, the rhythm of his singing was like the steady thumping sound made when wool is beaten into felt.

But I did not shrink away from his shouts and yells.

[In his first turn, Birzhan introduces himself and then presents his strong challenge to Sara. In her first reply, Sara acknowledges the village and the crowd, and agrees to meet Birzhan.]

Birzhan:

I, Birzhan, do not usually go to a girl,
 But once sparked, I am always ready to burn.
 Come out, don't play at femininity my dear,
 Don't keep yourself hidden away in the lands of the Naiman.
 Now I see the uncouth ways of Naiman girls,
 Rude is the life of a people with no sense of courtesy.
 Among our people, a younger brother would go to his elder,
 Is it so much for you to ask about my health?
 I am Birzhan Sal, the son of Qozhagul,
 I have much more exciting things than you in my life.
 I am a thoroughbred whose talisman is a silken mane,
 The endless dream of girls is to clutch my mane.
 Do you have a devil inside you that makes you deaf to men?
 I'm putting it as simply as I can, Sara.

Sara:

Ey, Birzhan, who cares about your health?
 You may speak well, but perhaps that's your misfortune.
 Wouldn't it be better to listen to the story of the Prophet?
 You have only made your ignorance more clear.
 The Creator made us all from clay,
 These words of yours show nothing but your ignorance.
 It was Adam who went first to Eve,
 Who do you think you are to break this custom?
 I thought you wanted to show your wisdom,
 But the Arghyns always boast about what they do not have.
 Among the Naiman I am a double-edged steel sword,
 Forged to slash your sail.
 My words will be a savage wind,

That shakes the dust from you.
 Is this how you pass your time, Arghyn?
 As you boast about revealing the Naiman's broken pieces,
 Did you not know that your honor would be questioned?
 Be careful not to stack your *körpe* too high.³⁹
 I will dig a pit into which you will sink, you crazy oathbreaker,
 I will leave you as tarnished brass.
 You say you have found someone you can beat,
 But, Birzhan Sal, are you sure you hold the reins?
 You could never grab my white hand,
 As you might grab the arm of a struggling child.

[In their subsequent turns, Birzhan agrees that an unwanted marriage is a misfortune, but also continues to praise the Arghyn lineage. Sara replies with a defense of the Naiman, and she tells although he is famous, in her eyes he is just an arrogant, rambling old man]

Birzhan:

Never think your tongue might touch me, a son of Qunanbai,
 Whose rage, like an angry elk, is known to all the Alash.⁴⁰
 You may strike me, Sara, like a viper,
 But I would not let ten such *agyns* bother me.
 Not just you, not even a man has ever overtaken me,
 I have a lineage, I do not come from nowhere.
 When I soar high, shining with truth,
 No man could come close to my side.
 But I may regret it if I do not respect you,
 Whose words seem cold to the bone.
 All afternoon you've been set loose,
 Careless, like some swift young horse.
 Show your skills in full, hold nothing back,

³⁹ The proverbial meaning referenced here is "Live within your means." *Körpes* are the handmade sleeping pads that are collected and stacked in a family's home, offering a way of measuring wealth figuratively.

⁴⁰ Qunanbai may refer to Qunanbai Öskenbaiuly (1804-188), an Arghyn who was an important leader in the nineteenth century and the father of the poet Abai Qunanbaiuly. Birzhan likely uses the term Alash to refer to the united Kazakh tribes and hence to the Kazakh people.

Don't placate me with shallow words.

[*Birzhan goes on to extensively praise his own character and abilities.*]

Why would your people hand you over to that dog, Tastanbek?
Is he the one that really suits you?
I've been hunting for women since I was fifteen,
Every day, my saddle streaked with blood.
Tread carefully, poor Sara,
I am not yours to deceive.

Sara:

No Kazakh can be compared to Baraq Khan,
Who led the Naiman and the Arghyn with his strength,
Our *aruaq*, watching over us until the end of days,
Who could sling sheep over his saddle, like so many lambs.⁴¹
In the same way, no man can be compared to me,
The *pir* of words has been my guide since I was only ten.⁴²
Though I may seem weak to the untrained eye,
A thoroughbred as easily thrown over the saddle as a sheep,
I am a white hawk, having been raised to fly
From the high hills of Matai's lineage.
Birds in the sky whirl toward my voice,
Which shifts and shimmers like a peacock's plumes.
Oathbreaker, make it plain to my in-laws,
Not a single word of mine falls short of theirs.
I sing, the Naiman nightingale,
Well-fed inside a cage, untouched even by the wind.
Though two adversaries may be unequal,
The people are quick to judge what they do not understand.
I don't mean to brag, but my spirit exceeds
The abilities of ten Arghyn.
As we compete with each other, overcome one another,

⁴¹ Baraq Khan was a ruler of the late Golden Horde in the early fifteenth century. *Aruaq* means an ancestor, one believed to watch over and guard their descendants.

⁴² *Pir* means a spiritual patron or guardian.

My voice is a golden flag that glows like embers.

Birzhan:

So these are your words, Sara, my dear,
 With eyes like those of a young bird of prey.
 “Who would match words with me?” I asked.
 And at that moment, God led you to me.
 Every victor must have a foe, so they say,
 No yurt can stand on crooked beams.
 Oh, you are like an unbridled racer,
 When you speak, words of brass turn gold!
 You, a white hawk whose wings cannot be overshadowed,
 Have now become an owl, hidden in the night.
 How unfortunate you went to a flawed man, sweet Sara,
 You, who could make any family happy!
 Tastanbek is not a man of good health,
 He won’t keep his daughter, yet he won’t let her go.
 I know your partner, Sara,
 If only your passion could not be crushed.
 When I saw you leave the yurt, heard the clamor of your song,
 I knew you wouldn’t give up without a fight.
 Don’t you see the reason for your sorrow?
 Grief is a louse that feeds upon your blood.⁴³
 You are a thoroughbred with eight angles and one secret,⁴⁴
 Don’t you see the fate that awaits you?
 Have that man of yours brought here,
 Let me see the one they’ve chosen for you.
 If the son of Turysbek truly cares,
 We won’t know until we see him for ourselves.
 He is probably a young man, willow-thin with a shining face,
 Your equal in art, eight-angled just like you.
 You’re so skilled, you could find faults in any work,
 In as many men as there are peacocks.
 Sara, they say if something’s good, let it be seen,

⁴³ The specific phrasing “*bit ishine qan quiu*” (to pour blood into a louse) means to feed or hold on to negative feelings.

⁴⁴ The idiom “*segiz qyrly, bir syrly*” (eight angles and one mystery) means someone who is multit talented, or someone with a complex character.

Sara, who has swallowed the grief of her people.
 Go quickly, invite your *mirza*, that dog Zhienqul,
 Sara, is it shame that makes you hesitate?⁴⁵

Sara:

Qazheke-au, what an invitation this is!⁴⁶
 “Let Zhienqul come quickly,” he roars!
 Go and bring your treasure, we will show him,
 Or Birzhan will wait in your village until he comes.
 My vain tongue does not let the Arghyn speak,
 Not a day passes without my red flower being humiliated.
 Shame kept me silent before all of you,
 I pass my days roped to a donkey!
 Any decent person should know,
 That all of this ends in sorrow.
 Though I am the laureate of the Altay when I speak,
 If I die, they will demand a dog’s price for this racehorse.
 My poor head trusted you,
 When I go to Zhienqul, I keep silent!
 You have seen Zhienqul for yourselves,
 Yet without fear of God you gave me away.
 You call upon the Naiman ancestors,
 Yet I too am their companion, even if I am a girl.
 So bring out Zhienqul, show him to Birzhan,
 Let an outsider judge who owns the herd.
 Shame doesn’t kill you; it only saps your will,
 What can I do, God has made me his possession!
 If that dog of yours won’t come, drag it here and tie it up,
 Do not let my boiling anger die.
 Elder uncles, if it befits your lineage,
 I would leave it all to God’s will.
Qazheke-au, you who have seen Mecca,⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Mirza* is an honorific usually addressed to young men. The meaning is close to lord or sir in English.

⁴⁶ *Qazheke* means someone who has gone on Hajj; here it is used as an expression of surprise.

⁴⁷ The words “*khaqtyng ui*” mean “the house of truth,” but here refers to Mecca, and more specifically to the Kaaba.

You must realize anyone would find this cruelty difficult.
 Will Zhienqul be the one to stand by me
 On the dawn of Judgement Day?
 Open my eyes, but don't disturb my peace,
 If you leave, do not act like an offended child.
 Let me invite him from outside with my song,
 Birzhan will not set me up to be shamed.
 Bring my greetings to Zhienqul, let him get up and come.
 Why does he sit there, afraid to approach?
 Whatever you hold in your hand is gold to you,
 I would not give up even his fingernail for Birzhan.
 Let Zhienqul show himself to Birzhan-sal like the moon,
 Like good white tea that cheers the mood.
 If offered, he is my thoroughbred who cannot be caught,
 I will not compare him to the Arghyn like some colt.
 Let him come quickly to greet Birzhan Sal,
 Let him show his ferocity to the old Arghyn.
 "Everybody claims that their baby goat is full-grown,"
 Then in the end, they sold me for cattle.
 Do not make a gift of my honor to my enemies.
 The Arghyn and the Naiman know my fame.
 May he come swiftly, if he has the soul of even a gnat,
 For my pace, thoroughbred-swift, is known to all.
 Let my Zhienqul be silent, his words are broken;
 My words are pure, as smooth as sherbet.
 Let my poor man, hiding within his fort,
 Squeeze his eyes shut and dive into the lake.
 My precious one, God-given for my happiness,
 Seven of him worth less than Birzhan's single fingernail.
 My hunter is a river among the Naiman,
 And I, a fish hooked on a line.
 Let the Arghyn see this great good fortune,
 A glittering triumph, worthy of the hero Targhyn.⁴⁸
 Well, if Birzhan says, let me see this prize,
 Then let our little one leave off his trembling and hurry here.
 If he has life in him, let him come before the afternoon prayer,
 If he has the strength, let him come without delay.
 Poor Birzhan, begging the people for alms,

⁴⁸ Targhyn is a hero of Central Asian oral literature, famous for his deeds in battle and for his relationship with his consort Aqzhunis. The epic of Targhyn was transformed into an opera in the Soviet period.

Wouldn't he take a girl like me, if he had the cattle?
 Let my chevalier show himself with honor,
 He with whom God chose to join me!
 Let a young horse be slaughtered for our guests,⁴⁹
 My honorable singer, strong willed as Tättimbet!⁵⁰

Birzhan:

Have someone fetch your husband, let me see him,
 He will not obey if it means evil for him.
 With my own eyes I would how this wretch looks,
 To one who jousts with words !
 You have exhausted, almost killed me, with your words
 Now halt your boasting and let my eyes see him.
 Is he so unworthy, irresolute, artless,
 He cannot be shown without shame?

Sara:

Eseke-au, send someone for your child,
 Birzhan has been like a demon among us.
 Must I praise this young man only from afar,
 Must we hide him away as though we'd stolen him?
 Send your black-maned chestnut pacer to him,
 My Zhienqul will put a saddle on him.
 Let me see the blow that knocks out Birzhan,
 Why has my God bound me to him!
Qazheke-au, summon him before the guests leave,
 For Birzhan will not stop saying, "Let me see him."
 A person chooses death also, it seems,
 Why hasn't death taken that dog yet ?
 If the proud rider of the chestnut pacer goes to him,
 The wretch will hide himself, he won't come,
 Truly, he would shame us scandalously,

⁴⁹ In Central Eurasian nomadic cultures, hospitality is a strong virtue; a host should feed guests meat from an animal sacrificed in honor of the meeting.

⁵⁰ Here she most likely refers to Tättimbet Qazanghauy, a nineteenth century musician (dombyra player) and well-known Arghyn.

If he refused to come, stayed home, rooted like a bush!
 He's no man, shows no care for his nation's honor,
 But the upstart preens like he's summited some desolate peak!
 Will Zhienqul come with a menacing look,
 Swollen in size, like his back bears ten rolls of cloth?
 You have sons and daughters, Hadji uncle,
 And I am left here with a man Birzhan calls miserable.
 In the time I dwelt with you,
 I had health but never joy.
 "Send the Arghyn tumbling," you said,
 Concerned not just for me, but for all the Naiman.
 With my *zhenge*⁵¹ you made pilgrimage to Baitulla,⁵²
 Came here from concern for my well-being.
 Why couldn't you see my tears,
 When Birzhan halted, when his song broke off?
 Oh heirs of Qaptagai, gathered here,
 Grant I be given to some other man.
 Why must Birzhan demand to meet him,
 He cannot really wish to see him.
 It will not make him the wealthiest of all the Argyn,
 Were his hand to grasp Zhienqul

Birzhan:

My dear Sara, a child like you is rare,
 Won't you share this gift with your *shezhire*?⁵³
 Your grief belongs to Esimbek and Turysbek,
 The mending of your young man, poor girl!
 It seems your people do not fear your tears,
 Yet I have no wish to be cut from your side.⁵⁴
 However much your enemies might diminish you,
 No one will surpass you.
 Do not bid Zhienqul come,

⁵¹ *Zhenge* is the wife of an older male relative, such as a brother or uncle.

⁵² An Arabic word sometimes used to refer to the Kaaba.

⁵³ *Shezhire* is an ancestral lineage, but can also mean the knowledge of and ability to recite the names of the lineage.

⁵⁴ *Qiyp ketu* is "to cut" (as with scissors) and often refers to the passing of a young person—his or her "life was cut short."

Let the fool stay home and be scolded there.
 I would boil with rage if I saw him,
 So let the heathen keep his distance.
 You know everything of the Arghyn and Naiman,
 My name, Birzhan, is known to all Alash.
 Instead of spending their cattle on one like you,
 A Kazakh man could take even a dog as a wife.
 How might your enemies abuse you,
 If I gave you something as a sign?
 A talented one like you will never be alone,
 Your courage as clear to all as the valleys of the moon.
 May you be saved from your fate, Sara,
 For I have seen a strong racer.
 Birzhan then spoke to our side⁵⁵:
 You're not to be forgotten, Sara, ever.
 You, who bend words into wonders, oh Lord,
 When shall I find my way back to you?
 Esimbek, never trade a jewel for dung,
 If your descendant is a girl, still you owe her honor.
 Eseke-aū, don't close your ears to what I say,
 If you don't listen, you'll say the Arghyn spoke for naught.
 I will cut my words short, say only this,
 I have not met one soul more masterful in song.
 Do not say your little sister is a woman,
 For she surpasses all here.
 Truly, if she were let to race each day,
 Neither poets nor birds of the air might catch her.
 If strangers passing by should hear her voice,
 They would think it the song of a fortepiano.⁵⁶
 Where there is sin, mercy may also be found,
 Zhiengkul is not the equal of this unfortunate!
 By law,⁵⁷ you may not do violence to the innocent.
 Guard the good, and evil will not happen.
 Then, too, there are Quranic verses and hadiths,

⁵⁵ This line appears to be reported from the perspective of one of Birzhan's companions, who would have further relayed the performance to other poets and scholars.

⁵⁶ In the late nineteenth century, the expansion of wealth and of trade routes connecting Central Asia with Russia brought west European musical instruments into the steppe region.

⁵⁷ Birzhan uses the Russian word for law, *zakon*, suggesting he invokes a secular rather than religious authority here.

“Don’t let ignorance bring tears,” it is said.
 Today, you alone are the wise one,
 a lion of the Naiman, one who went on Hajj.
 God gave him what he has,
 The best of all in a fight with enemies.
 If he looked for a bride, could he find one like Sara?
 Close her mouth and her song will press against it.
 Ten times better to behead her, as the Chinese do,
 Than to send her away in grief to Zhienkul.
 Turysbek and Esimbek are strong and healthy.
 The time for me to return home has drawn near.
 I may circle back this way next year,
 If I have not been laid in the grave.
 Please do not give Sara to Zhienkul,
 You have wealth enough for a daughter, even a son.
 If there are thinkers among your people,
 They say the laws of the dead do not apply to the living.
 Sara, as sorrowful as a fledgeling caught and leashed,⁵⁸
 Of all things in these days, there is nothing worst.

Sara:

Birzhan-sal has said farewell and left,
 For two days I fought him and would not yield.
 Though I had spoke bitter words to him at first,
 In my regret, I gifted him a pacer.
 ‘Farewell, Birzhan, be of good health!’ I said,
 ‘You are a wonder, a gift, a young man like a three-year old bay horse.’
 Until the day you die, remain a bright wonder,
 Wherever you go, by day there will be a wedding, by night a feast.
 I hope you will come and ask about us, poet Birzhan,
 If God keeps you from the grave.
 Do not always be saying you are Arghyn,
 If another girl should catch your eye like this.
 I knew your name, was in awe of your fame,
 Did I not, I would have beaten you so you would not return.
 Respecting you, I couldn’t leave you lying there on the ground,

⁵⁸ The word *bailauly* (bound) suggests a bird of prey; hawks and falcons are caught and trained by Central Asian hunters, and are typically kept leashed on a stand.

Or I wouldn't have let you take a single step forward.
 At one point, it seemed that you were familiar,
 Although you did not let me go ahead.
 If my Eseke was a man, he would not give me away,
 Like some simple man, without a word of dispute.

Narrator:

This song of mine was written in dedication to Akhmetkärīm,
 Who would grudge the art that comes from their hand?
 Though I tried to shape it as I wanted,
 My four-year old colt never overtook my dream.

[*The poem concludes with an additional 56 lines in which Zhusipbek Qoja reflects on the transience of human life. His speech is literally addressed to his fellow poet Akhmetkärīm, but his words of edification are directed more broadly to future generations.*]

NOTES ON SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

1. For the establishment of lithographic presses in Central Asia, see Khalid (1994). Surveys of the oral epic tradition in Central Asia include Chadwick and Zhirmunsky (1969) and Reichl (1992). For a study of folktales and their performance, see Mills (1991). Translations of Central Asian oral literature are rare, but see the translation of the early Turkic epic of *Dede Korkut* by Lewis (2011) and the translation of a portion of the *Manas* and of other Kyrgyz epic narratives by Prior (2022, 2013).
2. First published as Boborahim Mashrab's *Divan-i Mashrab* (1900). Prior to publication as a lithograph, Mashrab's biography circulated widely in hundreds of manuscript copies, with titles such as *Divan-i Mashrab* or *Qissa-i Mashrab*. Many of the longer poems in the biography are inserted without much relation to the narrative context. The long lithograph version of the *Divana-i Mashrab* published in Kabul (Mashrab 1934) includes more poems without adding to the narrative prose frame. During the Soviet period, Mashrab's biography was suppressed due to its glorification of Sufi practices and

knowledge. It was available only to those with access to pre-Soviet manuscripts and lithographs in Arabic script Turki, or to the annotated translation into Russian by Sergei Lykoshin (1910). Only in 1992 did an edition of the biography appear in Uzbek in Cyrillic orthography, based closely on the lithograph editions published in Tashkent in 1900. Since then, further editions of his poetry and biography have appeared, drawing on more sources and seeking to establish a complete canon of his poetry, although debates continue about the authorship of several works. For an analysis of the political meanings of the narrative of Mashrab's supposed conversion of the Dzungar ruler Galdan Khan to Islam, see Thierry Zarcone (2016). For the use of Mashrab's poems as lyrics for many songs in the Uyghur Muqam tradition, see Light (2008); Razia Sultanova presents several examples of Mashrab's ghazals she heard performed in *From Shamanism to Sufism: Women, Islam and Culture in Central Asia* (2011).

3. The poems included here were originally published in Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg's *Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains* (2004). See her volume as a whole for multiple comparative examples and for analyses of the poems themselves. The editors would like to thank Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg and Reichert Verlag for extending their permission to republish these poems here.
4. "Dudar Qyz, or the Girl with the Tangled Locks" was first published as "Dudar Qyz" in Radloff (1870: 309–320). "The Golden Shoes" was first published by Dawut Turekhmet as "Altun Kesh" in the Uyghur literary journal *Tarim* in 1958. There is relatively little English language scholarship on Kazakh folktales, but for a discussion of trickster tales in Kazakh, see McGuire (2022). For a broad discussion of folktales that feature a shift in sex, see Hooker (1990). Margaret A. Mills (2001) provides a detailed discussion of this plot device in Central Asian folktales. For scholarship on other Uyghur folktales, see Ildiko Beller-Hann (2004). Alan Dundes' *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook* (1982) includes multiple comparative studies of the Cinderella tale-type from around the world; Mills's study (1982) in this volume of the Cinderella tale-type in Central Asia and its role in Sufi women's ritual is particularly relevant for "The Golden Shoes."

5. The version of *Qyz Zhibek* translated here was first published as a work by Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly in Qazan (Shaikhyslamuly 1900). Zhusipbek Qozha's version is predated by a transcription the Russian army office E. A. Alexandrov made of an 1887 performance by the singer Musabai Zhirau near Fort Kazalinsk in present-day southern Kazakhstan, and by a transcription prepared by an "unknown Nogai" that was printed in Kazan in 1894. Zhusipbek Qozha was clearly aware of the 1894 version, as he included lines in his version distinguishing it from the earlier text. His version became the canonical text in the Soviet era, transcribed and reprinted into both Latin and Cyrillic script editions. These transcriptions often deleted words that were of Arabic origin and also removed the lines in which Zhusipbek Qozha identified himself as the singer of the narrative. A new and complete Cyrillic transcription of the Arabic text was completed in 2009 (Qosan 2009). McGuire (2021) offers a detailed discussion of the different versions and of Soviet era debates over the epic's place in the Kazakh literary canon. The film adaptation of the epic is analyzed extensively in Peter Rollberg's *The Cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan 1925–1991* (2021). Qashqynbai Qaraev's 1939 version of *Kenesary-Nauryzbai* is preserved in the archives of the Central Academic Library of Kazakhstan (Ortalyq Ghylymy Kitapkhany, Qolzhazba qory, 1338 qory, 13 dāpter). Multiple Cyrillic script editions of Qashqynbai Zhirau's performance have been published in the post-Soviet period; see for example Beisenbaev (1996). In addition to Qashqynbai Zhirau's performance, two other and earlier versions of *Kenesary-Nauryzbai* are known to exist, one by Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly published in Kazan in 1903, and one by Zhusipbek Basygarin published in Moscow in 1924; both differ substantially from Qashqynbai Zhirau's version in both language and plot, with Basygarin in particular depicting Kenesary as a negative figure. The history of the Kenesary rebellion itself is discussed in Alexander Morrison's *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia* (2020). Daniel Prior (2013) provides a contrasting translation of a Kyrgyz narrative poem narrating the death of Kenesary.

6. “The Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz,” was first published by Zhusipbek Qozha Shaikhyslamuly as the *Qissa Birzhan sal men Sara qyzdyng aitysqany* (Shaikhyslamuly 1898). Zhusipbek Qozha’s version was published in Latin and later in Cyrillic script editions in the Soviet era. More recently, a new transcription from the Arabic script original was published as part of a three volume collection of Zhusipbek Qozha’s complete works (Shaghatai 2015). A version of the entire *aitys* was also published together with Sara’s other poems and prose as well as additional biographical information in Shārbanu Beisenova’s *Sara Sanglaq* (2014). The *aitys* in its complete form numbers approximately one thousand lines; the translation given here highlights the conversation about Sara’s situation between the poets. Those lines or turns which were not included have been summarized as translators’ notes. In Shaghatai’s Cyrillic version of Zhusipbek Qozha’s text, he himself is referred to as “narrator,” a feature preserved in this translation. The Cyrillic edition breaks the poetic text into stanzas; here each turn is treated as a whole without breaks. The Soviet edition also includes some editorial notation within the actual *aitys* text itself, which is footnoted for reference, but not included in this translation. *Aitys* is one of the comparatively better studied genres of oral literature in Central Asia. For a discussion of the negotiation of gender roles and obligations within the framework of *aitys* poetry for the Kazakhs living in the Xinjiang region of China, see Guldana Salimjan’s “Debating gender and Kazakhness: memory and voice in poetic duel *aytis* between China and Kazakhstan” (2017); On the shifting historical and ideological frames of the “Aitys of Birzhan Sal and Sara Qyz” over the twentieth century—from its emergence as an improvisational performance, to its remolding as an opera under Soviet socialism, to its place in the contemporary contexts of nation-building—see Eva-Marie Dubuisson’s “Mapping Participant Frameworks in the Aitys of Birzhan and Sara,” (2021); for a study of oral duels among the Kyrgyz, see Mustafa Coskun’s *Improvising the Voice of the Ancestors* (2021); For a contemporary ethnographic description of the relationship among poets and audiences, see Dubuisson (2020). There is also an extensive critical literature in Kazakh on the different versions and on the debates over the transmission and authenticity of the text; see

for example Beisenova (2014), Baurzhan Erdembekov (2011), and Zhemisbek Tolymbekov (2018). The translation and the writing of the introductory note on the *aitys* was supported by a Social Policy Research Grant from Nazarbayev University (2019–2021).

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CHAPTER 3

Pre-revolutionary Written Literature

Emily Laskin

INTRODUCTION

The oral literary texts of the previous section existed alongside a rich tradition of Persian and Chaghatai (or Turki) written literature. Theirs was a symbiotic relationship, in which plots, characters, and styles continually slid back and forth from oral to written, from Persian to Turkic languages. For example, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the Persian *Book of Kings*, drew on oral literary traditions but once committed to text in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, the work became a source for new oral traditions, as its stories were retold in Persian and Turkic folk narratives. Other classic texts of Persian literature are similarly referenced quite frequently in oral (or oral-derived) epic texts, as when the two lovers of Zhusipbek Qozha's *Qyz Zhibek* are repeatedly compared to Nizami Ganjavi's *Layla and*

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Majnun. Texts from the Persian and Chaghatai written traditions likewise framed themselves as in dialogue with the poems and poets of earlier eras. The second of the two Bedil ghazals translated by Samuel Hodgkin in this section similarly references the lovelorn Majnun's wandering in the desert, while the other two ghazals are themselves emulations of Bedil's work.

The texts of this section, all written and/or published between the eighteenth century and the early twentieth century, emerge from Central Asia on the precipice of a modernity that would radically change the literate population's relationship to texts. Since the introduction of the Arabic script with the Muslim invasion in the mid-seventh century, Central Asian written culture has been based on manuscripts. Poets, scribes, calligraphers, scholars, and others preserved texts by excerpting, abridging, citing, compiling, rearranging, or copying them in full. They also left their mark on history as readers by annotating texts or even leaving new texts in the margins. Dilshod Barno's text in this section is a short autobiographical piece entirely found in the margins of a manuscript collection of her poetry. However, as the Russians conquered Central Asia and reduced its khanates to protectorates, they brought several technological advancements with them. 1881 saw the first use of a lithograph in the colonial capital of Central Asia, Tashkent, later to be the capital of the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan. As lithography became more available in the region, it enabled the mass production of several of the texts and genres we see in this section, such as the newspaper, the play, and the (pseudo)travelogue.

This is not to say that manuscript culture died out in the era of the printing press. The two manuscript pieces of this section, Dilshod Barno's "History of the Travelers" and Anbar Otin's *Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness*, were written by hand in the 1900s and 1910s. These two authors, a teacher and her student, respectively, reveal both textually and extratextually some of the networks of writers that supported manuscript culture in the region.

Russian conquest in this early period brought not only new technologies but new subjectivities for Central Asia's inhabitants. When the Russians colonized the Southern Caucasus and Kazakhstan, they often allowed local notables into the fold, making them imperial officers and giving them Russian education. Figures such as the Azerbaijani writer Mirza Fatali Akhundzade and the Kazakh scholar Shoqan Walikhanov became Russian bureaucrats and proponents of Europeanization in their

homelands. Yet even as they did so, they lamented the loss of their native selves and the alienation from their people. In this section, we include an 1836 piece by the Adyghe (a Circassian people of the Northern Caucasus) writer and Russian imperial officer Sultan Kazy-Girei. In the short autobiographical story, Kazy-Girei returns home to his native valley, observing it now through the split subjectivity of a conquering European and former indigenous inhabitant and lamenting a loss that can never be reversed.

The section closes with a different experience of Central Asia's imperial conquest. While the Russian Empire in the former half of the nineteenth century made more consistent attempts to integrate newly conquered non-Russian populations into the imperial institutions of the country, by the latter half of the century, integration had fallen off the agenda. The Russian Empire created far fewer Russian-educated subjects in its conquest of southern Central Asia, the territory of which is now split among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, and it also disempowered Muslims in territories that it had previously conquered, such as Azerbaijan. The Muslim subjects of these lands did not look primarily to Russia for ideas of modernization, but instead looked toward the millennium-old language of Islamic reform, and to Europe at large as mediated through Turkish, Tatar, and Persian.

These Muslim modernists have come to be known in scholarly literature as Jadids, so called for their common advocacy of a new phonetic pedagogy, *usul-i jadid*, for teaching the Arabic alphabet. Influenced by European ideas of science and the nation, these thinkers believed that their Muslim nations had fallen behind Europe, prime evidence of which was the nineteenth-century conquests of their communities by the expanding Russian Empire. In order to return their nations to their rightful place among others, they endeavored to raise the consciousness of their coethnics through didactic literature that drew both on European forms as well as native literary and folk traditions.

Abdurauf Fitrat, who wrote in both Persian and Turkic but is now considered part of the Uzbek literary canon, authored a 1911 Persian-language fictional travelogue in which a Hindu traveler berates urban Central Asians for their backwardness, implicitly calling on them to reform themselves. The two Turkmen columnists, Mugallym Muhammet Atabay Oglu and Mât Gurban Oglu, likewise use their pieces to address how their community has held back women through backward customs and thus held back the nation. Khislat, a poet of the elder generation of Jadids, praises new institutions of learning in his work, but also demonstrates

how Jadids maintained a connection with the literary traditions of their milieu with his translated elegy in this section. Jalil Mammadguluzade, an Azeri playwright and satirist, admonishes his fellow Azeris for their misplaced trust of corrupt religious figures, but, making a break with the other didactic writers of his time, also parodies Jadid drama.

Jadids looked not only to Europe for inspiration but also to their own folk and oral literary traditions. Prior to Jadids, the Persianate literature of Central Asia was written largely in cosmopolitan Persian and Chaghatai, languages far displaced from the speech of ordinary people. In attempting to enlighten their nations, Jadids had as their goal the creation of national languages and national poetic forms. In the late 1910s and 1920s, for example, many Jadids attempted to rid Turkic languages of the Arabisms and Persianisms found in Chaghatai and dispensed with ‘*aruz*’ meters in poetry. ‘*Aruz*’ meters, based on the specificities of Arabic and Persian, relied on the interchange of long and short vowels, which Turkic languages do not possess. The introduction to the Anbar Otin and Khislat poems of this section provides some further notes on the ‘*aruz*’ meters they use. Instead, Jadids established in their poetry a new and purely syllabic meter found in Turkic oral literature, *barmaq*, which is discussed in the next section. Jadid poetic experimentation took place not only in Turkic languages but also in Persian. Sadriddin Ayni, who had a hand in creating both the Uzbek and Tajik literary languages, in the poems excerpted here demonstrates through his rejection of the ornate Bedilian style of cosmopolitan Persianate poetry his commitment to the project of nationalizing Persian poetic language.

Chris Fort¹

THE BEDILIAN STYLE

The eighteenth to nineteenth centuries saw a relatively rapid divergence of poetic tastes between formerly closely linked literary communities across Persianate Eurasia. This owed something to vernacularization (the increasing prominence of verse composed in Turkic and Indian languages), but it also reflected a divergence of canonic models. A particularly striking example was the immense popularity in South and Central

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Asia—but not Iran—of the verse of Abdulqadir “Bedil” of Delhi (1642–1720). Down to the twentieth century (and in some communities to the present day), his abstruse and difficult verse has been discussed line-by-line in gatherings of enthusiasts, as well as widely emulated.

Here are two ghazals by Bedil, each accompanied by a formal imitation (*nazira*) by a Transoxanian Persophone poet. Bedil uses the refrain “here” in the first ghazal and “In the waste” in the second ghazal, and the emulations repeat these refrains to establish intertextual links with Bedil’s ghazals. The first of the emulations is by Khalifa Ashur Muhammad “Yakdil” of Bukhara (early nineteenth century), a Sufi poet about whom little is known apart from his enthusiasm for Bedil’s verse. The second is one of the earliest poems by Sadriddin “Ayni” (1878–1954), a Bukharan madrasa student from the nearby countryside who would subsequently become a major writer and intellectual first in the Jadid reform movement and then in Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. (During his Soviet career, Ayni would also become a modernizing critic of the Bedilian style’s supposedly elitist mystifications.) Both emulations adopt aspects of Bedil’s style while moving in the direction of simplicity and clarity, allowing us to identify distinctive features of Transoxanian poetic taste in this period.

Poetic translation often requires the translator to resolve ambivalence in favor of one meaning or another. This is nowhere more true than with the Bedilian style, whose effect relies on the suspension of multiple possible readings of each couplet. These translations seek to bring the central conceit of each couplet into focus, at the expense of secondary meanings.

Samuel Hodgkin²

Don’t strain yourself, holding out

Abdulqadir “Bedil” of Delhi

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Don’t strain yourself, holding out
 hope for kindness from Mother Earth
 Who drinks blood to whiten
 her milk here

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Dwell in your incapacity
 before you return to dirt
 All the efforts of this world and the next
 will drip away like sweat here
 From the motion of each drop, the ocean
 has a hundred mad squalls
 What a loss for the possible
 if even one heart beat here!
 The flux of nonexistence
 won't pull me out of expectancy
 The rose, turning to ash,
 will cloud the eye white here
 From intimacy's instrument, sounding of death,
 through my ear's veil
 Will come a tune so beside itself
 it can't be heard here
 In this house of trials, I am
 a mirror to orphans' tears
 Even armless, legless
 I must run here
 I've got a cup-scorching heart
 roasted on longing's fire
 Its smoke rears and shies wherever
 it burns without a song here
 One more uproar for those stubborn
 suplicants of Beauty
 It'd be a faux-naif ambush
 if he raised an eyebrow here
 From beyond certainty's veil
 panting breaths say:
 While any trace remains of self
 you won't rest here
 How high the nest
 of my weakness, Bedil!
 After all, without an effort,
 you can't break your wings here

n.d.

Despair, don't plant the seed

Khalifa Ashur Muhammad "Yakdil" of Bukhara

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Despair, don't plant the seed
 of hopelessness in my breast
 Hope's palm will soon be bending low
 with fruit here
 Under rose scent, I've concealed
 my darling's footprints
 From the nightingale's caravan of laments
 good news is here
 On the sacrificial altar of his flirtations
 he wants no colorless color
 A hundred fields are founded
 on martyrs' blood here
 What is the spell
 in that wild bird's wings
 That after a hundred moltings, you'd say
 it's content here?
 It lays down its head
 in the lap of ease
 On the legs of anyone thorn-pricked
 by fidelity's path here
 From that world-illuminating sun
 light goes to the one
 Who like the new moon, turns disciple
 only for politeness here
 Tonight, my imaginings
 color the page: I don't know
 Whether like a rose's veins
 the lines run in my blood here
 The rose has bloomed
 from Yakdil's veiled bud
 Whichever way the morning breeze
 of pleasure wafted here

n.d.

What color were the roses

Abdulqadir “Bedil” of Delhi

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

What color were the roses
 that your exquisite palanquin
 scattered on the waste?
 they're turning the dust
 to a European
 mirror in the waste
 What a notion—
 letting the hem of your garment
 fall from my hands to the dirt
 As if the briars could
 sink their claws
 into Majnun's head in the waste
 And where does this crazy
 stirring-up come from,
 that in an ecstasy of liberation, I
 Am spinning
 on one foot
 a whirlwind in the waste?
 In one gulp of breath
 I've carried
 from the field of the possible
 Its charming spark,
 hurrying like a lame
 gazelle to the waste
 With the ascendant planet
 making trouble,
 even if I reach perfection,
 It'll be as
 a panther in the sea
 or a crocodile in the waste
 The flowing sands
 have multiplied
 the madman's wealth of company:
 A thousand-fold increase
 in the reckoning
 of stones in the waste
 There's no cure

for the turbidity
 of a blood-clotted heart
 So I sit
 tight as a faun's
 musk gland in the waste
 Think about your own harvest:
 those who burnt
 their corn
 Are fallen,
 Scattered
 like cranes in the waste
 In this madhouse
 you can't deny
 you're presumptuous—
 Desire grows
 unplanted in your nature
 like hemp in the waste
 Don't be fooled
 by the lush growth
 of opportunities to exist
 The flood's good tidings
 will turn eternity
 to nowhere in the waste
 In the waves of this ocean
 can even one thread
 of my skirt hold?
 I myself am scattered
 more profligate
 than a poplar in the waste
 The dust
 of Bedil's terror
 settled in the other world—
 My mad humor
 wasn't built
 on shame in the waste!

n.d.

My tulip field

Sadriddin Ayni

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

My tulip field
 has gone
 hunting in the waste
 Shedding the prey's blood
 he made manifest
 the tulip field in the waste

Wherever
 that rosy-cheeked prankster
 steps, there grow
 Meadow upon meadow
 of succulent
 white roses in the waste

My bloody tears
 would have painted
 an icon over the city grounds
 Had not that idol
 departed today
 into the waste

Here in the city
 with its cares and trials
 separation has killed me
 While for a pleasantry
 you bear off the cup
 of savor to the waste

My tears have made
 an ocean
 of the city streets
 Why jaunt away
 to view a mere
 waterfall in the waste?

Hunting the lion of grief
 has killed the townsfolk
 like 'Aynī
 Since once again
 he went after that idol
 from the city to the waste

NATIVE INTELLECTUALS IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

In 1836 a short story entitled “Dolina Azhitugai” (The Valley of Azhitugai) written by the Adyghe Russophone writer Sultan Kazy-Girei appeared in the journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*). The story describes the landscape of the northwest Caucasus through the eyes of a man returning to his native land as an imperial soldier. *The Contemporary* was edited by the famous nineteenth-century Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (Kazy-Girei 1836). Pushkin was himself of part Russian and part African heritage and penned many poems about the Caucasus mountains, which reflect his intermittent embrace of his otherness in the Russian Empire. However, his editorial notes—in a classic Orientalist gesture—emphasize the otherness of the story’s Muslim Russophone author, noting this: “unexpected occurrence in our literature” in which its author, “the son of a half-wild Caucasian stands beside our writers” (Kazy-Girei 1836, 169). “The Valley of Azhitugai” marks one of the first examples of a Russophone work published by a non-Russian Muslim writer in a Russian journal, foreshadowing a body of Russian-language colonial literature that would emerge in the early twentieth century after over a half century of Russian military and cultural imperialism in the region.

Kazy-Girei, like his narrator, became a soldier in the Russian imperial forces in 1825.³ Little is known about his life before or after his military service. Soon after joining the army, he was awarded a medal for his service in the Persian Campaign of 1826–27, which led to the signing of the treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828 and the solidification of Russian imperial control in the Caucasus.⁴ Between 1830 and 1840 he was stationed in Saint-Petersburg as a cadet in the Caucasian-Mountaineer squadron, where he learned Russian, attended literary salons, and frequented the theater.⁵ Kazy-Girei’s friendly correspondence with Aleksandr Nikolae-vich Murav’ev, whom he met through military service, acquainted him

³ Turchaninov clarifies that Pushkin, in his editorial note, confuses Sultan Kazy-Girei with his sergeant Sultan Khan Girei (Turchaninov 1970).

⁴ The bloody imperial expansion into the northern Caucasus killed hundreds of thousands of native peoples and resulted in the deportation and displacement of more than a million North Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman empire from 1828 through the 1860s.

⁵ The Caucasian-Highlander squadron in Saint-Petersburg was an initiative that sought to create a favorable impression of Russian culture among princes, sultans, and the local aristocracy (Turchaninov 1970, 34).

with Russian literary culture, in particular with the work of Pushkin.⁶ After publishing two short stories in *The Contemporary*, he was transferred to a military division in Georgia. His correspondence with Murav'ev during this time suggests that the latter attempted, unsuccessfully, to convert him to Christianity.⁷ Nevertheless, in 1855 Kazy-Girei did convert to Russian Orthodoxy when he married a Cossack woman, taking Murav'ev's first name and patronymic in his baptism as Andrei Andreevich Sultan Kazy-Girei.

Kazy-Girei's "The Valley of Azhitugai" is an autobiographical short story that narrates the author's complex psychological experience of colonial exile alongside and through a celebration of the valley of his youth. This double-voiced Russophone text reverses the Pushkinian paradigm of the Russian exile who "goes native" during his wandering on the periphery of the empire, for he recounts his narrator's return to the familiar landscape of his homeland, resonant with memories of his youth. Kazy-Girei engages the tropes of Romantic prose—its portrait of a powerful and intoxicating landscape—to instead depict his own alienation and experience of colonial double consciousness, a consciousness fractured by the recognition of his role in colonial development as an imperial officer. He cites the famous Russian Romantic poet Konstantin Batiushkov's loose translation of Lord George Gordon Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, an iconic referent for Russian Orientalist imaginary. However, Kazy-Girei's setting of his story in a valley at the banks of the Kuban river and his intimate account of the landscape and his personal memories there invert a Russian imperial imagined geography of the Caucasus in which the mountains often served as a border demarcating "civilized" Christian Russia from the "wild" peoples of the north Caucasus. Kazy-Girei's dual emphasis on the topography of the valley as an inversion of the mountain and the crossing of the Kuban river as a threshold indexes his own liminal position as he returns clothed in an imperial officer's dress and reflecting on his home in a foreign tongue. In Kazy-Girei's hands, the brilliant light caressing the Azhitugai plains

⁶ Andrei Nicholaevich Murav'ev (1806–1874) served in the Russian imperial forces and participated in the Decembrist milieu. He was a poet, historian of religion, and travel writer.

⁷ In 1848 Murav'ev wrote "Letters on Muhammadism" ["Pis'ma o magometanstve"], which details the "superiority of the Christian faith over the Muhammadian (Islam)" (Turchaninov 1970, 39).

battles “the radiance of the Russian bayonet,” and though the author has been vanquished by the latter, his powerful account of the valley leaves its poetic imprint on Russian literature.

Leah Feldman⁸

The Valley of Azhitugai

Sultan Kazy-Girei

Translated by Leah Feldman

Across the Kuban river, the 3rd of June 1834:

Before sunrise I left the shelter of my hospitable host and hurried to the peak, which proudly rose above the valley that I was preparing to abandon. Hoping to shorten my route, I avoided the main road and turned instead onto a path on the left that snaked along the multicolored walls of the cliff. Strewed with speckled pebbles, this path was attractive and at the same time led to a terrifying cliff, as if enticing the curious into its nets. My heart called me higher and higher. I wanted to take up the whole of the landscape of my motherland in one glance without interruption, without sequence, and to, in one instant, raise all of the years of the past from the dead. I went up to the mountain and suddenly all of my memories crowded familiarly in front of me. My thoughts fled to the long-past years of my carefree youth, and for a long while I couldn't turn to anything new, certain that my eyes would not meet anything similar and that nothing could entice me with such happiness. For a long, long while I gave myself up to reflections like these. It seemed that the natural landscape I had abandoned a long time ago because of the dictates of fate now happily smiled at my return. A tear of gratitude fell from eyes charmed by the sight of the place where I was born.

Everything called me back to the former joys of my youth. There was a young birch tree, beside which the traces of my long-abandoned and now destroyed shelter could be seen. There, after tiring of vivacious amusements, I threw myself into the embrace of ravishing sleep, thinking of nothing but rising and setting out again to seize the rich joy of my past life.

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The green hills gleamed with many-colored flowers, and rising up from their midst, a gray-headed *kurgan*, a burial hill, stood like a grandfather among his grandchildren. I was reminded of how I used to play here, rolling down and running up the hill like a light chamois.⁹ The cold *akuzh*¹⁰ stirred the vast valley with its green grasses peppered with flowers, which seemed to lean toward one another for a sleepy morning kiss. Throughout this place recollections crowded my memory; one only need cast a glance to be moved to a few tears of tenderness.

As my gaze moved along Azhitugai valley, flocks of small, scattered towns began to appear. Travelers intersected alongside and across the valley. Boisterous crowds of young people—on horseback and on foot—amused themselves by firing their guns. Children on horseback tried to outrace one another. Every place and everything here breathed happiness; and everywhere one could hear the exaltation of a carefree spirit. Only I couldn't find the joy of my past days, for it seemed to have been swept away from my memory irretrievably.

The Nizhig river rolled quickly under my feet with high waves that rose and fell like the tender breast of a beauty excited by passionate love or anxious with a pride injured by unfaithfulness. In the past, its banks were speckled with forests of sprawling trees, in whose shadows on hot summer days I swam and played as if among transparent waves.

I awoke from reverie. The sun had risen long ago but now seemed to rise again over the horizon. It was concealed from my sight by the mountain Aru-Kiz.¹¹ Its rays rose gradually over the mountain's enormous bulk and soon shone over the proud beauty of the banks of the Kuban.

To the north, across the Kuban, a sumptuous valley spread out, strewn with harvest fields and with the Cossack settlement *bakchas* of Nevino-Myska and Barsuttskaia scattered over it.¹² This plain begins from the Aru-Kiz mountain, which the Russians call *Nevinnaia*, and ends near the Pogorelovskaia settlement (a distance of 50 *versts*).¹³ The plain is as bare

⁹ Goat-antelope found both in the Alps and the Caucasus.

¹⁰ The original includes a footnote explaining that the word *akuzh* means a morning breeze that blows in a ravine with the river's flow.

¹¹ The original text notes: "A charming maiden. It is unknown how this ugly mountain got this name."

¹² The original text notes: "Bakchas in Tatar means vegetable garden, but in southern Russian refers to the remote gardens where watermelons and melons are planted."

¹³ *Nevinnaia* in Russian means "innocent." One *verst* is approximately 3500 feet.

as the palm of one's hand, as one would say, but in some places has a few inconspicuous elevations, among which the high Durt-Kul, that is in Tatar, the four-cornered knoll, rises in the form of a house. From south to north the plain is surrounded by a mid-sized range of mountains, amidst which towers the Zhegerlik mountain, covered by a dense forest on the northern side and a voluptuous meadow on the southern and western sides. The prison of the Temno-Lesnaia¹⁴ fortress—a terror for the predatory Circassians—appears pale from this height. From the west, resting against the high cliff banks of the Kuban, this valley is extremely deceptive—you look at it and cannot believe your eyes, for with the slightest wind, it turns into a rippling green sea. This is exactly the place where the bloody battle between the highlanders and the Russians took place in 1813. The top of the cliff from which I observed my surroundings is also a plain, only it is much higher and wider than those I described previously. This plain, which the natives call Kazma, begins in the east from the Nizhig delta (or from Azhitugai), continues in a straight line west to the river Urup, and stretches a great distance to the north, uninterrupted for 100 *vershs*. The plain is inhabited by rich flocks of sheep, herds of horses, and hunters; as a common pasture for the sheep of all of the inhabitants of Transkubania, it breathes life into its surroundings. On the plain there are many animals, especially wolves and foxes, and as many wild goats as domestic ones. At this moment I found nothing remarkable there: only the sad consequences of deadly war were visible.

The sun shone high above my head! I needed to set out, so I said farewell to majestic nature! Hope consoled me in this separation; and having wished the best to these arresting plains of Azhitugai and Kazma I rode on further.

After riding thirty *vershs* I confess that I had lapsed into such a reverie that I did not notice the distance. Everything spoke to me of the wild and warlike life of the local inhabitants—and how strange it is to suddenly find oneself in such a place as this having just left the capital, to see ungraspable desert in place of the ordered streets and some bold highlander with his faithful horse in place of dandy carriages. Yes! And my non-European mind imagined this strange, rebellious life, and theories of the formation of nations, about which many had talked and still talk, came to

¹⁴ Russian for “dark forest.”

my thoughts. Strange! Was it so long ago that I rushed about on horseback like a whirlwind in this wild land? Yet now I was ready to present a thousand plans for its development. But this work is not ours; and for us there remains only a wish for the better—let be what will be—and anyway, my traveling companions didn't care for theories. Their hearts beat with joy when they saw a place to stay the night. I, on the other hand, felt as if I had come back to earth; upon waking, I threw a tired glance at the distance and suddenly noticed a new spectacle that struck me absolutely. Ten years ago could I have imagined seeing a Russian fortification in this spot and staying there overnight with people whom I had furiously threatened as a child? The imagined enemy for all of the fighting moves I practiced while racing across this field was always Russians, and yet now, I found myself standing here as a Russian officer.

A wonderful June evening charmed my gaze, and my sentiments returned to nature. The last rays of the daytime luminescence competed with the radiance of the Russian bayonet, as if willing to darken its victorious glory with their departure. The three-edged blade seemed to recall the words of its great leader, “the bullet is stupid, whereas the bayonet is mighty,”¹⁵ and, as if certain of the justice of his word and the immortality of its glory, proudly flashed in front of the dying rays. Finally, this time too as always, it vanquished its rival. The setting sun hid itself behind the mountain, while the bayonet still shone in front of my eyes. However, the sun concealed itself only from my glance, but did not lower its flaming rays from the peaks of a snowy giant of the charming Caucasus's majestic nature, upon which virgin snow seemed to blush, as if ashamed at the immodest rays of the splendid sunset. Charmed by the lovely pictures of my wild motherland, which I had not encountered in a long time, I involuntarily and with complete forgetfulness looked at her: how alluringly and how various she stood before me. I could hardly believe my eyes that I was in the Caucasus. I felt as if I were sitting in the plush seats of a Petersburg theater, being carried away by the lovely scenery of an enchanting opera. But one who sees the splendors of nature does not wish to watch the slavish imitation of art.

Finally, we reached the Iarsukanskaia fortress where I was ready to stay and rest in the company of an old comrade I had met there, but no! One

¹⁵ Russian general Aleksandr Suvorov (1730–1800) wrote these oft-quoted words about early nineteenth-century Russian military tactics in his book *The Science of Conquering*, posthumously published in 1806.

who has stayed in these places knows that it is better to sleep under the open sky than in those stuffy mud brick huts, which abound in all kinds of insects. And so, we decided to sleep on route in the open field. We covered ourselves in long sheepskin coats and fell asleep on the threshold of the mud brick hut. A quiet, cool wind blew over us with its light wings. For 2 days I had admired the majesty of local nature, feeding myself with memories of the past. But a Caucasian day cannot compare to night; it is so intoxicating here in the weightless twilight, the cool, and the mysterious silence. The night was quiet and warm. I asked my comrade to go with me to swim in the river. The noise of the river seemed to call me, as if to a warm and familiar conversation, and I ran to it as if remembering past days when I lived in its waves. We armed ourselves as if before a fight because here pleasure must always be paid for with danger; but in return every little thing gives you such joy that there could be nothing greater. We had two more men and two armed soldiers in the convoy with us, for danger and night make insignificant people unashamed to surround themselves with a luxurious entourage. And why not—who would not take advantage of such a chance? Besides, I'm the lead man in this fortress. Call it whatever you wish, you could say beggars can't be choosers, but this was still my corner of the world. A safe shelter, the fortress wall, was left behind us—and ahead danger could await us—but anyway we pressed on to the river.

A crescent moon lit the entire plain. The forest blackened in the distance and amidst the night's darkness seemed to appear as a black cloud in the clear midday sky. Here in between the trees the waves of the Nizhig sparkled, silvered over by the moon. The gloomy Iarsukan proudly rose above this, spread with granite rocks and dressed in a green velvet robe of scented grasses. This gloomy mountain, eternal shelter from the wind and thunder, presides like a jealous harem eunuch frowning over the valleys sprinkled with flowers and protecting them from the torrid heat in his gloomy shadow. We were descending to the river along the cliff, which was not so high but still difficult to walk down, for its paths were strewn with quite large stones and overgrown with dense blackthorn bushes that one had to pass through with care. Otherwise, with the first wrong step off the path one could be caught by hooked boughs from which one could no more easily disentangle oneself than from the claws of a bear.

We descended to the bottom. Nature itself divides the forest in this place in two, and this division even increases the beauty of the picture;

from here the river that lay half a *verst* away seems to appear as a rainbow amidst a dark cloud.

We reached the river, and here amidst the forest, a small round area appeared sprinkled with sand and small stones. Only from this spot could you see the river! The vision of the rushing stream of the current with its high waves tricks the eye, for the river seems to have neither beginning nor end, disappearing from one's curious glance into the twilight of night and the darkness of the forest. The river flows from the thicket and then, its banks filled with translucent waves, vanishes from sight as if devoured by the jaws of a monster.

The shadows of the trees on the opposite bank lay down like giants tired from battle on the supple waves of the river and seemingly breathed with life, rising and falling with the waves. A silent breeze drove light clouds onto the crescent moon, which shone through them like a shy beauty who, wrapped in a smoky veil, walked for the first time to a felonious rendezvous with her lover. We were already on the bank. I alone undressed and my eyes leaned tenderly toward the sky, thanking it for returning me to the banks where I was born. The crescent moon swam at once both in the clouds and in the streams of the river; but I left the one moon in the sky and tried to catch the other in the waves as if I were a child. I was happy. I swam joyfully, recalling the carefree years of my childhood and forgetting the anxiety of life, my fatigue, and the whole world. Let others have conversations with the stormy waves of the seas. Let their sight roam on the immeasurable surface of the ocean. I will talk to the slender flowing waves of familiar banks where everything breathes remembrance, where I, the only child of my loving mother, tasted the bliss of love and partook of heartfelt caresses on her native breast. Here I grew up as the only hope of this inconsolable widow, and here I bid farewell to the bliss of my carefree youth. Yes! This river is native to me and there in the valley, each *kurgan* sprinkled with fragrant flowers calls to converse with me after a long separation. My soul understands everything here: the noise of the river, the howling of the wind, the murmur of the leaves, the rustling of the bushes, and the gloomy face of the fruitless rocks. My conversation with the surrounding nature was rapturous. But I was already sitting on the banks beneath my sheepskin coat, drawing smoke from a pipe filled with scented American tobacco, which saturated the air with its intoxicating aroma. There are moments during which a person's imagination flies to all places available to them. The soul at such a moment wants something inexplicable, something lofty, such that the

weak nature of man is not in any condition to constrain the yearnings of the soul. And so, God only knows, where did my thoughts not reach, where and with whom did my imagination not converse? I sat there on the bank, tired and listening to the mournful noise of the river, which seemed to understand my disordered state of being. I wiped the rolling streams from my face, but they were warm and bitter, they did not spring from the cool water of the river. My comrade sat at my side, lowering his gaze to the earth. He had not come into the river with me, but his eyes were also wet. Perhaps he envied my fate. Of course! His dreams were on the banks of the Dnieper! Perhaps in his deepest wish, he imagined himself already united with the favorite of his thoughts. It seemed that the river whispered to me: “oh, what a strange man you are!” A conversation with nature familiar and beloved—this part wrung out tears from your eyes—but you cheated on her. There, not far away, a native embrace awaits you, but your dreams wander across foreign banks, and your soul lives in a foreign land. Finally, morning arrived. A sharp wind seemed to press us with its wings to our bare bed, so that each of us wanted to double the weight of our covers. From beneath my coat, I gazed stealthily upon the ascending sun, which long ago had risen above the horizon, but, having lost itself in the thick mist of Iarsukan, now hid from my glance. The bright day dispersed its cheerful strands in a nature damp with dew. The sun grew stronger, burning the mist into white clouds and sparkling as it rolled in the azure of the heavens. Soon it lifted itself high above the mountain, but the gloomy peak still did not want to throw off its misty morning whiteness.

Finally, I ventured further. The valley lay some distance from me to the south, and the road I followed wound along it like a dusty strip. In the distance on the right, a forest could be seen around the headwaters of the Urp, Gegel, and Labe. On the left, the mid-sized ridges of mountains extended, rising higher and higher above the cliffs to the south of the snow-capped mountains. I glanced back and saw the familiar granite pillar that stood two and a half *sazhens*¹⁶ high. My heart beat faster at the sight of this callous witness of the past, and my noble horse seemed to recognize my thoughts. My horse was racing quickly, as if he understood my desires to converse with the indifferent granite without witnesses, and

¹⁶ A *sazhen* was 2.34 meters.

who like me was also cut off from his circle of family and placed in a strange valley, from which he gazed into the distance at the gloomy cliffs.

My horse galloped up the hillock where the great granite was rooted, and I dismounted there in order to look more closely at this old friend. The featureless old man stood there gloomily, stooping forward to the west for God knows for what reason. Overhanging his grim brow was a roughly cut cross. At first, it seemed to me as though this icon of Europe and the Enlightenment were the coat of arms for some ancient Caucasian family hidden on the hill under this granite. Perhaps it was a celebratory symbol of belief or of victory. Was it not here that the despoilers of the ancient world had passed, their menacing leaders carrying terror for Rome with them. Yes, the Caucasus was the threshold of Europe and perhaps this granite had witnessed crowds of Huns, Magyars, Avars, Pechenegs, Turks, and other uninvited guests of the ancient world. But they did not prevail over Europe!

The granite was unresponsive, and no man's hands had left any inscription upon it, but placed it here in the desert with only this mysterious and silent sign upon it. Yes, Kishik-Sil,¹⁷ you stand in this desert wrapped in obscurity, and time and storms gnaw at you and your old greatness in vain, but wait! Your time is coming, your turn will fall, and the fierce wind of Besh-Tau will deliver your sand across the desert!¹⁸ Let others pass you here without a single word or any hint of homage, but I love you as my own. Was it not here under the shade of this granite that as a child I loved to dream in the open air? Yes, I remember the day when the wind gathered the black storm clouds and flew with them to Iarsukan, when it tore through the ravines and raised waves on the Nizhig that flooded the banks, and lightning fell like arrows that pierced the storm clouds. Thunder clattered terribly in the desert. I sat then on your pedestal and watched the horrors of nature, and it seemed to me that there was some delight in these storms. Yes, from that moment I began to love the storm, to love the wrath of nature, its gloom untouched by human artifice, and I believed the poet that

¹⁷ *Kishik* in Tartar means curved, and *sil* means statue.

¹⁸ *Besh-Tau*, or five mountains, is where the city Pyatigorsk, meaning "five mountains" in Russian, stands. The eastern wind, which blows from the side of these mountains, is called *Zakubants Besh-Tau*, that is, the wind of five mountains.

There is delight in the wildness of forests;
 There is happiness in the sandy banks;
 And there is harmony in the seven murmurs of the waves
 Crashing on the desert path.¹⁹

Yes, Caucasus! Your days and nights, your storms, your lush green plains, your snow-capped mountains reaching above the clouds, they breathe wonders. Here where everything strikes the heart, the poet need not travel far. Sooner or later, there will be a bard among the future inhabitants of the Caucasus who will find this granite. The spirit of the people will carry on the legacy of the tribes of the Caucasus in their poetry, their ancient songs, and their wandering bards. And there is dignity and strength in this thought. But what will be will be, and the mystery of this granite had carried me very far away. Finally, the time had come to say goodbye to this old man. Jumping onto the saddle, I turned my horse and soon the dust covered my tracks.

St. Petersburg, 1836

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MEMOIR: DILSHOD BARNO'S "HISTORY OF THE REFUGEES"

The teacher and poet Dilshod Barno did not choose to be a traveler: she was compelled to be a traveler. Following the siege and sack of her hometown of Uratepe (Istaravshan in modern-day Tajikistan) by the victorious forces of the Khanate of Khoqand in 1817, she was taken into captivity and marched across the wastelands to their capital along with over one thousand other survivors. There, she was initially separated from the bulk of the captives and was taken into the khan's palace along with two other girls. Primed and primed for royal audience, she sassed the khan with a critical verse and was expelled from the palace. After a night-time flit through the city's neighborhoods and environs, she fetched up at the home of an imam and his mother, who ran a girls school attached to her son's mosque. Dilshod married the imam and assisted his mother in the running of her school, which she took over after the old woman's death. Over the course of the next half century, she educated hundreds of young girls and often encouraged them to write poetry. She eventually

¹⁹ The opening lines from the 1819 poem, "There is delight in the wildness of forests," by Konstantin Nikolaevich Batyushkov (1787–1855).

died in 1906, having lived through the Russian conquest of Central Asia from 1865 onward, witnessing such innovations as the introduction of the railways.

Her memoirs and poetry were forgotten until they were rediscovered by a Tajik scholar in 1969. Dilshod Barno was consequently incorporated not only into the canon of Tajik national literature, but also that of the Uzbeks. This was due to the fact that, although she had been born in a Persian, i.e., “Tajik,” speaking locale, she out of necessity learned the local Turkic, i.e., “Uzbek,” dialect of Khoqand. Soviet-era nationalities policy prescribed a unified heritage for each of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) that constituted the Soviet Union. But how to classify a poet whose biography was divided between the territories of the Uzbek and Tajik SSRs? Furthermore, how to account for a *woman’s* voice that had been otherwise disregarded by the academics and commissars who delineated cultural heritage?

The present biographical account is remarkable for precisely these reasons. Dilshod obviously did not consider her literary biography an important contribution to her oeuvre because she wrote it only in the margins of her *divan*, her collection of poetry where it was discovered in the 1960s. Nevertheless, this biography gives us insights into the role that poetry played in the social life of the court of Kokand and how relationships were established and maintained between women writers. Here Dilshod chronicles how she became a teacher to some of the best-known women poets of the end of the nineteenth century in Central Asia, including Anbar Otin (1870–1915), an excerpt from whose work is found in this section. This courtly and artistic life inspires some of the material of contemporary Uzbek writer Hamid Ismailov’s novel *The Devil’s Dance*, which explores parallels between the cutthroat court life of the Kokand Khanate and Stalinist terror.

Dilshod is further notable for the longevity of her life, from the opening of the nineteenth century into the early years of the twentieth, and her short biography sheds light on Central Asia’s tumultuous nineteenth century. This was hardly a peaceful period in Central Asian history, and in particular for her hometown: Uratepe was assaulted, besieged, and sacked on no fewer than *fifty* occasions in the period 1800–66. Accordingly, it lost two-thirds of its population. This probably accounts for Dilshod’s observation upon her return to her birthplace much later in the century that the old cry of “the enemy is approaching!” was no longer heard and the city seemed more peaceful and at ease; moreover,

the burdensome taxes that used to be levied at the city gates were no longer in place. Such were the benefits of colonial rule; however, she also describes severe flooding in her hometown, which was most likely the fault of poor colonial management of Uratepe's canals and river.

Nicholas Walmsley

History of the Refugees

Dilshod Barno

Translated by Nicholas Walmsley

1232/1816–17: after the siege of the city, the King of Kings, i.e., Umar Khan, staged a parliament with one hundred lords and nobles at the Chaharsu [...]

[...] Out of circumspection he appointed Sarimsakbek to lead the sack. Consequently, he vengefully slaughtered and hung from the gates the bodies of 1213 people. He referred to the tragic storm as “an *ibrat*, an example.” And so, ever since that storm, the Chahorsu area of Uratepa has been known as Ibrat.

Everyone who survived the punishment was deported barefoot and bareheaded through the Bekat desert to the territory of Ferghana. At the age of seventeen I, your humble correspondent, was unlucky to be among that throng. My poor mother had died 3 years previously from cholera. She was laid in the direction of Mecca, headfirst toward the Kalla Menora. I remained in the family home with Bibi Nadira, a destitute old woman in her nineties. When the enemy attacked, Bibi hid me in the grain cellar.

The khan's foot soldiers pulled me out of the cellar but left Bibi behind. They shepherded me away and added me to the flock in the square. To this day I have no idea what became of poor old Bibi. As a crowd we were yoked together and corralled on the journey to Ferghana. In the dust behind the emir's troops, our eyes filled with grit and sand, the young were just about keeping up, but the elderly and infirm limped along, tortured by laments and grief.

I am weak and feeble, I am forgetful, therefore I will return at this point to the subject of Ibrat because I have not yet described it. There was a famous gazebo pavilion in the middle, underneath the mighty willow

trees, approximately 4.1 *tanobs*²⁰ in size, within which full samovars were situated between the innumerable pillars. There were three other smaller ones adjacent to Ibrat. The emir, the horsemen, and the commanders were massacred in one place, underneath the upper gallery of the mosque adjacent to Ibrat.

There was an immeasurably tall tree in the valley, about three *gaz*²¹ tall, and its crown resembled a quail.

We arrived at our destination. A thousand tortured and tormented souls entered Khoqand and passed through the emir's garden. In the entrance hall at the side of the Ark,²² three girls were picked out from the prisoners, and we were brought into the harem. Everyone else was herded to Öttüz Adr. After a period of 7 years, they were freed from living in "white houses," that is, tents, and they built a city. They named the aforementioned city Shahrikhan.

We three girls rested and recuperated in the harem for 3 days. Then, the khan summoned me: I was bathed in hot water, dressed in clean royal finery, led from the bath, and returned, dejected, to the khan's presence. He had a tall build and a red face; there was a notably bothersome mark on the left side of his face. On his shoulders he wore a brown velvet [coat] over a white shirt and work clothes. He quizzed me about my birthplace and my relatives and then proceeded to interrogate me on the topic of poetry. Even though I was passionate about poetry, I hesitated, kept my civility in check, and paused. This was because I had heard many times that Emir Umar Khan was renowned as a great poet. For that reason, I did not utter a word.

Of course, he persisted: "A pomegranate has appeared: what do you say to it?" "You have filled its insides with blood!" I said. He clapped and his private secretary entered, who dismissed me at the khan's behest. He led me into a room, dressed me in my own clothes, covered my face with white muslin, and at midnight on the day of my ejection from the palace horsemen led me from the gates.

They drove all of us barefoot. I headed for a well-lit way station that appeared in front. I had left the palace barefooted. I arrived at the illuminated place, where I saw a bathhouse fire. I entered a dim hash-den

²⁰ A measure of area that varied from 0.15 to 0.5 hectares, depending on the location.

²¹ A measure of length approximately 70 cm.

²² The Persian name for citadels in the area.

a little further away and observed thirty happy ascetics: losing all control of my senses, I collapsed. When I came to, the congregation's sheikh asked a question in Turki. At first I remained silent, but when he asked a question in Persian, I replied with a Persian ghazal on the keyword, the *radif*, of "*amadam*."²³ Afterward, at the behest of the ascetics' sheikh, one of the Sufis led me onward. Before dawn we had crossed two streams and arrived in the neighborhood of Khoja Kalantora. We knocked on the closer of two courtyard doors by the mosque. The Sufi gestured to me and I entered; I was amazed, however, that the door was open at such an early hour. There were two houses at the far end of the courtyard. The sound of someone reciting the Qur'an emanated from the one on the left; and in the one on the right there was the sound of sighing, as well as an oil lamp burning feebly. I entered. An elderly woman was embroidering muslin. She greeted me, speaking Turki, which I did not know. Then, she spoke half-baked Persian and, understanding what she meant, I spoke back to her. I lived in the old lady's service for several days. She was more than eighty. Her son, who was fifty, was still single at that age because he was penniless. Accepting that he was happy with me, she arranged a marriage with her son Tash Makhdum. He was the imam of the mosque, and my mother-in-law taught schoolgirls.

I worked for 13 years, learned Turki perfectly, and immersed myself in teaching. My mother-in-law was highly regarded: she sewed sight unaided until she was ninety and taught the girls daily. After I had been teaching the girls in this way at the school for 7 years, my mother-in-law died at the age of ninety-nine. I was then 37 years old. Two sons and one daughter of the eight children I had with Tash Makhdum survived: Sayyid Azim, Sayyid Mahmud, and Mehriniso. Tash Makhdum died at the age of ninety, 20 years after his mother. I was fifty-seven. I did not want to go on.

I read sight unaided and taught until I was 88 years old. I kept the school running for 51 years, maintaining twenty-three students in the middle grades: I educated a total of eight hundred and ninety-one girls. Nearly one-quarter of them had an affinity for poetry. In the last moment, i.e., when judged by the Pure of Heart [...]

Khan [...]

²³ Persian for "I came."

Of course, throughout the course of history wise and clever women had come together to pay allegiance to [male poets]. They were particularly devoted to their teacher. After Anbar Otin was seduced and ensnared by the poetry of Nava'i, Fuzuli, Hafiz, and Bedil, she dedicated herself to a proper education from the age of eight until she was fourteen. She produced poetry of her own.

I immersed her wholly in good taste. I have high hopes that she will become a great poet. However, she fled my embrace. Besides, overall more than two hundred women poets, in addition to that particular girl, received an education from start to finish. Thirty years previously three women poets had entered into the cantera of expertise and perfection. Mazluma, Ummida, and Khayrinisa were admitted to the palace of Khudayr Khan and entered into the pantheon of great women poets, i.e., they became famous for literature. The same age as yours truly, they were later memorialized in *Divan-i shairan*.²⁴ But, I was prevented from fulfilling my dream of joining the women poets of the palace because I was deemed unworthy of service in the palace and harem. However, the verses of those great women Jahan-bibi, also known as Uvaysiy, and Nadira-khanim exert a powerful influence on my sense of taste. I wish to compile my poetry in a *divan*.

It seems I have not written anything about the remaining events regarding the ascetics I witnessed around the bathhouse the night of my departure from the palace. Well then, now I have remembered, I have committed it to the margins of the paper. Now that I mention it, I was acquainted with the aforementioned ascetics for quite some years after I arrived at the hermitage. After 2 years had passed, with the help of his wife, I joined the household of the poet Mahjub [...]

My knowledge of Muntazir and Gulkhaniy became concrete thanks to that great man of letters. However, the poet and thinker Gulkhaniy had already died. He was the author of *Zarb-ul-masal*, or *Proverbs*, which greatly influenced the writers of amazing and illuminating examples of the subject throughout the villages of my homeland.²⁵ In later years it

²⁴ Also known as *Majmua-i shairan*, a compilation of poems of various genres, compiled in 1821 by Fazli Namagani on the order of the Khan of Khoqand at the time, Umarkhan (1787–1822).

²⁵ Muntazir is a poet and a contemporary of Dilshod Barno about whom little is known. Muhammad Sharif Gulkhaniy (1770s–1820s) worked in the court of the Khan of Khoqand Umarkhan as a bathhouse attendant and later a member of Umarkhan's retinue.

became easier to travel, because of the fire wagon, the train, brought by the Russians. Three times I returned to my hometown of Uratapa. The gates of the city and villages are ancient. However, the people breathe more easily, for the old cry of “the enemy is here!” and the locking of the city gates, and the heavy taxes, are no more. Alas, there is no hint of liveliness. The river that flows through the middle of the city has grown in strength. Every year, disastrous floods devastate the city. The springs become filthy and their clean water is spoiled.

Ishan Bagdar (the poet Nizami) has as of now lived forever in the neighborhood near ours. If we look in the direction of Mecca, there are the famous poets Divan-qari, Sadayi, and Nuriy in the neighborhood of Panjarasaz.²⁶ There are many poets and thinkers in Uratapa because it has been a well-established and grand city since the foundation of Khoqand. Secretly and obliquely, even though Uratapa has been a battlefield and under the heel of *that* vomit-inducing city, the people boil and cook to perfection proverbs guiding religious practice under the impact of *that* city’s tyranny.

There is a big school for everyone who is obsessed with the day-to-day. The Sufis are somewhat strange because they are Seekers (*ahl-i vujud*) who spout meaningless thoughts. The Seekers who, once they have looked over and learned from the pathways of life by weighing the everyday concerns of the people, understand well the thoughts and considerations circulating among the people. The Seekers have but one goal, one job in mind: observe a man’s strength and power and then find ways to be better and finer than him.

Your humble servant and my contemporaries had no desire to pay attention to the passing of the seasons. However, that said, our offspring and the middle-aged are blessed with time. It is a truth spoken that “sailors have one soul.” In time, they leave on a journey toward the future. Innumerable are my many young, like-minded contemporaries and dear friends who have left as a group on a journey in an ocean-going ship across the boundless sea. Anbar Otin was young when her life ended; however, she stands resplendent on the ship’s fo’c’sle.

He was not a prolific poet, but his 12 ghazals and one qasida are found in the *Divan-i shairan*.

²⁶ Ishan Bagdar was known popularly as Nizami Khoqandiy, or the Nizami of Khoqand; this is not the better known Nizami Ganjaviy of the Southern Caucasus. The remaining three poets are contemporaries of Dilshod Barno about whom little is known now.

Alas! It is difficult to reach your destination by that way, because the sails, the captain, and the lead oarsman are not working in unison. However, without any doubt or uncertainty we have brought into being and in one place, in the margins of pages 38–44, a collection of similar thoughts and reflections that recount the mindset of the Seekers because the material circumstances of our time and the increasing pain, suffering, and oppression, are very real.

n.d. (circa 1900)

GENRES OF CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN'S WRITING:
ANBAR OTIN'S *TREATISE ON THE PHILOSOPHY*
OF BLACKNESS AND LYRIC POETRY

Anbar Otin was born in 1870 in Khoqand, the capital of the Khanate of Khoqand, in a poor family. She went to a neighborhood school for her education and studied under Dilshod Barno, whose works are excerpted elsewhere in this anthology. There Anbar became acquainted with the works of such major figures of Turkic literary culture as Alisher Nava'i (1441–1501), Muhammad Fuzuli (1480–1556), and Abulqadir Bedil (1642–1720). She married a baker, Zohidkhöja, who also was fond of literature, and they had four children, one of whom predeceased Anbar. Anbar's own life was short, perhaps because she was disabled at an undetermined point in her life by a fall. Early scholarship on her life concluded that the date of her death was not known. The hypothesis of some scholars that she died in 1905 is contradicted by Anbar's own dating of the *Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness* as 1328 AH (1910). Other contradictory evidence comes from a poem that begins "Now, Germans started a new war in the world," which suggests she was alive when World War I started. She is buried in the Hujandboshi cemetery in Khoqand.

Anbar Otin's work concerns, in part, the lives of women. The honorific "Otin" in her name identifies her as a female teacher, and specifically one whose students would have been other women and whose lessons would have taken place in the private space of the home. In her ghazal addressed to Muqimiy, the pen name of her male contemporary Muhammad Aminkhöja Mirzakhöja öghli (1850–1903), she praises his work, but includes an entreaty that the poet does not observe the gender segregation around poetic performance traditional in sedentary Central Asia. While educated women like Anbar Otin could certainly read his

lyric poetry in manuscripts, it was rare that they were permitted to attend male *mushairas*, competitive gatherings of poets in which the participants displayed their prowess by improvising in a common genre. Nevertheless, she ends her poem declaring that she ultimately prizes the lyric composed in solitude with a pen over such public performance. The meter used in the original poem employs the Arabo-Persian system of ‘*aruz*, which relies on the rhythmic interchange of long and short vowels. The particular meter used here is *ramal mahzuf musamman*, which contains 15 syllables per line. Each line is divided into four intervals of four syllables, with the exception of the final line, which contains three. The ghazal follows a rhythmic pattern in which every second syllable in the interval is short, though the third syllable can also be read as short.

Anbar Otin’s work concerns not only those issues faced by women but also those faced by all of sedentary Central Asian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The other text included here is a translation of the first chapter of her work *Risalai Falsafai Siyahan* (Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness). In the *Treatise*, she argues that, while black in its various denotations—a color, a racial or civilizational designation, a level of social standing—is often interpreted as evil, lowly, base, ugly, and deserving of oppression, it is, in fact, a sign of beauty, virtue, and enlightenment. Anbar’s work on blackness is inspired by her doubly subordinate position in society as a disabled person and as a woman; through the notion of a much-maligned blackness, she defends the downtrodden and marginalized. Comprised of four chapters, the work presents the author’s philosophical thoughts on the appearance, differences, fates, and hopelessness of those people and things designated in society as “black.”

The *Treatise* was first discovered and disseminated in Soviet Uzbekistan in 1960. The discovery was just 2 years after the first annual meeting of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference, which took place in Tashkent in 1958. The Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference, which met annually from 1958 to 1979, gathered litterateurs of the postcolonial world, including those of the Soviet “East,” to discuss possibilities for collaboration and mutual aid in the process of decolonization. The Soviet Union was keen on showcasing its “Eastern” representatives within these meetings as evidence that Soviet socialism was a model superior to capitalism for the achievement of decolonial goals. Because of this context, several contemporary Uzbek scholars have privately speculated that the *Treatise* might be a fabrication, specifically created to suggest a strong past foundation

for present goodwill between Soviet colonized peoples and those of Africa and Asia. While there is no consensus on the text's authenticity, its expressions of solidarity mixed with a fetishization of black skin and bodies are hardly out of place within the Soviet anti-colonial rhetoric of the mid-twentieth century. Much as Anbar Otin fixates on the contrasting colors of Africans' palms and the rest of their bodies and on the geographical hardships that condition both their skin color and their purported virtue, so too do Soviet-era "Eastern" writers, such as Yuri Rytkeu and Olzhas Suleimenov, direct inordinate focus to Africans' "large lips" in clumsy attempts to express solidarity. Because of these connections and its disputed authenticity, the text can be read both as a relic of the early Russian imperial period of Central Asian history and of the mid-twentieth century.

Donohon Abdugafurova,²⁷ Chris Fort

[To Muqimiy]

Anbar Otin

Translated by Chris Fort

Hey Muqimiy, you're always singing among men!
 But why do you think singing for women is sin?
 They say God made the two with preference for men,
 So why not sing and be loved by your women kin?
 If it's your fault that poverty abounds in our land,
 Then avenge us against those who founded law and rule.
 Truthtellers like you make poor sycophants,
 Some day your words will be valued as jewels.
 Inside four walls my pen and paper—confidantes to me,
 It would be a joy to live, to write to the age of seventy.
 When they find my notebook, the crowd will one day long to read,
 But the burial of my Anbar will be that world's tragedy.

n.d.

²⁷ Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC, USA

Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness

Anbar Otin

Translated by Donohon Abdugafurova

My name is Anbar, being poor and bedridden, I recount my despondent and disabled years. My narration shows the influence of weakness on me, cursed and unfortunate. However, I suspect that my name is not accidental; on the outside, *anbar*, ambergris, is a coal-black substance with a strong scent. On the inside, it is the symbol of all black materials that seem black on the outside but inside harbor countless dreams that are not perceived with the naked eye. They can only be perceived with a sharp inner intellect.

For people whose fate is black, whose difference is their blackness, and for all black things and people who are buried in darkness by tyranny, for all sage writers—who can see a black ant under a black rock that lies on the bottom of a black abyss in the dark of night—who describe those people's conditions and fate, I will narrate:

With the name of God who is most gracious and merciful.

All praise is to God, the Highest, Peace be upon Muhammad, the chosen one.

First, I start with the name of God, the eternal and everlasting, bowing with veneration to the honorable one, and to the rightly guided Caliphs. I am truthfully yours, Anbaroy, the daughter of Farmonqul, recounting, with this book, sullied and corrupted times. This book is a commentary on blackness, narrated in Anbar's voice.

The first chapter tells of the faces of those black

The second chapter speaks to the differences of the blacks

The third chapter is about people whose fates are black

The fourth chapter describes black darkness

Chapter One

In this chapter, I discuss all blackness from the point of view of those who are given little and are deprived of understanding.²⁸

In reality, everything that is black cannot be seen when it is dark, but the deceptive world with its rules has wrapped the world inside a black tent that, only after 40 years enveloped in that darkness, reveals to one all the blackness inside. We see this revelation in the practice of Sufis, for whom the place of worship is the black tent. There, those who gather together make a fire in the middle of the tent, boil water in black kettles, soak opium in their dirty handkerchiefs in wooden bowls, and drink it. Those ignorant people, who believe they are hidden, do not realize that the willow of smoke emitted from the black tent makes them visible like vapor on a mirror.

The conclusion from this example is that our world appears as that dark place of worship, and all bad things are visible to the perceptive even in the darkness.

A perceptive person knows that in the darkness of night, black fate, black desire, and black thought move enveloped in darkness. The movement of black fate in dark night means that all oppressed are sleepless, filled with fear of impending danger, and bound to hardship and labor. On this very night, a group of tyrants with their pretentious wealth busy themselves devising attacks on the purity of poor and defenseless women.

Black fate strolls at night and never leaves the frail people who suffer in the dungeons of tyrants. As soon as a black-fated member of the oppressed forgets about the pleasures of life, another group of masters realizes that the lives of the oppressed are a blessing for them because they believe the oppressed were created for the satisfaction of their filthy desires. These hostile plunderers' abusive thoughts are called black will.

If a person thinks through the matter, he or she is able to fathom the world by looking into the faces of Africans. The whole body of an African is black, only their teeth look like white Shirazi pearls. Their lips are full, their faces are smoky, and their hair is brown. Their faces are shining with blackness. Their hands and legs are coal-black and only the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet are of a lighter color. An incisive person

²⁸ Here the line should be read as "with the point of view of little and incomplete intellect." Using the topos of humility and wishing to conform to societal views of women, Anbar here diminishes herself as a lesser intellectual.

can glean limitless cleanliness and a universe of meaning from looking at the faces of Africans.

For me, the face of an African indicates long, hair-curling hard work under the sun's rays and its high temperature. His face and lips are shaped by desert climates, by work in deserts and jungles devoid of water and nourishment.

Many people from the South and the East, namely Arab, Iranian, Afghan, Ceylon, Indian, and Kashmiri people, are dark-faced but light-hearted. Those people have white figures, legs and arms, a tongue, eyes, intelligence, enthusiasm, strength, and astuteness just like light-skinned aristocrats. However, the wind of opposition brought thin, light-skinned, pale worm-like beings to the soil of African landowners. Those parasitic worms embedded themselves inside the locals by way of the soil and plants. Sucking their blood, they weaken them and dissipate the fruits of their labor. When I gaze at those African people's bodies and contemplate them, I find myself confirmed in the thoughts that I stated earlier.

Although those simple people burn so much under the sun, they give away their harvest. Take a pot, for example, that is black on the outside: although it burns and turns black in the process of cooking, it feeds people by preparing food.

Similarly, there are Blacks who, though black on the outside, are filled with the rays of enlightenment. Another example is the lantern that, made black by oil and soot, brightens a hut with its light.

In terms of beauty, black is the most important color. The foundation of a beautiful face is black eyebrows, black hair, and black beauty marks.

Ghazal

Your beauty brightens the dark night, oh beautiful,
 All the black things that you have spread illuminate all at once.
 The strands of your black hair are like shiny strings,
 One of your black eyebrows is the Sun and the other is the Moon, oh
 fairylike beauty.
 One of your black eyes is Mars and the other is Venus.
 Your beauty mark is the brightest in the collection.
 If blackness embellishes your face,
 Anbar gives your nose the aroma of her fondness.

Oh friend, thus you know that all blackness is the source of goodness. For example, black people have so much zeal and courage, and by their labor, they expend their energy to the benefit of other people.

Pots and pans while being black brighten the world, prepare food, and feed people.

Black minerals, such as coal, iron, and steel, enable a better life.

Black chemicals, such as ambergris and a special black dye, olive, and kohl, serve people by decorating women and calming them.

It is necessary and worthy to pay close attention to the reality of blackness, to reflect on its wisdom and purity, and to be grateful.

It is also necessary to know that some scoundrels sit in the shade, being arrogantly content with their fair skin, and look down on people with black skin. In most of the West, whites look down on people from the South and East. They think the Blacks are worthy of suffering and oppress them unjustly.

Yet those pale scoundrels need the rare blessings of Blacks' beauty. Even if they spend all of their wealth and fortune, they could never attain even one black beauty mark, whereas each southern beauty is replete with alluring black magnificence.

Those desperate whites want to create artificial beauty: they dye their hair black, blacken their eyebrows, don kohl over their eyes, and dab fake moles on their cheeks. Some go so far as to create beauty marks on their faces by poking a needle with black thread through their cheek. But all these fake decorations are useless. No matter how they blush their pale face and lips, they never approach the ruby lips of the beautiful. Although they place kohl on their eyebrows and eyes, they will never have the eyes and eyebrows of the beautiful. Moles made with black dye or needles possess the allure of the faces of the beautiful.

Now, agree with me and acknowledge that the Whites who possess wealth do not have any of the virtues of the Blacks.

1910 [1328 AH]

JADIDISM AND TURKMEN ENCOUNTERS WITH MODERNITY: PROGRESS FOR WOMEN

At the turn of the twentieth century, the social and intellectual movement known as Jadidism began to make its way across the territory of the Turkmen tribes, or Transcaspia as the region was called by the Russian imperial government. Historians took the name Jadidism from the original concept of *usul-i jadid* (Persian for "new-method"), which referenced new approaches to teaching, but the movement combined ideas from across the Islamic world as part of a broader rethinking of

what it meant to be Muslim in a modernizing world. Elite members of Turkmen society were inspired by Jadidism to advocate for reform, with the primary aims of increasing literacy, the advancement of society, and improving the lot of women—who made up half of the fledgling nation. To encourage social progress, intellectual leaders and teachers opened new-method schools and encouraged women to participate in gender-segregated girls' schools. Opinion pieces regularly appeared in Transcaspia's Turkmen/Persian bilingual newspaper, the *Transcaspian Newspaper* (*Ruznama-i mawerana-i bahr-i hazar* in Persian and *Zakaspijskaia tuzemnaia gazeta* in Russian), which was published from 1914 to 1917. Newspapers were an unfamiliar but effective medium in Turkmen lands, embodying the spirit of Jadidist principles. Published opinion pieces included commentaries on the role of judges in determining what constituted custom and which customs surrounding marriage should be upheld. But the most poignant essays concerned education for women, underscoring that women's lives must not be wasted. The modern nation needed them to be “clever” in order for the entire society to “progress” [*taragky*], a word that was often used in this newspaper.

The author of the following opinion piece, Mugallym Muhammed Atabay oglu (1885–1916), was one of the Turkmen thinkers of this time who traveled abroad for schooling but returned home to put into practice the new ideas he had encountered in cities such as Tashkent. A publicist as well as a teacher—his title, *mugallym* (teacher), indicates this—Atabay oglu wrote articles for the newspaper and founded schools that encouraged Jadid-inspired ideas. The concept of “awakening” was one of those ideas and a common theme of Jadidism. Authors like Atabay oglu wrote “*o'yan!*” [wake up!] to the Turkmen people in the hope that they would awaken from a slumber of ignorance to authentic selves that they had forgotten. He wanted to see Turkmen alert to what he perceived as dangerous social conditions, such as the dearth of education for women. The second essay, from Mät Gurban Oglu, also addresses a social issue related to women: *galyň* or bride-price. *Galyň* is the money or goods a groom offers to a bride's family on the occasion of her wedding. The practice was the subject of debate in Turkmen society and elsewhere, with some seeing it as the equivalent of buying a bride. Though the social context was more complex than that, the ritual remained controversial into the Soviet era, when the Bolsheviks attempted to eradicate it. Nevertheless, it persists to this day.

The Intelligence of Turkmen Women

Mugallym Muhammet Atabay Oglu

Translated by Victoria Clement

Women are not weaker than men when it comes to work. And, among educated women there are many clever poets who do better than men do in any work. If our women are not clever it is our fault. That is, because we do not educate them. Of course, without schooling no work will get underway; skills will rust and spoil if you do not use them. If talents are not exercised regularly (every hour), intelligence will not develop but will diminish and be lost. Our Turkmen women's vast talents, as is known, include the very complicated work on carpets. This alone cannot fulfill women. Yet, our Turkmen women, thank Allah, are very skilled at carpet weaving and lead all nations in this work. As I have written elsewhere, we Turkmen in every respect are weak and lag behind other peoples (nations). Of course, our men are hardworking, it is true, but it is our women who can weave carpets. For this also, a thousand thanks to Allah. It occurs to me that our women are very talented and if their talent is put to use—that is, if we educate them more generally—they will not fall behind our men, and in all endeavors, they will be our right hands. In the end, in this way, women need to be taught to be regarded as equal to men in the family and society. If everyone who says, “if hair is long, intelligence is short,” teaches women to see themselves as less than human, these women will not be smart. It was mentioned in the noble Qur'an that it is necessary to teach girls. In Cheleken, there are many literate girls, thank Allah. When one molla said, “girls' literacy is not prohibited by Islamic law, but is discouraged,” several other learned mollas found the proof against this in the noble Qur'an, and he was *silenced*. Allah instructed all people to learn from cradle to grave.

March 17, 1915

²⁹ Krulak Center, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VI, USA

Turkmen Girl-Selling Circles

Mät Gurban Oglu

Translated by Victoria Clement

Among us Ahal Turkmen, that is, among all Turkmen, there are sometimes instances of inappropriate behavior.³⁰ This includes the following: an old widower from Mary came to our Ahal lands to take a woman. He went around to every town; in the end he took a young, beautiful girl, but such things occur among those from Mary. In our opinion, such acts do not accord with Allah. Think to yourselves: what profit will you make when you get just a little more money from giving the life of a girl who so recently came into the world to an old man? There are no wealthy people selling girls. In the region Gök-Tepe, a man who sold his third daughter said, "selling girls will not make one wealthy if Allah himself does not give them." These words are true, such undertakings are very unfitting; we should think about this old man spending even one night lying with that young girl. Such bad things should not happen.

It is said that the Teke people are brave. But these customs are dead. Nobody is interested in a girl after she is sold as a sheep or a camel. Does this girl have a soul or not have a soul? My dear girl, if you want to cry, then cry; I am concerned only about the exchange of money. I do not care if the man is blind or deaf. I now only care about the exchange of money. Sold as an animal Allah save us! But Teke people are like this. Such things happen among the Teke, who are not great in number, but nothing similar to this happens in other kingdoms or Muslim countries.³¹ That is, they will come and talk to the relatives, then discuss the bride-price, then arrange the wedding ceremony. The poor girl is kept in the dark, thinking to herself, "Will they give me to a young man or an elder?" Hey Teke people! If you sell a girl, you will not become rich. Do not ruin the life of your daughter. Such undertakings will not give you a good reputation. If these words are untrue, then respond in writing to say what is inaccurate.

October 6, 1915

³⁰ Ahal and Teke are two of the many tribal groups of Turkmen.

³¹ In fact, the custom is found throughout Central Asia and other parts of the Islamic world. This is an example of the common technique of shaming and admonition found in Jadid rhetoric.

JADID LYRIC POETRY: TWO POEMS BY KHISLAT

The Jadid reformers of turn of the century Central Asia emerged from a milieu of educated Muslims, *ulama* in Arabic, most of whom were polymath practitioners of the various written discourses in Islamic letters, from poetry to jurisprudence, from philosophy to mysticism. While the impetus of the moment pushed Jadids to engage in new print mediums, such as the newspaper above, and in new genres, such as the civic lyric, they also remained committed to the poetic genres of their forefathers and contemporaries.

This section includes two poems by the Jadid poet Khislat, the pen name of Said Orifkhöja öghli Said Haybatullokhkhöja. Born in 1880 in Tashkent, Khislat received his education at Tashkent's Kökaldosh madrasa, where he learned to read Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages other than his native Turki. According to the Uzbek literary scholar Naim Karimov, however, he acquired his avidity and aptitude for poetry in a student's cell at the nearby Beklarbegi madrasa alongside some of the other major poets of the time, including Miskin (1880–1937) and Sidqiy Khondayliqiy (1884–1934). Students there worked under the tutelage of one of the most accomplished poets of the time, Kamiy (1864–1923) (Karimov 2008, 66). Khislat and Khondayliqiy both entered the region's literary consciousness in the 1910s with the publication of a series of *bayaz*, or Persianate collections of poems of various authors. While the *bayaz* had long been a genre in classical letters, before this time it was not the typical genre with which a poet would have established their presence in the literary field. Instead, poets would have more typically introduced themselves through the *divan*, a manuscript collection of a single author's poems. The introduction of the printing press together with what the Jadids saw as the urgent need to educate Central Asians about their past and present led to the increased prominence of the *bayaz*. For that reason, between 1910 and 1914 Khislat published four *bayaz* that bore his name. These *bayaz* included hundreds of his own poems but also works from the classical canon, including poems by Nava'i, Lutfiy, and Fuzuli.

"Study, you beautiful child, the time has treated you well" is a panegyric ghazal that, in keeping with the Jadids' advocacy of progress and education, also figures as a civic lyric praising schools, learned leadership, and the Party. The meter is *hazaj salim musamman*, a 16-syllable line divided by 4-syllable intervals in which the first syllable is short and the remaining long. The second poem, "I, dear friends, have known the loss

of a child...,” demonstrates how Jadids like Khislat continued to draw on the poetic traditions of their predecessors. Here he mourns the deaths of his children using the traditional form of *marsiya*, or elegy, in which every line ends on the same rhyme. The meter is *hazaj mahzuf*, an 11-syllable line with three intervals of 4–4–3 syllables. As with *hazaj salim musamman*, the first syllable of the interval is read as short while the remaining syllables are long.

After the early 1920s, Khislat largely abandoned his poetic activity and supported himself with work in construction, but he continued to contribute to a growing modern Uzbek literature through translation and prose adaptation. Khislat’s target audience for this work was primarily children; as a Jadid, he sought to dispense with the traditional Islamic method of teaching children to memorize classic texts and instead to teach them to read independently. He completed and published prose adaptations and simplifications of texts such as Nizami Ganjavi’s epic poem *Layli and Majnun* with precisely this goal in mind. Unlike many of his Jadid colleagues who became victims of Stalin’s Great Terror, Khislat died peacefully in 1945.

Chris Fort

Study, you beautiful child, the time has treated you well...

Khislat

Translated by Chris Fort

Study, you beautiful child, the time has treated you well
Be a learned person, child, the time has treated you well

Your parents have sat their whole life through, in remorse, in woe
Take lesson from them, dear child, the time has treated you well

So many universities, technicums, schools have opened
Toil with zeal and purpose, child, the time has treated you well

Our leaders are teachers without equal, even in the time of Plato
Follow them in earnest, child, the time has treated you well

Take up the professions in sciences and arts, oh progressives
Be courageous in this, child, the time has treated you well

The Party is sympathetic; there will be no more pain
Discover its every magic, child, the time has treated you well

Let your knowledge be at the people's service
Be worthy of your good name, child, the time has treated you well

Let these words Khislat has written remain in his heart
Be a learned person, child, the time has treated you well

1922

I, dear friends, have known the loss of a child...

Khislat

Translated by Chris Fort

I, dear friends, have known the loss of a child,
To my eyes, the streets of Tashkent are defiled.

I had a daughter, her name Malohat,
Tied to my soul with a thread never cut.

She departed this world at the age of four,
Not another has matched her in all of lore.

I had just one son after God took her,
His name was Nisbatkhon, his words sugar.

He had only just turned from four to five,
When the pain of that disease, the measles, arrived.

They knew of no cure for that foul rot,
No matter how many doctors to his bedside I brought.

He lay on his pillow, silent for eleven days,
And departed this world, he worthy of praise.

From my two nightingales forever separated,
How can I go on, my heart so vacated?...

It pities no age, death is a despot,
Death says “repent,” but only it gives respite.

Khislal’s commemoration: let sixteen be exiled
To find the death date in “loss of a child.”³²

1911

JADIDS AND THE (PSEUDO)TRAVELOGUE: ABDURAUUF FITRAT’S *TALES OF AN INDIAN TRAVELER*

The Uzbek and Persian author, statesman, and scholar Abdurauf Fitrat was born in Bukhara, now part of Uzbekistan, in 1886. The son of Abdurahimboy, an educated and wealthy trader, Fitrat studied in a maktab and then in the famous Mir-i Arab Madrasa in Bukhara. He also traveled extensively in his youth, completing the hajj with his father and traveling around the Middle East and Central Asia (Khan 2003, 118). In his brief autobiography, published in 1929, Fitrat claims that he initially opposed the reforms advocated by the Jadids (Fitrat 2022b, 390). Beginning in the 1910s, however, Fitrat turned toward the reformists, and in 1909 he left Bukhara for the Ottoman Empire with the help of funds provided by Bukharan merchants for study abroad in Istanbul (Khalid 1998, 111). As Hamidulla Boltaboyev notes, there is little information and much disagreement on precisely what Fitrat did in Istanbul (2022, 5).

³² In the original Turki-language text, “loss of a child” is a chronogram marking the poem’s date of composition. The sum of the letters in the chronogram is 1346. Subtracting sixteen from that, one arrives at 1330 AH, which corresponds to 1911 CE.

But we do know that, as a member of the Bukharan reformist diaspora, he published in local Islamist journals, such as *Hikmet* and *Sirat-i Mustakim*. He also published the book excerpted here, *Tales of an Indian Traveler*, which achieved great fame among Central Asian readers in the Bukharan Emirate and Russian Turkestan (Khalid 1998, 111–12). Fitrat returned home, in the words of Adeeb Khalid, “a Bukharan patriot,” heavily influenced by the Young Turks’ understanding of the state as protector of the nation and faith (Khalid 2015, 41).

While Fitrat wrote *Tales of an Indian Traveler* and most of his other works before 1917 in Persian, he switched to writing almost entirely in Uzbek following the Russian Revolution in 1917. This is because he was a proponent of an Uzbek nation and of what Adeeb Khalid calls “Turkism,” the idea that Turkic culture, not Persian, offered an ideal path to modernity (Khalid 2015, 15). In the early 1920s, Fitrat became a statesman, serving in various roles in the newly created Bukharan People’s Socialist Republic. The BPSR was dissolved in 1924 with the creation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, but Fitrat continued his activity as a cultural leader by contributing dramas and poems to the Uzbek national canon as well as important scholarly works about Uzbek literature and culture. Toward the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, Fitrat came under fire from Uzbek socialists as a proponent of Turkic nationalism, or what they called “Pan-Turkism.” As a result, though Fitrat continued to produce literary and scholarly works, he switched back to predominantly writing in Persian, now called Tajik. Despite his efforts to fend off accusations of nationalism, Fitrat was arrested in 1937 for his alleged participation in a nationalist pan-Turkic counter-revolutionary movement and executed as part of Stalin’s Great Terror in October of the following year.

The *Tales* feature a highly educated, fictionalized Indian Muslim who travels to Bukhara on the recommendation of an acquaintance. The travelogue was a Jadid genre in vogue at the time because it allowed writers to use the example of “more advanced” Muslim societies to critique their own communities in Central Asia. Fitrat’s traveler, expecting a city proud of its ancient history, its madrasas and libraries, and its wealth, instead finds a decadent and superstitious society in which most of the residents are uneducated, poor, and oppressed by the clergy and the local rulers. Disappointed and bored by the city, the Indian traveler soon meets a young man who seems impressed by the traveler’s judgments, and who takes on the role of host, guide, and debate partner with the traveler. This young Bukharan is even more harshly critical of Bukhara than the Indian

traveler, and in their conversations he disparages his native city and weeps over its decline from an illustrious past. This gives the Indian traveler an opportunity to argue in the city's favor, consoling his young friend and guide by pointing out how easily improvements could be made to the city's governance.

There are three major types of characters in *Tales of an Indian Traveler*: first, the residents of Bukhara who either do not care to see improvements made to their society, or who defend it as it is; second, the residents of Bukhara who are sharply critical of society there, but who despair of ever seeing reforms; third, the Indian traveler himself, who shares enough of a social and religious background to identify with the second group but who, being somewhat more worldly than them, sees opportunities for improvement and tries to enlighten Bukhara's would-be reformers. This division—defenders, despairers, and reformers, we might say—is implicit in the text, however, it also parallels the explicit tripartite division of Bukharan society into clergy (*ulama*), political rulers (*umara*), and the masses (*ahali*). This second division initiates the text of *Tales*, whose brief introduction is followed by scathing descriptions of all three groups. The clergy, much to the traveler's dismay, find Arabic too difficult and so study religious and legal questions from Persian literature. The situation is even worse with the ruling class, whose many faults range from gross corruption to illiteracy and bad taste. Of the third group, the masses, *Tales* has only one sentence: "These unfortunates are faultless in everything, and ready for anything; they have only one shortcoming, which is that 'they don't know.'" The phrase "they don't know" is in quotes, attributed to the masses themselves, and it is one of the only things they say during the entirety of the account. The brief description and the plaintive "they don't know," however, leave space for a possibility: that the masses might align with the third of Fitrat's unspoken categories, the reformers. They don't know now, the traveler and Fitrat suggest, but this situation leaves room for hope.

Emily Laskin, Chris Fort

Tales of an Indian Traveler

Abdurauf Fitrat

Translated by Emily Laskin

Foreword

A few years ago I met an inhabitant of Bukhara and asked him about that city; he praised the city at such length that from then on I considered a visit an absolute necessity for myself—a must. That very year an auspicious opportunity presented itself, and I hastened to bring my plan to completion. On the road I saw nothing deserving of mention and, in the end, I arrived in the city. I studied Bukhara and Bukharans for several months and acquainted myself with most of their affairs. With great regret I can say this: Bukharans not only take part themselves in the general decline of the Muslim world, but also they drag other Muslim tribes behind them into the valley of ignorance. Before I begin an analysis and description of my journey, I wish to acquaint my esteemed readers briefly with the opinions I formed of Bukhara and Bukharans.

All the inhabitants of Bukhara can be divided into three categories: *clergy*, *rulers*, and *residents*. Now I will tell you in brief about each of them.

Clergy (Ulama)

It is well known that in ancient times Bukhara produced many famous, learned people; every day an Avicenna or an Al-Farabi brought others to the field of competition and thus became a beacon for the whole world.³³ But already nearly 200 years have passed since the value of Bukharan scholarship was lowered. After the arrival of Mirza Shirazi, Bukharan scholars began to occupy themselves solely with reading explanations of words written in the margins of books.³⁴ Little by little they reached such a point in these useless pursuits that they completely forgot even the

³³ Avicenna was a Persian polymath and a philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age who was born in a village near Bukhara. Al-Farabi was an Islamic philosopher who was credited with preserving Greek philosophical texts through the Middle Ages. His origins are less clear than Avicenna's, though here Fitrat suggests that he, too, is from the region of Bukhara.

³⁴ Mirza Shirazi was a thirteenth-century Bukharan scholar to whom Fitrat here points as the originator of Bukharan Islamic scholars' pedantry.

names of the useful sciences. Others in Turkestan, having also received their education in Bukhara, fell along with the Bukharans into the abyss of stupidity and laxity. The result of all this was that the bright star in the heavens of civilization, the brilliant page in the book of humanity that is Turkestan, wound up in such a position that it is shameful to discuss it with enemies, let alone with friends. The same people who now possess no understanding of the true sciences study for 20 years by themselves, then for another 20 years, they teach others, and only then do they attain the position of *mufti*; here, considering Arabic books difficult, they are forced to take up books written in Persian for the study of *sharia*. Now they occupy a high and sacred position in Bukhara! This community, having decided that the affairs of God should depend on their own opinions and goals, interprets the verses of the Qur'an in whichever sense they see fit and freely make up hadiths. So, in time I shall write in detail about how they themselves commit offenses, crimes, and all kinds of oppression, always ready to mete out punishment to some unfortunate bumpkin, calling him a *kafir* for some insignificant fault. On the one hand, this community sucks Bukhara dry for its own profit; on the other, the poor residents, possessing no understanding of science, sacrifice all they have to the scholars.

Rulers (Emirs/Umara)

This outrageous party, having achieved different offices in government thanks solely to blind luck, tramples underfoot with great zeal the property, lives, dignity, honor, and peace of the unfortunate citizens. The general composition of this group of powerful leaders consists of people from two classes who have never been trusted by anyone at any time. First are the uneducated sons of rulers, who during their fathers' reigns conduct their lives with all manner of stupid and foul deeds. They possess none of the human virtues, and at times they are even illiterate. Second are shopkeepers and merchants, who recognize filling their own stomachs to the utmost as the only good in this world and the next, and who consider teaching anyone anything to be a completely unnecessary undertaking. Many of them ascend to high administrative posts in a very strange manner.

None of these dear people have ever laid eyes on a school, nor heard of the laws of governance. They are unacquainted with the rights and customs of giving orders! How does a nation progress? How is their region governed? How is the state treasury stocked? All of this is

completely uninteresting to them! What duties does the government have in relation to the population? And what about the citizens to the ruler? They have heard absolutely nothing about these matters! As soon as they take a region under their control, taking the decrees of the Emir as a ticket for hellfire or a free pass for destruction and plunder, they throw themselves, together with their subordinates and friends, into the new land like an army of misfortune and take from the unhappy inhabitants anything they desire, while also paying into the Emir's coffers only what they wish. And no one ever questions them about the reasons why such a sea of requisitions becomes mere droplets when transferred to the Emir's treasury.

Masses (Ahali)

These unfortunates are faultless in everything, and ready for anything; they have only one shortcoming, which is "they don't know!" Now it is most convenient to combine a description of their situation with the theme of the present work and begin the narrative.

The Beginning

Disembarking from the train at Kogon, I put my baggage in a carriage, got in myself, and headed for the city of Bukhara. On the road customs collectors inspected my things. Soon enough I approached the gates of Bukhara, and the carriage came to a halt. I asked, "what is this?" and someone answered: "Four hours have passed since sunset, therefore the gates of the city are locked and no one may enter."

I left the carriage and saw that many different people, obviously also not having gotten to the city in time, surrounded a certain man and asked him to open the gates, but he stubbornly refused. At that moment a loud shout rang out: "Make way!" The *mirshab*, the emir's night patrol chief, having driven the people back, cleared the way and opened the city gates; I saw that two or three Armenians entered the city in their own carriage, and then the gates closed again. I approached the gatekeeper and said to him: "Brother! You allowed the Armenians through without a single question; why will you not allow us Muslims?"

The gatekeeper, without answering me, went out to the road. Again a loud shout was heard: "Make way!" Again the people were driven back, the gates were opened and a few wagons full of Jews were let through. I was very distressed by these circumstances and called out loudly "Oh God! Of what are we followers of Muhammad guilty?!"

A young man with an attractive, intelligent face approached me from behind and answered "Of our own stupidity!"

At that moment the city gates opened, and one of the Armenians who had first been allowed into the city came out and began to call out loudly, as if to a person; suddenly from somewhere a dog ran up to him and became very affectionate. I guessed that this dog belonged to the Armenian and had been left outside the city; on the way his master noticed and returned to let the dog in. Having gotten him, the Armenian left and the gates closed once again behind him.

My patience had run out and so, leaving everyone there, I left and in great distress went to sleep in a corner of some teahouse. Upon waking early in the morning and raising my head I saw a great number of sleeping people around me and guessed that no one had been let into the city that night.

I performed my ablutions and prayed, got into a carriage, laid down my things, and said to the driver, "I'm coming to this city for the first time and know nothing of it; take me to a caravanserai of some sort."

"Very well," he answered, and started off.

We approached the middle of a bazaar and my carriage came to a stop; supposing that we had arrived at the designated place, I grabbed my baggage and began to climb down. But the driver said "We're still not there."

"Well then why have you stopped?" I asked.

"Because some carts are coming the other way."

I got out of my carriage and saw that two or three carts and a few other carriages had converged on one spot; a few more carts also stood opposite the others; the road was very narrow and it was difficult to pass. I asked the driver: "What should we do?"

"All the carts need to back up somewhere to a wider spot."

"On which side is the road wide?"

"On this side, and over on that side there are wider spots."

"So how come these carts standing opposite us don't back up?"

"They're acting important!"

"Then move aside!"

"So we're not permitted to be important like them?"

"There you have it! You're stubborn and they're stubborn, and what are we supposed to do?"

"Sit here a little longer."

Then a shout and a loud racket rose up; I said, "What will be will be—I need to take a look," and, leaving my driver, walked through the crowd to see two cart drivers who had accidentally run into one another, swearing at each other in the most indecent language. Suddenly one of them jumped out of his cart and started to pound the other on the head; this one also hopped out of his cart and started to beat the first about the face and head with both fists. All the other drivers threw themselves in from all sides to help. In an instant, the whole bazaar had gathered around them and shouts rose up: "Stop! Hit him!" Observers from all sides fell under the feet of the fighters and shouted even more loudly. I asked one person standing near me: "Brother, where are the guards? Who will separate them?" He was surprised at my question and answered: "What does this matter to the ruler's people?"

"Well, in that case, if the ruler's people have no business here, I'll try to get away."

I said this thinking that I would return to my carriage, sit down, and go back the way I'd come, but it turned out that observers had completely blocked the road; against my will and with a great effort, I got up onto a ledge in front of some shops and waited for the result. After a furious scuffle people managed to separate the fighters, and the side that seemed to have been defeated reined in their vehicles at the first intersection where they could stop, and we went around them by a different road.

Finally my carriage stopped in front of a caravanseraï, whose keeper took my things and brought them to a cramped and dark room. Leaving my baggage there, I went out to see the city. However, I was in a very awkward situation because I knew nothing about the city and not a soul in it. After 2 or 3 days I grew very bored, and 1 day I called the keeper of the caravanseraï and said, "Tell me about some interesting place so that I might look around and entertain myself."

"Go to the Labi Havz pool of Divan-Beghi," he said.

He showed me the way and I set out.

I arrived and saw that this was a very large pool. Salons and tea houses were built around it and at the very edge tattered rugs were spread out on which people sat and drank tea, so I also sat there. The eastern side of this pool forms an elevated square; a large mosque is built on it, in which the majority of the residents of Bukhara gather to pray, and they all perform their ablutions before prayer in the pond.

I sat for a little while on the bank of the pool. Soon, two Bukharan mullahs arrived and stood opposite me; they noticed my unfamiliar face

and from time to time glanced at me. Because loneliness gnawed at my heart, I thought, "I'll speak with them a bit," and I sat down by them and greeted them.

They answered in kind and passed me a cup of tea. After I drank they asked me, "Where are you from?"

"From India."

Then, falling back into private conversation, they forgot about me. This time, however, I had a question for them:

"I've sat here some time already and noticed that people fill large jugs with water from this pond and take them away. They empty them somewhere and come back again. Tell me, where are they taking so much water?"

"They distribute it to residents' homes."

"What for?"

"For drinking."

"Do you really drink water from this pool?"

The mullah asked me carelessly, "What else would you do with this water?"

"This water is harmful to your health!"

"We designate water, like life, for everyone," he said, quoting in Arabic from the Qur'an. "Water is good for people's health, not harmful!"

"Yes, water is not harmful for people's health, but the water from this pool is not altogether water. The better part of it is filth."

"How is the better part of this water filth?"

"Look at how many people are washing themselves in it. They gargle, they blow their noses, wash their feet. If you count all the filth that gets swept out of these barber shops, teahouses, and shops selling lamb heads and fried fish, every day nearly half a *man* of filth."³⁵

"What is the point of this conversation of yours?" asked the mullah. "Maybe you want us to stop drinking water from here?"

"I'm not saying don't drink this water. But don't make ablutions in it, don't blow your nose in it, don't wash dirty feet, don't throw scraps in it. Since this water is intended for drinking it should be clean."

Then the call to prayer sounded. I headed home. On the road a young man caught up to me and greeted me. I saw that he was the same boy

³⁵ One *man* is approximately 36 pounds.

I'd met outside the city gates. I returned his greeting, and he said, "I appreciate your argument with the mullahs about the water in that pond."

I answered, "I'm very grateful. I am a stranger in this town, I don't know a soul. If you wouldn't be put out by it, come to my lodgings from time to time."

"It would be my greatest pleasure. Where do you live?"

I gave the address of my room, and we said goodbye and parted. I returned to my room and asked the innkeeper at the caravanserai where else in the city was interesting.

"Tomorrow is Tuesday," he said, "go to the shrine of Baha-ud-Din."³⁶

I spent the night in a corner of the room. Early the next morning I was thinking of going out when there was a knock at the door. "Come in!" I said. The young man from the day before entered with another person.

"I'm bringing you back to my place," he said.

"I'm your humble servant," I answered. "Today I thought of making a pilgrimage to Baha-ud-Din. I'd much appreciate it if you came along with me."

"Of course I'll come," he said. "But you shouldn't stay in this caravanserai any longer. My house is at your service. Give your things to my friend, he'll take them to my place. We'll go to see Baha-ud-Din."

"Very good," I agreed, and gave my things to this new person, walked out with my new companion, got into a carriage, and set out for our destination. We got out of the carriage, went another little ways on foot, and found ourselves in a large square. A newly built mosque stood on it. We crossed the square and entered the gate of the shrine. We saw a wide courtyard with the grave of Baha-ud-Din Naqshband in the front part of it, and people, one by one and in pairs, circling it in a religious procession. I also (not for religious observance, but rather to be attentive to the situation) circled the grave. I saw that near the grave in many places lay groups of two to three rams' horns, while large bundles of hair from horses' tails hung in a few other places. Holy men were grabbing the pilgrims from the countryside by their collars and forcing them to kiss the horns, saying, "Pay your respects to the horns of the founders!" For this they would then extract money. The poor simple folk, having humbly kissed the horns, rubbed them on their eyes! One of the holy

³⁶ Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bokhari (1318–1391) was the founder of the Naqshbandi, one of the largest Sufi orders. He was born and died near Bukhara, and the site of his tomb has been a shrine and a place of pilgrimage since the sixteenth century.

men suddenly grabbed a bundle of horsehair and said “pay respects!” while smearing it on my face. In my rage I hit him hard in the ear. Then I saw that each of the pilgrims after they finished a revolution around the tomb, touched his head to a flagpole that stood before the grave. They cried and touched their eyes to this stick, and wouldn’t raise their heads for 5 min, as if they were complaining to this dry stick of their bitter fates and asking it to fulfill their long-neglected needs. When I left the mosque, I entered a teahouse pointed out by my companion and sat down. Two or three Bukharans, evidently acquainted with my friend, approached and sat near us. We all began to drink tea together. One of them looked at me and said:

“How did you like the shrine?”

I answered, “The place is very excellent on account of the grave of the holy Naqshband. It merits respect. But some confusion crept into my mind about the pilgrimage to the shrine.”

“What confusion?”

“That stick that was raised over the grave, what is it?”

“It’s the banner of the shrine.”

“Was it left by Baha-ud-Din himself?”

“No...that stick marks the tomb of a saint, and from time to time it’s replaced with a new one. It has no connection to Baha-ud-Din.”

“Then why do people submit themselves before the stick and pray to it?” I asked.

“They don’t submit, but only lay their heads on it.”

“But isn’t that submission?”

“Well, it’s also submission, but not for prayer, only for respect, so it’s not a sin.”

“Why do you call Christians infidels?”

“Because they are idol worshippers.”

“They are people of the book and followers of the messiah; they’re not idol worshippers,” I said.

“They prostrate themselves before one thing that is like an idol,” he answered.

“What is that?” I asked.

The man, taking a pen out of his pocket, drew the shape of a cross on a piece of paper and said, “It’s this!”

“Do you know what this represents?” I asked.

“It’s an image of an idol.”

“There is no idiot in the whole world who would worship this soulless form as a god. Christians, whose knowledge today is everywhere, would never call this thing by God’s name. This image that you call an idol takes the form of an item which, according to Christians, touched the body of the prophet Jesus and became blessed. Because of this, believing Christians bow to it out of respect. Their bow is also out of respect, not worship. The non-believers of Mecca, who also worshipped idols before the arrival of the prophet Muhammad, didn’t worship them as gods, but rather believed the idols would intercede for them on the day of resurrection.” How astonishing that you accuse others of being infidels for worshiping idols and praying to a cross, when you yourselves bow to sticks placed on graves and ask for Baha-ud-Din to fulfill your needs, and you call yourselves Muslims:

I fear that you are not on the road to the Ka’bah, oh Arab,
The road you take leads to Turkestan.³⁷

Prostration, whether out of respect or in prayer, in our religious law (*sharia*) is done before no one but God. I’ll tell you a bit about the history of Islam:

When the prophet found himself in a tight spot because of the cruelty of the nonbelievers in Mecca, he ordered his companions to emigrate to Abyssinia. Eighty-two men and twenty-one women fulfilled the command and arrived in the city of the Abyssinians. Al-Najashi (the king of Abyssinia) heard of their arrival and asked the Muslim migrants to come to him. When the migrants came before the king, they did not bow to him. The courtiers were shocked at this and said, “Our custom is to bow respectfully before our king. Why do you not bow before our king?”

Jafar ibn Abu-Talib, the brother of Ali,³⁸ was among them, and he answered: “We bow before no one but God. Our prophet forbade us to bow before anyone but God, and commanded that none should bow before anyone except for God.”

³⁷ The lines are from Saadi Shirazi’s *Golestan* or *Flower Garden*, a medieval Persian prose work and a foundational piece of Persian literature.

³⁸ Ali ibn Abi Talib (c. 600–c. 661) was the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad and the fourth caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate.

Al-Najashi was glad when he heard Jafar's answer and said "Well, in my view the best person is one who cannot bow before any but God."

The man then said, "You show disrespect to Baha-ud-Din."

I answered, "Well, God help me, I do not disrespect saints and do not wish to. I'm not saying that the blessed Baha-ud-Din was a bad man, and I'm not saying that no one should go visit his shrine. The prophet himself tells us, 'Visit graves, for visiting graves reminds you of the world to come.' Yes, visiting shrines, if it's for the purpose of remembering death and fate, is a fine thing, but our conversation just now is about how this pilgrimage has reached the level of idolatry. Judge for yourself: here at the Baha-ud-Din shrine people pray, bow to a stick that symbolizes the shrine, and make requests of Baha-ud-Din. Today in all of Bukhara there is not one person who wouldn't exclaim 'O, Baha-ud-Din!' in place of 'O God!' Nothing I mentioned is out of keeping with Islamic law. Here look at what our prophet has ordered: 'God almighty killed the Jews for they made shrines of the prophets' graves!' We love the prophet Baha-ud-Din, respect him, make pilgrimages, but it doesn't therefore follow that our love, respect, and pilgrimages should make us worshippers of Baha-ud-Din!"

At that point some man who had stopped in the road in front of the teahouse where we were sitting began to declaim poetry in a loud voice and with unpleasant gestures, attracting the attention of the people around us.

"Who is that?" I asked my acquaintance.

"That's the tale-teller, and they say he also preaches."

"Really? Preachers are very good people, they lead Muslims on the path of truth. It's a necessity to listen to them."

My acquaintance, laughing, said, "If that's so, then listen."

The storyteller began his tale in a funny voice. But what was this story?! In his movements the man was more entertaining than a monkey. It would be impossible to find such a story in any reasonable book. It was empty, senseless, a sham, laughable! For example, he said, "The honorable Ali made sixteen *farsangs*³⁹ of land tremble with one shout; he grabbed a wandering fool by the belt and hurled him into the sky so that he completely disappeared from view. After some time the fool reappeared, cartwheeling in the sky. Again Ali stretched out his arm, grabbed him by

³⁹ One farsang is equivalent to approximately three to five miles. Premodern measurements often varied depending on the time and place.

the belt, spun him around his head, and slammed him to the ground so that he became soft as kohl.”

The simple-hearted people who heard these ravings imagined Ali right in front of their eyes and with their happy smiles showed the storyteller their approval and encouragement! Then this man suddenly left off his half-told tale and like a “wooden goat,” the stringed puppet of Iranian beggars, made a leap. He jumped about so, clapping his hands, shouting, beating himself in the chest, and throwing his turban on the ground, that I said, “Surely he’s lost his mind.”

My companion said, “He wants money.”

“Now? When his story isn’t even finished?”

“Yes, if he waited until the story was over to make his demands, no one would give any. So he stops at an exciting part and asks for money.”

I made to leave and my friend also got up. In what remained of the day we walked around and then passed the evening at the house of another respected person.

Istanbul, 1912

JADIDS AND DRAMA

Mirza Jalil Memmedguluzade (1869–1932) was a dramatist, poet, literary critic, and one of the most famous Azeri satirical prose writers of the twentieth century. He also served as editor of the internationally popular working-class Turkic and Persian-oriented satirical journal *Molla Nasreddin* (1906–1931). After graduating from the Russian imperial-sponsored Gori Pedagogical seminary in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in 1887, he traveled to Moscow and Petersburg, where he was involved in early Bolshevik revolutionary circles, and then returned to the Caucasus to teach in a local school in the Georgian countryside. In 1903 he moved to Tiflis to work as a correspondent for the leading Azeri language newspaper *Şerq-i Rus* (The Russian East), which was edited by his friend Mehmed aga Shahtakhtinski. When the paper closed, Memmedguluzade bought the press and founded the Azeri language satirical paper *Molla Nasreddin* in 1906. His most famous prose works include “The Events in the Danabash Village,” “The Russian Girl,” “Freedom in Iran,” “Qurbaneli bey,” and “The Postbox,” as well as the plays *The Dead* and *My Mother’s Books*.

Molla Nasreddin was published between 1906 and 1917 in Tbilisi, in 1921 in Tabriz, and between 1922 and 1931 in Baku. Memmedguluzade envisioned his projected readership as an international community of Muslim readers familiar with the popular folk character Molla (or Hoja) Nasreddin. Through this appeal to a broad Muslim cultural community and his use of non-verbal cartoons, Memmedguluzade's work held a wide appeal that arguably extended beyond particular Muslim modernist movements (such as the work of the Jadids). However, he draws on satire to forward a similar critique of the corrupt institutional and bureaucratic authority of the Muslim clergy through its service to the Russian imperial administration as well as to support broad secular educational and social reform. After the consolidation of Soviet power, Memmedguluzade shared his facilities and staff with the Soviet administrative Narkompros (the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) offices. While Memmedguluzade initially supported the revolution and the Bolshevik annexation of the Caucasus, his work during this later period highlights tensions with the Soviet regime. His own work at *Molla Nasreddin* was subjected to Soviet censorship.

The Dead (*Ölüler*), published in 1909, is one of the most popular works of twentieth-century Azeri theater. Influenced by the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (1836), which presents a portrait of the backwardness of local government networks in the provinces of the Russian Empire, *The Dead* recounts the story of the arrival of a corrupt Isfahani (southern Azeri or Persian) religious figure to the revolutionary South Caucasus. Like Gogol's play, which also takes place on the imperial periphery, *The Dead* sets its critique of spiritual and political authority in a space characterized by temporal and geographical tensions, as well as by the transience of a revolution staged between crumbling imperial centers. Notably, the sheikh's pilgrimage north offers a critique of the encroaching power of corrupt, bourgeois Persian clerics, which would have resonated both with the agendas of Muslim reformists and Social Democratic activists (the Social Democrats were the group to which both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks laid leadership claims at this time) in this early revolutionary moment.

Drawing on another common Russian imperial theme that resonates with his own biography, Memmedguluzade explores the psychological dimensions of his main character's struggle to return home after studying in Europe. Iskender returns home from France to find his family and

town swindled by a greedy sheikh from Isfahan. Desperate and misunderstood, Iskender spends much of the play ranting in drunken monologues, offering a searing portrait of the challenges posed to young reformist intellectuals. Thus, Memmedguluzade seems to satirize both imperial authority and the anemic local intelligentsia. However, in his drunken rambling, Iskender's monologues often prove daringly poignant. His character evokes the popular folk figure of the "wise fool." In the Azeri comedic tradition, the figure of the fool can be traced to buffoonery, as well as to the Seljuk Sufi figure Molla Nasreddin, who was based on an actual medieval Seljuk Muslim cleric. The wise fool Nasreddin, often called Molla, Khoja, Efendi, or Juha, is the subject of stories that were popular throughout the Turkic world, as well as Persia, India, China, and beyond. Contextualized in its moment of inscription—penned between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions—Iskender's final monologue, which breaks the fourth wall to address the audience directly, powerfully calls the audience to rise up and give new life to a degenerate and indeed "dead" society, plagued by corrupt and dogmatic religious and imperial institutions. Yet Memmedguluzade's work has a timeless quality that resists a singular political doxa, drawing at once on the revolutionary anti-imperial spirit of its day, inviting its audience to awaken from political paralysis, while it also urges the audience toward civic enlightenment and a critique of religious institutionality.

Leah Feldman⁴⁰

The Dead

Mirza Jalil Memmedguluzade

Translated by Javad Efendi and Leah Feldman

A Comedy in Four Acts and Five Scenes

Dramatis Personae

Sheikh⁴¹ Nasrullah—45 years old

Sheikh Ahmad—his pupil, 40 years old

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⁴¹ An honorific in Arabic, literally meaning "elder" but also implying leader and/or governor. It is commonly used to designate the head of a tribe or group of people, or a respected Islamic scholar.

Hajji⁴² **Hasan**—one of the esteemed Hajjis of the town, 50 years old
Karbalayi⁴³ **Fatma Khanim**—his wife, 40 years old
Iskender—his son, 22 years old
Jalal—his younger son, 10 years old
Nazli—his daughter, 12 years old⁴⁴
Zeynab—Hajji Hasan's servant, 20 years old
Ali—Hajji Hasan's servant, 18 years old
Hajji Bakshali—45 years old
Hajji Karim—50 years old
Hajji Kazim—50 years old
Mashadi⁴⁵ **Oruj**—35 years old
Mother of Mashadi Oruj—50 years old
Mir⁴⁶ **Baghir Agha**—35 years old
Heydar Agha—the telegraphist, 45 years old
Aligulu Bey⁴⁷—the interpreter, 30 years old
Mirza⁴⁸ **Huseyn**—the teacher, 40 years old
Karbalayi Vali—35 years old
Four girls—wives of Sheikh Nasrullah, each 13–14 years old
Patients, Women, Travelers, People

The story takes place in a town in the Irevan⁴⁹ province in 1889

⁴² An honorific given to a Muslim person who has successfully completed the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

⁴³ An honorific among Shi'i Muslims given to a person who has successfully completed a pilgrimage to the Holy city of Karbala, Iraq.

⁴⁴ The only place in the original text that gives Nazli's age as twelve—everywhere else in the text she is referred to as a nine years old.

⁴⁵ An honorific among Shi'i Muslims given to a person who has successfully completed a pilgrimage to the Holy city of Mashad, Iran.

⁴⁶ Mir is a prefix as a title for Seyyids—descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Agha is a Persian honorific given to a landowner; also commonly used to refer to the head of the family.

⁴⁷ A Turkic honorific initially given to aristocrats; later in more common use as a sign of respect.

⁴⁸ Mirza is from the Persian *ʿAmīr-zāde* which literally means “*child of an ʿAmīr*” or “*child of the ruler*.” It is an honorific originally denoting the rank of a high nobleman or prince. In nineteenth and early twentieth-century Azerbaijan the word was also commonly used to denote clerks or more generally educated people able to teach literacy and/or manage paperwork.

⁴⁹ Irevan was in the early nineteenth to the early twentieth-centuries capital of the Armenian Oblast of Russia; formerly (from the early seventeenth century) capital of the Irevan Khanate, an administrative territory of the Azerbaijan region of Safavid Persia; currently it is Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.

Act I

Hajji Hasan's house, Iskender's room: There is an iron bed in the corner and an old writing desk in front of it with a couple of books on it. Two old chairs stand beside it. Jalal and his teacher Mirza Huseyn sit on their knees facing each other and reading a lesson.

Jalal (*a book in front of him, reads with apprehension*) "What a beautiful gift hast thou bought us..."

Teacher (*aloud*) Brought!

Jalal "...Brought us from the garden in which thou hast been?" He replied: "I intended to fill the skirts of my rope..."

Teacher (*aloud*) Robe!

Jalal "...robe with roses, when I reached the rose-tree, as pretends..."

Teacher (*aloud*) Presents.

Jalal "presents for my friends, but the perfume of the flowers intoxicated me so much that I let go the gold."

Teacher (*aloud*) Hold!

Jalal "hold on my skirts. O bird of the morning, learn love from the moth..."

(*Man in Mashadi robe⁵⁰ rushes in, breathless.*)

Man (*loudly*) Is Hajji Hasan at home?

Jalal (*to Man*) My agha went to the market.

(*Man exits. Teacher, surprised, follows the man with his eyes.*)

Jalal (*reads again*) "learn from the moth, witch... burnt..."

Teacher (*aloud*) Read correctly, "which burned..." One should not besmirch poetry.

Jalal "Which burned itself and burned completely, though no cry we've heard..."

(*Iskender's voice is heard, crying: "Mars, Mars! Mars!" He enters still calling for their dog.*)

Jalal (*reads*) "Which burned, which burned"... (*to Iskender*) Brother, please leave. Let me read my lesson.

(*Iskender attempts to pull the dog inside by its ears. The dog refuses to obey.*)

Jalal (*to Iskender*) For Allah's sake, brother, don't bring the dog in. Let me read my lesson.

⁵⁰ The same type of robe that Iranian mullahs wear today.

(Iskender lets go of the dog, and slams his hat on the bed. Taking out a cigarette he begins loosening the tobacco between his fingers.)

Teacher *(to Iskender)* Godspeed, Iskender Bey. It is good that you paid us a visit. So please be so kind as to counsel Mirza Jalal to be diligent about his lessons.

Iskender *(sits on bed)* Alright, alright, I will. But tell me, who is going to listen to me? See, even an Allah-fearing dog wouldn't obey me. He wouldn't come in no matter how hard I tried. *(Roars with laughter)* Ha...Ha...Ha...

Teacher No, do not say that. Mirza Jalal is a clever boy. For all of the effort that I've invested and that his father has invested in helping him, Mirza Jalal will listen to you and demonstrate that these efforts have not been in vain. Does Mirza Jalal not see that an uneducated man is not worth a penny? A person with no knowledge—what is he worth? How well can he be respected?

Iskender *(roars with laughter)* Does Mirza Jalal not see that an educated man is not worth a penny? Ha...Ha...Ha... Everyone who has an education has no respect, while everyone who has respect has no education. Ha... Ha... Ha... Being a man means being someone who has neither education nor respect. Ha... Ha... Ha...

Teacher *(to Jalal)* No, no. Iskender Bey is joking; he is surely joking.

Jalal *(to Teacher)* Mirza, by Allah, my brother is drunk again.

Iskender *(quickly stands up and approaches Jalal)* Me? Me? Am I drunk? *(Turns his mouth to Jalal's and exhales)* "Hu, hu, hu" Where? Where's the drunk?

Jalal *(turns away and screws up his face)* By Allah, brother you've been drinking wine again.

Iskender *(laughing loudly)* You're lying, by Allah you're lying! I haven't been drinking wine; I've been drinking vodka! See, you're lying! Ha...Ha...Ha!

Teacher *(standing up, to Jalal)* Since you do not know your lesson well today, I will not give you a new lesson. I will ask you to repeat the same lesson tomorrow.

(Man in Mashadi dress rushes through the door, breathless.)

Man *(loudly)* Is uncle Hajji home?

Jalal *(to Man)*: He is not.

(Man exits. The dog barks at the man in the yard.)

Iskender (*moving toward the door*) Shoo, Shoo, Shoo! Ha... Ha... Ha! Shoo, Shoo, Shoo! Ha... Ha... Ha! Mars, Mars, Mars! (*Whistles to the dog*) Toot, toot, toot!

Jalal (*to Iskender*) By Allah, brother, when my agha comes back I will tell him that my brother was setting the dog on people.

Iskender (*after looking at Jalal for a while*) Then I will tell him that Jalal didn't know his lesson. Ha... Ha... Ha! (*Stops laughing, looks at Jalal for a little while and approaches him*) No, no, I won't tell, I won't tell. You know that I love you very much. (*Touches his face*) But it isn't really right that you don't listen to your brother. Now, for example, you put this book in front of you and read. (*He picks up the book*) Your agha could have paid three abbasi, maybe even four abbasi, or even one manat for this book.⁵¹ So, you fool, put it in front of you and read it. Besides, if you had taken the money to old Karapet you could have instead got two bottles of Smirnov vodka for that. Then you could have given them to your brother Iskender. I would have put them in my pocket and drunk one to your health from morning till evening and the other to the Mirza's health from evening until morning. In this way, you would be healthy and I would be enjoying getting drunk. (*To Teacher*) For me, Mirza, am I not right? Ha...Ha...Ha!

Teacher Excuse me, Iskender Bey, while I know that it is impudent for a servant to counsel you, nonetheless I ask that you not say these sorts of things to children; it is inappropriate. Instead of telling your brother to strive for education, you give him useless advice.

(*Jalal tries to take the book from him, but he does not hand it over*)

Iskender Ha... Ha... Ha!... (*To Jalal*) Seek out knowledge. Ha... Ha... Ha! Seek out knowledge. Hush, hush, listen, listen to what I say.

(*A Mashadi enters, breathless*)

Mashadi (*loudly*) Is Uncle Hajji Hasan at home?

Iskender He's home. He's home.

Jalal (*to the Mashadi*) My brother is lying. My agha went to the market.

⁵¹ Abbasi is a popular name for the 20-kopeck coin from the era when Persian 20-kopeck coins carried a profile of the great Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty. The manat, formally introduced in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1919, was the basic unit of currency of Azerbaijan; it was reintroduced in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. It is unclear if this use marks an error in the transliteration of the text or if manats were used as a term for currency informally prior to 1919.

Teacher (*to the Mashadi*) What is it, what has happened?

(*The Mashadi leaves without saying a word.*)

Iskender (*book in hand, runs after the Mashadi*) Hey man, don't go. The Hajji is home. Don't go. Mars, Mars, Mars! Shoo, shoo! Don't let him get away. Toot, toot, toot! Aha, toot! Shoo, shoo, shoo! (*Stamps his feet on the ground.*)

Teacher (*prepares to leave*) Well then, farewell. (*Exits.*)

Iskender (*laughing, to Teacher as he exits*) Mirza, don't go! For my sake, don't go. Come and teach Jalal. Let him learn and become a scholar.

Jalal (*stealthily approaches Iskender*) Brother, give me my book.

Iskender (*very loudly and angry*) Go to hell!

(*Jalal runs out scared. Iskender looks after him for a short while and then goes over to sit on the bed. Taking a bottle of vodka out of one pocket and a small glass out of the other he begins to pour, drink and then open the book to look at it.*)

Iskender (*to the book*) I recognize you. I also studied you a little. Fifteen years ago in this same room I read you too. (*He reads*) "*The Padishah liked his advice and spared his life.*"⁵² My teacher also gave me this advice: "Child, do your best, learn your lessons well." But I didn't hear any of those good-for-nothings tell me: "Child, be a proper human being." Everyone you meet tells you the same thing: "Study science and become a scholar." But in the end no one could explain: What does it mean, this science, this knowledge? This is what they call science—when one throws back the whole glass. (*He drinks down the glass*) Well! Pff! (*Screws up his face*) Now this is knowledge.

Jalal (*looks in from the door*) Brother, by Allah, when my agha comes I will tell him.

Iskender (*puts the glass and the bottle in his pocket*) Jalal, Jalal, come here, listen to what I am going to tell you.

Jalal I am not coming. You are drunk.

Iskender Jalal, you know what Socrates used to say?

Jalal Who is Socrates?

Iskender Socrates was a man. He was a man of ancient times. Socrates used to say: "Before I studied I thought I knew something in this world. But after I studied I realized that I knew nothing." Ha... Ha... Ha! Meaning—I did not know how to drink vodka either! Jalal, hey Jalal!

⁵² Also a piece from Saadi Shirazi's *Gulistan*.

You avoid me now, saying that I am drunk, but I swear on the shrine⁵³ of Gara Aghaj that when you finish your lessons as I did, you too will end up lying at the bottom of a wine jug like your brother Iskender. Ha... Ha... Ha!...

(*Nazli appears at the door.*)

Nazli Brother, for God's sake, don't drink so much of this poison!

Iskender On my honor and as my eyes attest—see how I am at your service. (*He touches his brow with his hand.*)

Nazli By Allah you lie.

Iskender By Allah, I do not. As long as you stand here, I will not drink even a drop. Though it's true that once you leave I will drink.

Nazli (*approaches and seizes Iskender by the hand*) Then I will not leave you.

Iskender (*embraces Nazli*) Oh my beautiful sister Nazli! From morning until evening you sit at home taking lessons from your mother on how to cook bozbash,⁵⁴ but you don't come to me to hear my stories about the cities I have traveled and so you don't see what is happening in the world! Look, the sun has risen in the yard; what is its light worth if you will not see it? Grasses sprout in the field, trees have flowered, but what are they worth without you—those meadows, those flowers? Your snotty little brothers (*Jalal and Nazli laugh*) collect alfalfa and eat at the canal's edge, while you sit at home chewing gum. At home, hand in hand with your lousy sisters you jump and sing:

Haqushka ha haqushka!⁵⁵
I have one love haqushka;
The long hemmed skirt haqushka!

Ha... Ha... Ha!... (*Jalal and Nazli laugh*) My beloved sister Nazli! Let me take you by the hand and let us leave this province. The moment

⁵³ The original word translated here as “shrine” is “pir,” which is from a Persian word literally meaning “old [person],” but is commonly used as a title for a Sufi master or saint. The name also, as in this context, refers to places connected with saints and, therefore, regarded as sacred.

⁵⁴ A popular meat soup cooked with chickpeas and potatoes.

⁵⁵ *Haqushka* has no meaning in Azeri, but the suffix “ushka” imitates that of Russian diminutive words. Since Russian was a relatively new language in the region during this period, some words may have sounded strange to Azeris, accounting for the linguistic parody in this folk song.

is precious. Why do you stand still? Why are you covering, why are you wrapping up, why are you feeling shame?

Enough of this restraint!

Thank God, your rosy cheeks have no disgrace,
Your brows, your mouth, your lips, have no disgrace,
Your hair, your chin, is free of all disgrace,
So why are you covering, why are you wrapping up, why are you feeling shame?

Enough of this restraint!⁵⁶

(Very perplexed and gasping for breath, Hajji Hasan enters. Nazli and Jalal exit.)

Iskender Father, what has happened?

Hajji Hasan *(raising his head after some thought)* They say Karbalayi Fatullah has risen from the dead.

Iskender *(surprised, inclines his head to his father)* What?

Hajji Hasan They say Karbalayi Fatullah has risen from the dead.

Iskender *(surprised)* What do you mean, which Karbalayi Fatullah?

Hajji Hasan Karbalayi Fatullah, the son of your uncle Hajji Rustam.

Iskender The one who died in Khorasan?⁵⁷

Hajji Hasan Yes, yes ... that same Karbalayi Fatullah.

Iskender You mean that he rose from the dead and left the grave?

Hajji Hasan *(impatiently)* Yes, yes, he rose from the dead.

(Iskender straightens, turns his face aside and tries to hold in his smile, but he cannot restrain himself, suddenly roars with laughter and runs out.)

Hajji Hasan *(looking after him with surprise)* God damn you! And this is one of our educated ones! He is probably drunk again. Even if he were not drunk, he would not believe such things. He believes in nothing—doesn't recognise either Allah or the prophet. I put his weight in gold into funding his education. He went to school for 10 years and studied his lessons at I-do-not-know-which Allah-forsaken classes. Now look, what is the end result? Still there are plenty of poor wretches who reproach Muslims for not taking their children to their lessons. Here is your lesson! Now let them come and see those who did study their lessons. May Allah damn me a thousand times if I ever send my child abroad to study among

⁵⁶ A short poem by the celebrated Azeri poet Molla Panah Vagif (1717–1797).

⁵⁷ Khorasan is currently the name of a region in northeastern Iran, but historically referred to a much larger area in the east and north-east of the Persian Empire.

*kafirs*⁵⁸ again! May I be damned! I knew it would all end like this. But they will not let it be. By Allah, these men do not let the people do what they think is right. They keep harassing me: “Hajji, take pity on the child, thank Allah you have the means, let him go and study and return as a leader. Let him become an enginar,⁵⁹ a doctor, an inspectist,⁶⁰ or an I-don’t-know-what-the-hell.” All right, so we sent him. Praised be Allah, he studied and returned. And look what became of him—drunk in the morning, drunk in the evening. Courthouses will not take him even as a clerk. May Allah ruin the house of the one who caused this.

(Hajji Bakhshali enters.)

Hajji Bakhshali (*breathless*) Hajji, Karbalayi Fatullah has revived?

Hajji Hasan (*stands up*) Yes, yes, he has revived. He even wrote a letter in his own hand; I am still shocked.

Hajji Bakhshali Nothing is beyond Allah. But wait, Hajji, a dead man cannot revive himself? Surely, someone else revived him.

Hajji Hasan Well Hajji, this is not such a strange thing! Only last year they announced that Karbalayi Khalil’s wife had died. But in the morning they said that she had risen from the dead. Now she is walking about.

Iskender (*sticks his head around the door*) Of course, in the evening they thought that the woman had died but it turned out that she was really still alive! Ha ... Ha ... Ha!...

Hajji Hasan (*loudly and angrily, to Iskender*) Get the hell out of here!

(Hajji Karim enters.)

Hajji Karim (*breathless*) Hajji, is it true as they say, that Karbalayi Fatullah has risen from the dead?

Hajji Hasan Yes, it is so, it is true. Hajji, take a seat. Hajji, take a seat.

(They sit down. Hajji Kazim enters.)

Hajji Kazim (*breathless*) Hajji, Hasan Agha, is it true as they say that the son of Hajji Rustam has risen from the dead?

Hajji Hasan (*stands up*) Yes, Hajji Agha, it is so, it is true.

(Mashadi Oruj and a group of people following him enter, breathless.)

⁵⁸ *Kafir* is an Arabic term used in an Islamic doctrinal sense, usually translated as “unbeliever” or “infidel.”

⁵⁹ Enginar (in the original text sounds like “indjinar”) is a deliberate misspelling/mispronunciation of the word “engineer,” which was also part of the new Russian imperial lexicon.

⁶⁰ Inspectist here means inspector. In the original text the author uses the folk word “silitchi” from the Russian “sledovatel.”

Mashadi Oruj (*paper in hand, raises both hands and calls out in the name of Allah*) Allah the Creator, powerless is my tongue to describe your might. Oh Allah, a thousand thanks to your grace!

(*Some people walk forward, look at the paper, asking: "Is it the letter from Karbalayi Fatullah? Read it. Let us see; what did he write?"*)

Hajji Hasan (*to Mashadi Oruj*) Mashadi Oruj, it would be better if you were to read the paper so that everyone can listen. This is a very strange case; one could become confused.

Mashadi Oruj (*raises both of his hands again, starts crying, and after wiping his tears with the hem of his gown, begins reading the paper*) "My dear and kind brother Mashadi Oruj. As soon as you receive this paper, deliver this good news directly to my uncle Hajji Hasan." (*Hajji Hasan cries.*)

Then, since my mother is still alive, go and embrace my mother and tell her: "Dear mother, poor mother, mourn no longer. Your son Karbalayi Fatullah has returned from the dead." Then pick up and hold my son Muhammadhasan in your arms and say: "My poor child, do not feel sad because you are an orphan no more. Your father has been revived and in a few days he will bring you red shoes from Khorasan." And, please, send my sister-in-law to let the mother of Muhammadhasan know—although she has surely remarried by now, or perhaps not yet. (*He cries*) My dear and kind brother Mashadi Oruj! Perhaps the news of my resurrection will seem staggering to you and to some skeptical people. May a thousand damnations be upon those who cast doubt on the wisdom of the Lord of the Universe!

People (*in unison*) Damnation!

Mashadi Oruj (*reads*) My brother! Mashadi Oruj! Myself along with one hundred and fourteen men have risen from the grave and returned to this world. I shall spend one whole week on a pilgrimage and, with the help of Allah, I shall return to my motherland after that week. Only now can I say in brief that in the holy city of Mashad a devout man has appeared. His eminence's name is Sheikh Nasrullah. *May the Mercy of Allah be his help!* After several years of studying the secret sciences in Isfahan his eminence the Sheikh has graciously arrived in Khorasan where, after several months of spiritual exercises and upholding a vow of silence, he was fated to reach the finest understanding of esoterics and exoterics that the sciences could offer. He was finally ordained by the Grace of the Almighty to begin practicing necromancy. My dear brother Mashadi Oruj! With the help of Allah, I shall personally render you a detailed account

of the story when I arrive and you will be astonished and amazed to hear it. Only listen and understand that on the eighteenth day of Jumada Al-Akhira,⁶¹ at the hour when Selene⁶² approached the lower world, his eminence the Sheikh came to visit the inhabitants of a distant cemetery in the holy city of Mashad. After following ritual preparations, he started to read a certain prayer and then recited aloud: "Grace be with you, o people of graves! Rise to your feet, righteous creatures of Allah!" When they heard his voice, all the dead came to life by the might of Allah. (*Some people start crying.*)

Oh brother, what else can I say? I saw a man standing by my head. He was a brave man of forty, truly devoted, and compassionate. His black-eyed blessed face was shot through with an olive green color and his blessed name is Sheikh Nasrullah Isfahani.

One of the Hajjis Oh Allah, praised be your glory!

Another Hajji Almighty Allah, have mercy upon your creatures!

(*Everyone starts crying again.*)

Mashadi Oruj (*reads*) "Oh my righteous brother Mashadi Oruj, by writing this letter to you my aim is to inform you that the morally peerless and saintly-devoted Sheikh Nasrullah departs from the Holy city of Mashad at the dawn of the month of Rajab.⁶³ He will pass through Tabriz by the Julfa road and head to Najaful-Ashraf city.⁶⁴ His eminence the Sheikh is intending to stay in our city for a day and then to start on the road and leave after paying a visit to inhabitants of the cemetery. (*People cry.*)

As soon as this letter reaches you, please deliver this news to my fellow countrymen and especially to my honorable uncle Hajji. Ask them to greet his eminence the Sheikh on the seventh or eighth day of the month and pay the respect due to this untarnished being so that my fellow townspeople will not forgo the benefits of the bliss and charity of the agha's divine grace. That is all. Signed: Mashadi Fatullah son of Hajji Rustam

⁶¹ The sixth month of the Islamic calendar.

⁶² The Ancient Greek goddess of the Moon.

⁶³ The seventh month of the Islamic calendar.

⁶⁴ Tabriz is the fourth largest city and one of the historical capitals of Iran; now the capital of Iran's East Azerbaijan Province. Julfa is a town in Nakhichevan. Nakhichevan was a khanate in Safavid Persia, then a province of the Russian Empire, and is now an autonomous republic and an exclave of the Azerbaijani Republic. Najaful-Ashraf is a historical city sacred to Shi'i Muslims, near Karbala, Iraq.

of such-and-such province. Dated: 19 Jumada Al-Akhira, holy city of Mashad." (*He raises both hands and cries. The people cry too.*) Praised be Allah!

Hajji Bakhshali (*surprised*) So his eminence the Sheikh will honor our city with his visit?

Hajji Hasan Yes, yes. The letter clearly says this. It is written there that several people will come and that they will come to our city.

Mashadi Oruj Yes, yes, they will come to our city, that is, they will come here and then go to Tabriz.

Hajji Kazim So when will they come? What do you think, good man?

Mashadi Oruj Yes, yes, it is written that they will pay us a visit on the seventh or eighth day of the month of Rajab.

Hajji Karim What? Really? That means that they will be in our city after how many days?

Mashadi Oruj It means in 2 or 3 days.

Several People This means that his eminence the Sheikh will visit our city in 2 or 3 days?

Mashadi Oruj Yes, yes, that's right.

(*People spring into motion and say to one another: "Then what are we waiting for?" They all look at one another.*)

Hajji Hasan (*turns to the Hajjis*) By Allah, this world leaves me completely astonished. (*After a little thought*) For it is a real miracle that a person can be resurrected from the dead and can still be a proper clever man just like us.

Hajji Bakhshali Hajji Hasan Agha, you shouldn't utter such words. One cannot embrace the wisdom of Allah and, moreover, this is not some kind of mystery. There it is, the man has written a letter in his own hand. So, don't say such things, Hajji Agha.

Several People Of course, of course, all of this is divine wisdom. All of these mysteries belong to Allah.

Hajji Hasan So then what are we waiting for? His eminence the Sheikh is on his way now. There's no time to stand still. Hajji Kazim, Hajji Karim, Hajji Bakhshali, Mashadi Oruj, and whoever else is there, I am talking to every one of you. Don't stand still, make preparations! (*Loudly*) Hey boy, Ali, where are our servant boys? (*Servant Ali can be seen at the door behind the people.*)

Hey boy, give barley to the horse and tighten the saddle. And you Hajjis, Mashadis—get prepared. There is no time to stand still. We must prepare supplies for the road. We must advance.

(The Hajjis and others spring into motion. A few people exit saying to each other: "Let's go prepare the horses.")

Hey boy, Ali! Don't stand still, rush home and tell them to furnish the rooms with carpets; guests are coming. *(Servant Ali emerges from the crowd and exits.)*

Hajji Kazim *(to Hajji Hasan)* Hajji, don't trouble yourself, I can serve his eminence the Sheikh myself; let him be our guest. I'm afraid it would be a burden for you.

Hajji Hasan No, no, Hajji Kazim, for Allah's sake, don't say that. It is a pleasure to take on these responsibilities to serve such a being.

Hajji Bakhshali No, please Hajji Hasan Agha, let the Sheikh be our guest.

Hajji Karim By Allah, I can't agree, I should accept the role of serving his eminence myself. By Allah, there is no other way.

Hajji Hasan *(to Hajji Karim)* We owe so much to his eminence the Sheikh. So I couldn't agree to it even if your head were on the line.

Hajji Kazim Well then, Hajji Hasan Agha, this isn't the time to stand still. Let's go and get prepared. Hajjis, please, let's go and make preparations for the road.

(All exit, saying "please-please, after you." Only Hajji Hasan remains in the room. Karbalayi Fatma Khanim, with a chador⁶⁵ over her head, timidly sticks her head through the door and enters.)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim *(to Hajji Hasan)* Hey Hajji, what's this news? They say that Karbalayi Fatullah has risen from the dead and is on his way here?

Hajji Hasan Karbalayi Fatma, there is no time to stand around, put the house in order. The whole world is collapsing. Everyone who ever died in Khorasan has been revived. Karbalayi Fatullah has returned from the dead, too, and he'll be here any day now. The Sheikh who revived him is coming too and will be staying with us. Hey, I'm talking to you. Don't just stand there—go and tidy the house. *(Loudly and angrily)* Hey, I'm talking to you. Don't stand there! *(Goes to leave.)*

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Hey Hajji, Allah rest your father's soul, tell me please, will he revive the dead men of our town too?

⁶⁵ An outer garment or open cloak worn by Shi'i Muslim women in public spaces following the Islamic dress code known as *hijab*. A chador is a full-body-length semicircle of fabric (usually black) that is placed over the woman's or girl's head and then held closed at the front.

Hajji Hasan (*at the door*) Hey woman, for Allah's sake, hurry, don't stand still! I don't know if he will revive them or not. It all depends on the benevolence of Allah. I'm racking my brains, but I don't understand a thing. How can he revive the dead? May Allah be praised, isn't that a difficult thing to do? (*He yells*) I'm talking to you woman. Don't stand still. Go make the preparations! I'm leaving. (*Exits.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*raises both hands and starts crying*) Oh Allah who created the earth and heaven from nothing! You have left me in tears for a year and a half. You took my rosy-cheeked daughter from me and gave me so much pain! Oh All-Merciful Allah, I'm asking you for my Sara! Oh Allah who revived Karbalayi Fatullah, have mercy on me too. Please revive my rosy-cheeked daughter! Allah! Allah!... (*She cries and falls face down to the floor.*)

(*Iskender enters slowly, approaches his mother and stands beside her.*)

Iskender (*head bowed, sadly*) Poor mother!

(*Curtain*)

Act II

Hajji Hasan's guest room. Karbalayi Fatma Khanim and her servant Zeynab are putting the house in order. Nazli walks around cheerfully, dancing and singing.

Nazli (*joyfully to her mother*) Mother, my dear mother, my precious mother, they say that our guest who is coming revives the dead. My dear mother, please tell me, is it true or not?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Young lady, how would I know anymore than you? They say he revived ten hundred men in Khorasan. He revived your cousin Karbalayi Fatullah too. The guests are arriving any minute, let me get back to my work. Zeynab, girl, bring pillows and put them on this side. Pull the carpet this way a little. Hurry! More quickly!

Nazli Mother, by Allah I don't know if I should cry or laugh. In the name of Allah listen, something just came to my mind. Mother, I have to tell you something, let me speak. (*Her mother is silent.*) Mother, by Allah, I will beg our guest; (*Crying*) I will fall at his feet if only he will revive my sister Sara too.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Young lady, I just don't know. (*She sinks to the floor, covers her face with the edge of her kerchief, and starts crying.*)

Zeynab: Khanim, for Allah's sake, don't torture yourself, Allah is merciful. (*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim dries her tears and uncovers her face.*) Khanim, for Allah's sake, what kind of person can revive the dead? All

right, perhaps he's an Imam or a Seyyid?⁶⁶ Oh Allah thanks to your Grace. (*She pauses*) For Allah's sake, Khanim, there's only one thing I wanted to ask you—does he revive the poor dead or only the rich? By Allah, Khanim, I've been thinking so much today that I hardly know what I'm doing. To tell you the truth, (*crying*) I can't stop thinking about our little boy today. It's as if the little one were breathing his last in front of me now. The poor child was still staring at me when he died, as if he wanted something from me. (*She continues crying and dries her tears with her kerchief.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim: Ah, I don't know, by Allah. Allah is merciful; surely he will take pity on us too. So don't just stand there, Zeynab, go tell Ali to bring water. And you, go take care of the stove. (*Zeynab exits.*)

Nazli Mother, mother, by Allah my heart feels like it will burst. (*Laughing*) I'll die if I can't see my sister Sara just once again. Mother, you know how I loved my sister. I just hope I don't die before seeing my Sara walk through this door again. I would throw myself at her, embrace her neck and say, "Oh my sister, who rots in the ground!" By Allah, mother, I want to lose my mind. I don't know if I should cry or laugh. I swear to Allah, to the prophet; I vow to give all that I have to the poor, here, my dresses, gold, I'll go and fetch it all now. (*She starts to run.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Young lady, don't rush yet. Let's see what happens. Don't dump all of your stuff out here. It's about time for our guests to arrive. Go and tell Zeynab to come here quickly.

(*Iskender enters singing.*)

Iskender All right ... mother, how are you feeling?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Eh, I'd feel better if I had been poisoned! Worrying about you all the time has almost ruined me. Other people's children studied and became proper men; they are all clear-eyed, reasonable men. Each in his own way is a respectable person. But you're drunk day and night... By Allah, we've completely lost face in this town. You drink this poison and babble on with whatever nonsense comes to your mind. You neither have faith in Allah nor respect for your elders. What was that you said to Nazli yesterday? "Let me hold your hand and let's go for a walk." Do you mean that now all we're left with are girls walking around just like boys? By Allah, when Jalal told me that yesterday, I was

⁶⁶ An Imam is a religious leader in Islam. A Seyyid is an honorific denoting male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his grandsons, Hasan ibn Ali and Huseyn ibn Ali, sons of the prophet's daughter Fatima Zahra and his son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib.

about to go and dig a grave with my own hands, get in it, and escape all this.

Iskender (*shouts with laughter and clasps his mother's shoulder*) From now on, you won't escape, even if you die. After all, he arrives today, this Sheikh Nasrullah or whatever. You will die and then the Sheikh will revive you again. Ha... Ha... Ha!... From now on you can't escape, even in death. Ha... Ha... Ha!...

(*Zeynab and Nazli enter. Iskender goes to sit down on some cushions. Zeynab tries to prevent him.*)

Zeynab Don't sit there and rumple the cushions! We didn't put them here for you! Can't you see we're expecting a guest?

Iskender (*to Zeynab*) Hey, Zeynab, by Allah I see what game you're playing! (*Stands up*) Are you trying your best to impress the guest so that he'll revive your husband Karbalayi Novruz? By Allah, I see your game. Ha... Ha... Ha!...

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*to Iskender*) You miserable man, you wretched man! How can you believe in that if you don't believe in anything at all? I feel sorry for you! You'd better leave and let us do our work. Hey girl, Zeynab, come straighten the corner of the carpet.

Nazli (*to Iskender*) Brother, for Allah's sake, hold yourself together, at least for today. By Allah this is embarrassing; the guests are coming.

(*Mir Baghir Agha enters and takes off his shoes.*)

Mir Baghir Agha: Salam aleykum.

(*Nazli covers her face and runs out.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim: Aleyk As-Salam. Agha, please take a seat.

(*Mir Baghir Agha sits down. Iskender runs after Nazli.*)

Iskender Hey, Nazli, you're going to thank me—I have great news! Your fiancé has come.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*angrily to Iskender*) Shut up! Stop talking nonsense!

(*Mir Baghir Agha bows his head.*)

Iskender (*approaches and stands before Mir Baghir*) For me, let's shake hands! If you're such a tough guy, give me your hand! By Allah, you have real guts to go for a 9 years old—exactly—everything it should be and nothing it shouldn't. Lamb's meat, soft, fresh, tender, small. A mouth that smells of milk. Delicious, delicious! By Allah, you've got guts! If you're such a tough guy, give me your hand!

Mir Baghir Agha (*to Iskender*) This is shameful, shameful! You should at least be ashamed to speak like that in front of your mother.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim If he had a sense of shame then why would he speak like that?

Iskender (*stands, looking down at himself in surprise*) It's true, what if I have lost my shame? (*Puts both of his hands into his pockets as if trying to find something*) Let me see, maybe the shame is in my pockets, no, it isn't. (*To Mir Baghir Agha*) Agha, for my sake, look in your pockets, perhaps it's there. (*Mir Baghir Agha tries to stand up.*) Ha... Ha... Ha!... Don't take offense for my sake! If you're such a tough guy, don't take offense. Now I'll bring you your fiancée. (*Calls*) Nazli, Nazli! (*Fatma Khanim stands up.*)

Mir Baghir Agha (*in a rage, loudly*) Shut up, you drunk! (*He goes to leave*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Oh dear! Hey boy, what are you doing! The boy's gone totally mad. (*Loudly*) Hey, Ali, come throw this idiot out!

(*Mir Baghir Agha exits. Nazli enters.*)

Nazli: Brother, by Allah, you've dishonored us. How could you say that? Aren't you ashamed?

Iskender (*sings and dances, snapping his fingers*)

I loved one girl, she was just nine...

Black kohl on her brows and her eyes are lined.

Aha! Aha! Aha!...

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim makes a gesture as if to strangle Iskender with both hands and exits.*)

Nazli (*loudly*) Brother, shut up!

Iskender (*after some thought he grabs Nazli by the hand and takes her to the window*) Look, look, who's that?

Nazli How do I know? You know yourself who that is.

Iskender Look carefully! Look, who is that?

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim enters, stands at the door.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Oh my child, that's enough! Aren't you ashamed, tired? Have a little pity on yourself. Have some sense of shame. All those words you said to that man, how could you not feel shame? The poor man couldn't stand the embarrassment and left. Above all, he is a Seyyid and our relative. Is it possible that everything you think comes out of your mouth? The poor man is an outcast; who else does he have in this town besides us?

Iskender (*snaps his fingers and points at Nazli*) But in this town he has a fiancée like Nazli.

Nazli Brother, I swear to Allah, I'm not going to marry Mir Baghir Agha. I will not marry anyone.

Iskender Ha... Ha... Ha!... (*approaches and takes Nazli by the hand*) My dear sister, you are still a child. Take your time; there is so much you haven't experienced yet! One day I'll come home and see that they are holding a mirror⁶⁷ in front of you and pulling you, taking you away. And say that you start acting coy. (*He pretends to be coy*) Let's presume that you don't want to get married. At that very moment, you will see that they will push you from behind, saying: "Don't stop, come on, go!" You'll turn back and see that it's your father Hajji Hasan pushing you. All right, and then, while you are walking you might stop again and not want to go on. You'll suddenly feel someone poke you and say: "Don't stop, walk quickly!" You'll turn back and see that it is your mother Karbalayi Fatma Khanim. And if eventually you try to resist, then all the people around you: your aunts, uncles, Seyyids, mullahs, neighbors, grandmothers, and sisters will each prod you: "Shut up, be quiet! Or the vampire will come and get you!" Yes, with all that hullabaloo they'll take you and set you down next to some man. How will you find me then? (*He sings, snapping his fingers*)

There will come a day when you'll abandon me,
Worms will be the ones to keep you company,
Baby, you will,
Sister, you will!...

(*He stands in thought for a while and then looks at Nazli and his mother.*)

Mother, you think I'm only saying these things because I'm drunk?

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim says nothing, Nazli approaches and embraces Iskender.*)

Nazli Brother, even if you're drunk I will never stop listening to you.
(*Servants enter.*)

Servants (*breathless*) Khanim, please come, the guests are arriving.

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim and Nazli leave the room. Hajji Hasan, covered in dust, enters breathlessly and looks at everyone round the room. A*

⁶⁷ A mirror held in front of the bride, a *mirror of good fortune*, is a traditional wedding ritual in Azerbaijan.

voice can be heard from afar reciting the salavat—a prayer for the Prophet Muhammad.)

Hajji Hasan Why should all of Allah's misfortune always fall upon this province? His eminence the Sheikh fell a little sick on the road. May Allah the Creator heal him so that we won't be embarrassed. (*To Iskender*) Iskender, keep yourself in order in front of the guests today. It's shameful and there are all sorts of people—friends and enemies.

Iskender Papa, is this the same Sheikh who revives the dead?

Hajji Hasan His eminence the Sheikh Nasrullah. I don't have any more time to talk to you. (*He prepares to leave*) Let me go see, have they prepared everything in the house?

Iskender Papa, then ask our guest to revive me first, because I'm somewhat dead too.

Hajji Hasan quickly and silently approaches and seizes Iskender by the arm and takes him out. The sound of the salavat⁶⁸ and of people babbling gets closer. The clatter, horses neighing and hullabaloo gets louder and louder. Hajji Hasan on one side and Sheikh Ahmad on the other side, supporting Sheikh Nasrullah by the arms, bring him inside, seat him on a mattress, move aside, and stand respectfully. Hajji Bakhshali, Hajji Karim, Hajji Kazim, Mashadi Oruj, Mir Bagbir Agha and the other Hajjis fill the room, while people covered with dust enter breathless and stand aside respectfully. Sheikh Nasrullah leans against the cushions like an invalid, not looking at anyone. Iskender sticks his head out of the crowd and watches. Hajji Hasan gestures for him to leave; Iskender disappears. Sheikh Ahmad approaches slowly, sinks down in front of Sheikh Nasrullah and on his knees speaks quietly.

Sheikh Ahmad (*to Sheikh Nasrullah*) My Sheikh, how are you feeling now?

(Sheikh Nasrullah doesn't say a word and moves his head.)

Hajji Hasan (*approaching Sheikh Ahmad timidly*) Will his eminence the Sheikh give permission for tea to be served?

(Sheikh Nasrullah shakes his head.)

Hajji Hasan (*carefully*) Perhaps they should bring sweet drinks?

(Sheikh Nasrullah again shakes his head)

Hajji Hasan Perhaps, his eminence the Sheikh wishes to feast? A good chicken pilaf has been prepared.

⁶⁸ The recitation of blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad when his name is mentioned or in prayer.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*not looking anyone in the face, speaks quietly*) While ill, a man has no desire to feast. One is not likely to remember Allah when one's heart is stricken with the illness of worldly passions. No matter how delicious the meal, it will never seem delicious to an ailing man; and neither would he gain pleasure from the benefits of the afterlife. If you love the hereafter then it will remove all desire for the things that seem beautiful in this world, and all the things that you want to see in the afterlife will take the world out of your heart. (*After some thought he looks at Hajji Hasan and suddenly stands up and calls out.*) Feast? Chicken pilaf? (*To Sheikh Ahmad*) Sheikh Ahmad, where did you bring me? What kind of Muslims are these men? What kind of devotion is this? What is this? (*Points at the room furnishings*) What are these carpets for? And the feast, and the chicken pilaf? Sheikh Ahmad, have you not told them that the only food I require in a single day is a date?!

(*Sheikh Ahmad, like everyone else, trembles with fear.*)

Sheikh Ahmad Yes, my Sheikh, that is what I said.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*turns to face the crowd and shouts*) What is this, you misbegotten ones? What lures you to this world? What is this? What do you want? What are you searching for? Even if you're a king, you will die. Your world is less to me than the leaf in the mouth of a locust. Your world consists of six tastes: Sweet, Sour, Salty, Bitter, Pungent, and Astringent. That's all! But the most delicious meal is honey made from the saliva of bees. Thousands of animal remains swill in the water that you drink. Your finest perfume is musk, which consists of blood from the navel of a gazelle. The most aristocratic of your animals is a horse, which puts at risk anyone who rides it. The best garments are made of silk, which comes out of the putrid mouth of a worm. As for the significant benefits of marriage, the question is a little complicated. (*He settles down a little, more quietly*) The most useful medicine against the very itchy scabies that appears as a result of the dream of one's eyes—is a marital affair, that is, a *Sigha*—temporary marriage.⁶⁹ A *Sigha* is a powerful measure that helps protect the realm of faith from the plundering charms of coquettish eyes. (*Very loudly*) Marriage protects faith. That means he who marries protects half of his faith from Satan's evil and inferior passions. (*Quietly, after a short*

⁶⁹ *Sigha* is a Persian word for *Nikāh al-Mut'ah* (Arabic, "Pleasure marriage"). A fixed-term contractual marriage in Shi'i Islam, which is automatically dissolved upon completion of its term. Like any marriage in Islam, *Sigha* is contractual and has the same rules as a conventional marriage.

pause) Sheikh Ahmad, why don't I see any sisters among these people? Tell those poor ones to come gather here behind the curtain so they can also benefit from hearing the precepts of Allah.

(People spring into motion. The wives covered in chadors enter in one-by-one and line up behind the men.)

(Loudly) Aksaru ablinnaril-az-zab bishtarin ahli-jahannam azabanand.⁷⁰ *(Quietly to Sheikh Ahmad)* Sheikh Ahmad I'm exhausted, you explain it to them.

Sheikh Ahmad *(to the people)* As is clear from the explanations of his eminence the Sheikh, hell is mostly populated by men and women deprived of temporary marriage.

Sheikh Nasrullah *(to Sheikh Ahmad)* Louder, louder. *(Screaming)* Two raka'at⁷¹ of prayer from a married man is better than seventy raka'at of prayer from a single one. *(He suddenly stands up and extends his right hand toward the people and speaks very loudly)* Get married. Otherwise, you will become one of the Christian hermits and brothers of Satan.

Hajji Hasan *(steps forward and prostrates himself in front of Sheikh Nasrullah)* My Sheikh, have mercy on us; we're pitiful. We're ready to do anything to obey your command. Take pity on us.

Sheikh Nasrullah *(looks at Hajji Hasan a little and starts crying)* Once King David happened upon a graveyard, and he saw the angel of sorrow torturing a dead man. His Highness said... *(Stops, sits down and people start crying)* Sheikh Ahmad, I'm too weak to speak.

Hajji Hasan May Allah heal you!

People May Allah heal you!

(A voice saying "Move away, give way" can be heard from within the crowd. Heydar Agha, Aligulu Bey and the teacher Mirza Huseyn enter. Sheikh Nasrullah notes that people show them respect and so he stands up.)

Sheikh Nasrullah Sheikh Ahmad who are these aghas?

Hajji Hasan My Sheikh! This is Heydar Agha, a high-ranking telegraph official and a very educated person. This agha is Aligulu Bey. He is

⁷⁰ Persian for "Clearly, the souls of a majority of those who are not married will populate Hell." The Persian phrase is retained here for dramatic purposes, since the Sheikh uses complex Persian and Arabic language to obscure and fool the simple people of a small town who can barely follow his speech. The use of Arabic among the mullahs of non-Arabic countries is somewhat similar to the use of Latin among Catholic priests.

⁷¹ The plural of the Arabic *raka'ah*—the cycle of prescribed movements and recitations followed by Muslims during their prayer that is to be practiced five times a day. For example, dawn prayer consists of two, sunset prayers of three, and the others four raka'at.

the son of the famous Jahangir Bey; he's also the judge's interpreter. This gentleman, Molla Huseyn, is a teacher.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*gestures a place for the visitors; they sit down*) Allah willing, you are all well, venerable gentlemen?

Heydar Agha Only may Allah not deprive us of such a theologian as you.

Aligulu Bey May Allah grant you a long life!

Sheikh Nasrullah As soon as a man is put in his grave, the secretaries of the invisible library write the lessons learned by the man's body on a coffin lid with the pen of doom... Allah, the beholder of Truth... (*Sheikh Nasrullah suddenly says "ow, ow," grimaces and touches his side with his left hand. People are shocked and silent. Sheikh Ahmad says nothing, stands up and leaves, gesturing to Hajji Hasan to follow him. After they exit, Sheikh Nasrullah renews his lecture.*)

...Asked him 40 questions. One of these questions was: "My educated son, you adorned your outside with the clothes of infidels. Have you forgotten the only thing that is of interest to me is your inside?" I wonder how they answer this question.

Heydar Agha Yes, your eminence the Sheikh, in any case we are Allah's sinful creatures. (*Turning to people, more quietly*) *Mashallah*,⁷² this gentleman is an ocean of knowledge; I have never seen such a theologian.

Several People *Mashallah*, remarkable speech; this truly is a gift from Allah.

Aligulu Bey (*to people*) *Mashallah*, to the Sheikh's scholarliness! "Biravo!"

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to Heydar Agha*) My agha, is there anyone else besides you who studies foreign languages in this town; aren't there more of you?

Heydar Agha No, my Sheikh, there aren't. There's only one of us. Well, a son of Hajji Hasan Agha studied in Frankistan⁷³ too; but it was no use, the results were disappointing. It's true, your eminence the Sheikh, there's no shame if one learns a little of a foreign nation's language.

(*Sheikh Ahmad and Hajji Hasan enter.*)

⁷² Arabic phrase that literally means "God has willed it." Muslims use it to express appreciation, joy, or praise for an event or a person.

⁷³ "The land of Franks," i.e., France.

But if a Muslim child goes and spends years among *kafirs*, of course his beliefs will change.

Hajji Hasan My Sheikh, honestly, I've become unhappy because of my child. I made a terrible mistake.

Sheikh Nasrullah Is the Hajji's son here among the people too?

Hajji Hasan No, your eminence the Sheikh, he was embarrassed to meet you and ran and hid. May Allah bring shame upon him.

Sheikh Nasrullah Each Muslim is called upon to do good deeds. Hajji Hasan Agha, call for your son to come; I want to see him.

(People spring into motion. Hajji Hasan moves toward the door and a woman begins to cry loudly.)

What does this woman want?

Mashadi Oruj *(takes a few steps forward)* My Sheikh, that's my mother, she cries because of her son. Her son is the same Karbalayi Fatullah, who you kindly revived in Khorasan.

Crying Woman *(a chador covering her head, cries, moves forward a little)* I beseech you, my Sheikh! I'm asking you for my son.

Sheikh Nasrullah *(very loudly)* Each word has its own time; each point has its own place.

Sheikh Ahmad *(to the woman)* Sister, step away, don't annoy the Sheikh; it isn't the right time for this conversation.

(Hajji Hasan brings Iskender in, holding him by the hand. Iskender approaches, stands in front of Sheikh Nasrullah, puts his hands in his pockets and looks him in the face.)

Sheikh Nasrullah: What is the name of the bey?

Hajji Hasan: Your servant's name is Iskender.

Sheikh Nasrullah: Vai, vai! Iskender! Iskender! Al-Iskender the Great! Iskender Zulgarneyn!⁷⁴ What a beautiful name! Iskender, Iskender! And since not a single person in the nation felt the necessity to purify their inner passions *(Hajji Hasan makes a sign to Hajji Bakhshali and both walk out.)* and morals as the padishahs did for their sultans, Iskender built a strong barrier around the country to secure it against the horror of an enemy as evil as Gog and Magog.

⁷⁴ Iskender Zulgarneyn is from Arabic and means "He of the Two Horns." He is a figure mentioned in the Qur'an, in which he is described as a great and righteous ruler who built the wall that prevented Gog and Magog from attacking the people he encountered on his journey east. He is also identified with Alexander the Great.

Everything that exists in this world
 is the work of comradeship.
 If it were not so, then how would the leaves
 of a willow tree grow green in spring?

Iskender Yes, your eminence the Sheikh, I understand.

Heydar Agha (*to Aligulu Bey*) You see, he jokes.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to Iskender*) Do you, sir, also hold a high rank or not?

Iskender No, I don't hold anything. These aghas do hold high ranks. (*Gestures towards Heydar Agha and Aligulu Bey*) I'm the only dog-rose hip among these fruits.

Aligulu Bey (*to Heydar Agha*) He's certainly drunk again.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to Iskender*) Obviously, you have learned less than these aghas, since you have not surpassed their rank.

Iskender Yes, yes, these are the oceans of knowledge. And so now, with Allah's help, they'll learn from your eminence how to revive a dead man and they will become even better scientists, Allah willing!

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to Hajji*) Hajji Hasan Agha, I ask you, please, remove this barbarian from here! This apostate mocks the power of Allah. (*Hajji Hasan and others threaten Iskender and push him out.*)

Heydar Agha My Sheikh, he has lost his mind from being drunk all day long.

Mir Baghir Agha Besides his drunkenness, he criticizes the *hijab* too. He says that women should walk with their faces uncovered.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*) What?

Hajji Karim No, Mir Baghir Agha, he could not commit that blunder.

Mir Baghir Agha Why couldn't he? Wasn't that him yesterday telling his 9-year-old sister "let's go out and take a walk." Something like "the sun is shining, the flowers are in bloom." I heard it with my own ears.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*stands up*) Oh my God, oh my God! (*People spring into motion and all stand up. Sheikh Nasrullah rushes towards the door.*) I cannot stay in this province!

(*People jostle one another. Hajji Hasan enters anxiously and falls down crying before the Sheikh.*)

Hajji Hasan My Sheikh, please have mercy on my poor soul. Whatever punishment he deserves—let me do it. Just don't leave my house dissatisfied; don't make me miserable.

Hajjis My Sheikh, please be at peace. We'll turn him out of here right now; he'll go to hell!

(Several men leave the house and run after Iskender muttering.)

Hajji Hasan *(to the people)* Wait! Wait! Have patience. I'll punish him myself. Hajji Bakhshali, Hajji Karim, Hajji Kazim! Calm the people down and I'll handle that rascal myself *(He exits. Sheikh Nasrullah and Sheikh Ahmad stay in the room.)*

Sheikh Nasrullah Sheikh Ahmad, I don't like this Iskender, or whatever his name is.

Sheikh Ahmad *(after a little thought)* My Sheikh, don't worry, no one even regards him as a human being here. Don't lose your enthusiasm, keep up the good work.

Sheikh Nasrullah *(thinks for a moment)* Sheikh Ahmad, first, sneak out quietly and tell the host to bring me something to eat. Second, request them to allocate me a room; I want to rest. And third, *(pauses)* well you know, of course you've sorted it all out, for sure. I cannot stay here alone tonight, my body hurts, really. I need a massage... Thank Allah, you understand everything yourself. So don't stand there, come on, hurry!

(Sheikh Ahmad exits, it is getting dark. Sheikh Nasrullah sits down on a mattress and, after a pause, speaks to himself.)

Whenever I tell people that I don't feel well, they think that I'm lying. But Allah is my witness that... *(Pauses)* I don't lie to anyone, because I really am sick. Whenever I appear ill in front of gatherings, Sheikh Ahmad always thinks that I'm fooling people; but this poor fellow simply can't understand that my illness is very acute... *(Thinks)* It's because of this problem that I have become a little baby at the side of this nincompoop Ahmad. Every day, full of shame, I have to ask: "Sheikh Ahmad, give me raisins," just like a baby begging his father for a treat. *(He covers his face with both hands and sits quietly.)*

Hajji Hasan's servant Ali brings a tray with pilaf and other dishes, places it in the middle of the room and exits. Sheikh Ahmad enters and stands aside. After a while, two women appear at the door. Whispering to each other, they lead a small woman by the hand, bring her in and stand by the door the servant enters and lights the lamp. Hajji Hasan enters after the women.

Hajji Hasan *(to the women)* My daughter, don't be ashamed, it is Allah's order. Why are you ashamed?

Sheikh Nasrullah Sheikh Ahmad, be my representative and marry us temporarily.

Sheikh Ahmad Your wish is my command.

Hajji Hasan, Ali and the two women exit, leaving the small woman in the room. She also wants to leave, but while exiting they closed the door leaving her inside. Sheikh Nasrullah stands up and after thinking for a little while, speaks eloquently to the woman.

Sheikh Nasrullah It is in your power: if you want you can leave or you can stay. It is in your power if you fall into the realm of *purgatory*. A window will open beneath your feet and scorpions the size of a mule will claw onto your body. And it is also in your power to make it so that when you are laid in your grave a window will open above your head and a young servant of paradise will come to you through this window. And he will flirt with you, and at this moment the olivine chaplet will break, and the beads will scatter, and you will start threading them each from its own side. And suddenly you will realize that the world's seventy thousand hours have turned around you and that now it's Judgement Day. (*He approaches the woman*) Then, the servant of paradise will hold your hand (*holds woman's hand*) and say smiling: "I wonder how many good deeds you have done in the world to deserve this?"

(*Curtain*)

Act III

Act Three takes place on the outskirts of the town near a graveyard. A crowd of people stand barefoot, with their trousers rolled up to their knees, and hands resting one on top of the other. In the middle of the crowd, Sheikh Nasrullah sits on a high rock and speaks. Sheikh Ahmad is at his right side, Hajji Hasan at his left, Iskender and the women are not present.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*a large book in his hand, speaking very eloquently*) "In the treasuries of might there is no dearer and more valuable jewel than knowledge." (*Then poetically*)

"The life of the heart and soul is tied to knowledge.
Knowledge brings freshness to water and mud.
Knowledge is the gentle breeze of a soul's meadow.
Knowledge is the scent of the garden of paradise.
A man who has reached the source of knowledge
has tasted eternal heavenly life."

(*He pauses, raises the book with both hands and speaks very loudly*) This is the book! This is the knowledge! (*Pauses, then very quietly*) All disciplines and sciences are of two types: esoteric and exoteric. Exoteric ones are popularly known: most of the scientists are certainly aware of those laws and embrace their nuances. Esoteric ones are those that stay in hidden angles, and their reality and mysteries remain beyond reach. (*A little louder*) First among them is the art of conjuring. However, we do not deal with this. Second, the art of spiritism. We do not deal with this either. Third, the art of visualization. Nor do we deal with this. Fourth, the art of magic. We do not deal with this one. Fifth (*stands up, turns towards the graveyard, and after looking there for some moments, says very loudly*)—resurrection. (*Short pause, quietly*) That is, the return of the dead. (*Eases up, sits down and says quietly*) According to common knowledge and to what is given us in this valuable book (*raises the book*), which is the highest essence of knowledge and the key to any door. It is unique and is to be followed strictly. It is noble; it covers many fields, and is a gift to those who deserve it. It is full of the great splendor of humanity's religious treasures, collected by humble and devoted saintly people since the times of his highness Emir Khosrov. It was fated by Allah to be written down by such a poor, modest man as Nasrullah Ibn-Jafar of Isfahan. It is called *The Search for and Discovery of Resurrection* and consists of five sections. First, on signs; second, on decomposition; third, on chemistry; fourth, on preparation; fifth, on completion. And yet, we're not dealing with these matters. (*Pause*) Resurrection means the return to life after one's death. (*He continues quietly*) Some apostates argue: "Resurrection cannot be performed. For since one is dead, life is no longer his responsibility. What is the benefit of a return to this world?" (*Loudly*) Are there any such apostates among you? If there are, let them come to me. I will answer them with this book. Whoever said that the dead cannot return to this world?

Sheikh Ahmad (*quietly to Sheikh Nasrullah*) Say it in Arabic, in Arabic.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*) *Fäiza äräftä haza vä övzähtü läkä fil-gövlü bir-rijätü-läti ichtämäätiş-shiätü äleyhima fi jämiil-ägvam.*⁷⁵ Anyone who denies has also to deny that he touched the back of a lamb with his holy hand (*begins to cry*) and chanted blessed prayer, and by the power of Almighty Allah that one lamb became seventy. He who can turn

⁷⁵ The Arabic here is unclear, and therefore, we have left it in a transliterated form without translation.

one sheep into seventy can kill his own creatures, as well as revive them. (*Very loudly*) Who denies this? Let them come to me and I will answer them with this book.

Hajji Hasan (*one hand on top of the other, bows his head in fear*) May we all be your sacrifice, for the one who denies the order of Allah is a *kafir*.

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to people, angrily and loudly*) Stand up! (*They all stand up as one.*) Haven't you heard that a tribe of seventy thousand men died of plague? And said he: oh Allah, if Thou wilt revive them they shall make your city flourish. Since they did not run from the suffering you set upon them, they have become your witnesses. Let them now be revived. Let them come alive and worship you. Let them return to this world and make your cities prosperous. And an answer came from the master of the universe: (*crying*) Do you wish me to revive them for your sake? (*People start crying*) And he said: Yes! So Almighty Allah revived them. Allah revived them all. And as it was promised, they all died and then revived and returned to this world.

Old Man (*cries*) Oh Sheikh, may my soul be a sacrifice for you. I ask you for my son, the wrestler. It is only a month since he died and my soul burns. I beseech you, oh Sheikh, have pity.

(*Several people try to make similar requests.*)

Sheikh Ahmad (*loudly*) Be patient, it is not the right time for this.

(*The crowd begins to cry and beg again, cries of "revive my father," "return my mother to life," "my sister," "my brother."*)

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*): Silence! (*All calm down and wipe their tears*) Sheikh Ahmad, take a paper and a pen, and for everyone who asks for someone from his family to be revived, please write it down and give it to me.

(*People spring into motion. Jostling one another, they all try to get closer to Sheikh Ahmad, some of them crying. Everyone wants to get to the front and clamor and bustle ensues.*)

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*): Order!

(*All step back slowly and stand still.*)

Sheikh Ahmad (*takes up paper and pen*) In the name of Allah, Most Gracious and Most Merciful. Everyone who asks to revive the dead—that is to return them alive to this world—please speak out one by one, each in his turn and in a civilized manner. I will write it down on this paper and pass it on to his eminence the Sheikh. (*Again people spring into motion and begin to clamor.*)

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*) Hey Muslims! Be patient! (*people are scared and fall silent. To Hajji Hasan*) Hajji Hasan Agha, tell me the names of the dead one by one and let Sheikh Ahmad write them down.

Hajji Hasan (*solemnly places one hand on top of the other, takes a step forward and bows his head*) My father Hajji Mehdi. May Allah also let the souls of your dead rest in peace.

People (*in unison*) May Allah let them rest in peace!

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) Your father Hajji Mehdi.

Hajji Hasan My mother Sakina.

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) Your mother Sukeyna.⁷⁶

Hajji Hasan: My son Jafar. (*Cries.*)

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) Your son Jafar.

Hajji Hasan: My son Heydar.

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) Your son Heydar.

Hajji Hasan My daughter Sara.

Mir Baghir Agha (*suddenly cries out from among the people*) Don't write that! Don't write that!

(*Hajji Hasan and the people are surprised and look in Mir Baghir's direction.*)

Sheikh Nasrullah (*loudly*) Who is that saying "don't write"? How does this concern you?

Mir Baghir Agha (*steps forward*) My Sheikh, excuse me, that girl is my wife!

Sheikh Nasrullah Fine, don't you agree to reviving your spouse?

Mir Baghir Agha (*hesitant*) Your eminence the Sheikh, I don't mean that. What hurts me is that if Hajji Hasan is an honest man, then why wouldn't he sign up his brother Hajji Rza?

(*The crowd looks expectantly at Hajji Hasan.*)

Hajji Hasan (*angrily, to Mir Baghir*) This is no concern of yours! He is my brother and if I want to I will sign him up, and if I don't, I won't. What is it to you?

Mir Baghir Agha (*angrily, to Hajji Hasan*) All right then, now why wouldn't you sign up that great man, but instead sign up a little girl?

Sheikh Nasrullah (*loudly*) There is no need for such argument! (*To Hajji Hasan*) Hajji Hasan Agha, why don't you sign up your dead brother Hajji Rza?

⁷⁶ An Arabic pronunciation of the original Arabic name. In Azeri the name is pronounced "Sakina."

Hajji Hasan (*bows his head and thinks*) My Sheikh! My brother Hajji Rza died more than 5 years ago now. He has decomposed already, so how can he be revived and become a man?

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very loudly*) What do you mean decomposed? Who decomposed him? Look how we can revive bones. Indeed, look at the bones and see how the Lord of the Universe raises them up and returns them to their place, connects some bones to others and then covers their surface—creating flesh.⁷⁷ What do you mean decomposed? Who decomposed him?

Sheikh Ahmad (*to Hajji Hasan*) Hajji Hasan Agha, please make it short. The time of his eminence the Sheikh is very valuable. Shall I write the name of your brother Hajji Rza on the list or not? The choice is yours. If you don't want him to be revived then that's another matter.

Hajji Hasan (*to Sheikh Nasrullah*): My Sheikh, if it is possible, will you allow me to go and think about it for a little while?

Sheikh Nasrullah All right, go and think. (*Hajji Hasan bows his head and exits.*)

Sheikh Nasrullah (*to Hajji Bakhshali*) Hajji Agha it's your turn. Tell us the name of your dead one by one so that Sheikh Ahmad can write them down.

Hajji Bakhshali (*puts one hand on top of the other, steps forward and starts to cry*) May my father and mother be your sacrifice. At the end of the day, I am left with, pardon me, only one daughter, and I miss my son badly. In my whole life Allah has granted me the blessing of two sons, but then took both out of my poor arms. One was called Jalil and the other Khalil. Jalil was ten and Khalil was eight. Both were engaged. I was preparing for Jalil's wedding, when all of a sudden, right in this part of his neck (*he points to the back of his neck*) he got a scab. It wouldn't heal, no matter how often I made Usta Jafar treat him. (*Cries*) Oh my poor Jalil! It was all in vain—no matter how many alms I gave out and no matter how many times I took him to Garadash shrine. It seems that the poor boy was doomed.

Sheikh Nasrullah Hajji Bakhshali, I don't have much time to sit here.

Sheikh Ahmad Hajji Bakhshali, state briefly, whom you want so that I can write it.

⁷⁷ An improvised rendering of a fragment from the Qur'an, sura *al-Baqra*, Verse 259.

Hajji Bakhshali (*to Sheikh Nasrullah*) Your eminence the Sheikh, I have no more to say. I want my Jalil and Khalil from you.

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) So, one son Jalil and another son Khalil. I have written them down. Anyone else besides them?

Hajji Bakhshali Sheikh Ahmad Agha, they are enough.

Sheikh Ahmad (*surprised*) Well, don't you have a father, mother, or any other relatives who died?

Hajji Bakhshali Yes, I have, my father and mother died too, but those poor souls were very old. They were so old, so very old that even they had had enough.

Sheikh Ahmad So, you have no one else to sign up except for Jalil and Khalil?

Hajji Bakhshali (*turns to the graveyard*) Oh my poor children. The graves of the unfortunate children can be seen from here. I buried them side-by-side. Actually, poor Khalil was truly very naughty, but they loved each other very much. That's why...

Sheikh Nasrullah (*angrily interrupting Hajji Bakhshali*) Hajji Bakhshali, if you have no more dead, please move aside!

Hajji Bakhshali: No, my Sheikh, there are no more.

Someone from the crowd (*loudly*) What do you mean there's no one else? Why don't you sign up your wife Hurnisa? (*The crowd, surprised, looks to where the voice came from.*)

Sheikh Nasrullah Who is that speaking? Come forward.

Karbalayi Vali (*moves forward*) Sheikh, it's me speaking. Please ask this Hajji (*points at Hajji Bakhshali*) why he doesn't sign up his wife who died 3 years ago. Her name's Hurnisa and she was my sister.

Hajji Bakhshali (*to Karbalayi Vali*) Go to hell, you imbecile! It's my family and I'll decide whether I want to sign her up or not. And what is it to you anyway?

Sheikh Nasrullah (*loudly*) Quiet! There is no need to argue! Hajji Bakhshali we need your final answer. I don't have much time and if you want your wife to be revived, sign her up, if not move aside.

Hajji Bakhshali (*thinks for a little while*) My Sheikh, allow me to take a little time to go and think about it.

Sheikh Nasrullah Very good, go and think about it. Sheikh Ahmad, look and see who else is left, so we can please finish writing.

(*Hajji Bakhshali moves away and the crowd slowly dwindles.*)

Karbalayi Vali (*moves forward*) Your eminence the Sheikh, I beg at your feet. Add the name of my sister Hurnisa to the list, let the poor

woman be revived and let her explain to your eminence herself everything that Hajji Bakhshali did to her. Then your eminence will understand why Hajji Bakhshali didn't agree to revive his wife.

Hajji Bakhshali (*steps forward from among the people again, angrily and loudly*) Hey you, aren't you ashamed to speak like this? All right, sign Hurnisa up. But on one condition: that you will also sign up all of your dead.

Karbalayi Vali (*angrily*) Very well, I will.

Sheikh Ahmad We don't need long discussions here. Karbalayi Vali, if you are going to sign up, tell us the names of your dead and move on.

Karbalayi Vali My father Mashadi Mustafa.

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*) Your father Mashadi Mustafa.

Hajji Bakhshali Very good.

Karbalayi Vali My son Zeynal. (*On the verge of tears.*)

Sheikh Ahmad (*writes*): Your son Zeynal.

Hajji Bakhshali Very good.

Karbalayi Vali My daughter Pusta.

Sheikh Ahmad Your daughter Pusta.

Hajji Bakhshali Very good.

Karbalayi Vali (*thinks a little*) That's all.

Hajji Bakhshali (*moves forward, angrily to Karbalayi Vali*). That's all? Why don't you mention your mother? Hasn't your mother died? Last year you beat the old lady to death! Well, why are you silent, eh? Or are you afraid that she will be revived, complain to the authorities and that they will pick you up and throw you into prison? Eh... why don't you sign her up? Why are you leering?

Sheikh Nasrullah (*loudly*) Don't start a hullabaloo. Karbalayi Vali, if you wish then let Sheikh Ahmad write down your mother too, but if you do not, then move aside.

Karbalayi Vali (*head bowed*) Your eminence the Sheikh, let me go and think for a while.

Sheikh Nasrullah Good, you go and think too.

(*Karbalayi Vali and Hajji Bakhshali leave, looking angrily at one another. The crowd disperses. The voice of drunken Iskender is heard in the distance.*)

Iskender Good, you go and think too! Good, you go and think too!...

Iskender continues repeating these words and taking pieces of bread out of his pocket. While eating he grabs people's arms and looks into their faces with

a smile. They say nothing and leave, heads bowed. Sheikh Nasrullah comes down from the rock, and Sheikh Ahmad puts away the pen and paper.

Good, you go and think too! Good, you go and think too!...

(As he sees the Sheikh he stops, explodes with laughter and bends over laughing so hard that he almost falls on the ground. Then he calms down and scrutinizes the Sheikh.)

Everyone has gone to think. All that's left in this square is the drunkard Iskender. This square is a wrestling ring. It takes courage for a hero like Iskender to come and stand in this square and say: (*Loudly*) Your eminence the Sheikh, revive all the dead—whoever is buried in this graveyard (*indicates with his hand*) Ha... Ha... Ha!... (*He turns and looks at the people leaving*) Ha... Ha... Ha!... Everyone has gone away to think. (*Turns to Sheikh Nasrullah, goes over to him and offers him his hand*) Your eminence the Sheikh, for my sake, give me your hand! Aren't you a real man? Give me your hand!

Sheikh Nasrullah (*loudly*) Withdraw! I'll never give my hand to you. You have partaken of wine.

Iskender Your eminence the Sheikh, you should thank Allah that I drink wine. If I don't drink wine, then I'm clear-headed. And if I were clear-headed then I'd open my eyes and see that, aha, one highly religious Muslim came to our town, calls himself the reviver of the dead, and while pulling the wool over the eyes of our devout Hajjis with this reviving business, takes in one little girl every night. Ha... Ha... Ha!... For my sake, give me your hand! You're a real man, give me your hand! Ha... Ha... Ha!...

Sheikh Nasrullah (*very angry*) Go to hell! By Allah, I could put such a terrible curse on you that you would be wiped out completely! Every night I achieve endless bliss by the order of Allah; I do not corrupt my spirit in drinking houses as you do. (*To Sheikh Ahmad*) Sheikh Ahmad, let's go, this agnostic is talking too much. (*The Sheikhs exit.*)

(Iskender quietly watches them go and when they disappear he raises both fists.)

Iskender (*loudly*) If these arms had the strength of Rustam⁷⁸ the hero, I would catch you by the feet and throw you up in the sky, and you would fall upside-down and crack like a watermelon—(*shouts and jumps in the air*) Bang!... Pah, charlatans! ... (*Sighs like a drunkard, looking down at*

⁷⁸ A heroic character from the epic poem *Shah-nameh* (*The Book of Kings*) written by the great Persian poet Ferdowsi (940–1020).

himself carefully and smiling) Say! Aha, by Allah, it seems I am quite a wrestler! Ha ... Ha ... Ha!...

He lights a cigarette, slowly walks up and stops at the stone that Sheikh Nasrullah had sat on, stands and looks over the graveyard. After gazing thoughtfully for a while, he slaps his hands on his knees in frustration.

Oh, by the greatness of Allah, if only I had the knowledge that Sheikh Nasrullah has, I could speak with the dead who rest here! Oh! If only that were the case, I would turn to this graveyard and call out: (*Very loudly*) "Oh you dead!" (*A little quieter*) At that moment, all the dead resting here would stick their heads out of their graves and ask: "What, Iskender Bey?" Then I would advise these deceased; I would say to them" (*turns to the graveyard and cries out*) "Oh dead! (*Again a little quieter*) One day Sheikh Nasrullah will come and stand over your heads and he will pray and call out loudly: (*Loudly*) 'Hey righteous servants of Allah, stand on your feet!' (*Pauses, a little quieter*) Oh dead! I command you not to obey the orders of the Sheikh. You had better think about the words of this drunkard Iskender and accept his advice." And if you ask me why, I'm ready to answer you. (*Pauses, takes a piece of bread out of his pocket and eats*) "Oh, deceased ones! You sleep here comfortably now with no idea of what's going on in the world. But, by Allah, I swear on your dear souls that as soon as you are revived and stand up from the grave, you'll be extremely disappointed." If you ask me why, I'll explain it to you now. "Let's assume, for example, that you've been revived. Very good. But after you are revived you won't stay in this graveyard, will you? No doubt you will want to go to your homes. Very well, there you go. Now tell me please, will they let you in? By Allah, I swear on the head of Sheikh Nasrullah, you'll go and see that the doors of your houses are closed. Well, that's alright. You'll pick up a stone and knock on the door so that someone opens it. Then a man will come and ask from behind the door: (*In a shrill voice*) 'Hey you knocking on the door, who are you?' Yes, you'll answer: 'Open the door, it's me.' (*In a shrill voice*) 'And who are you? What's your name?' 'Open the door! I'm the owner of this house.' (*in a shrill voice*) 'Go to hell, get away! We don't know you.' 'Hey man, what do you mean, you don't know me? I'm Karbalayi Huseyngulu, this house is mine. I have a wife and a child in there.' (*In a shrill voice*) 'You talk too much! Go to hell! There's nothing for you here! Your brother Hajji Faraj married your wife, took this house and sent your children to herd the cattle.' 'Hey man, for Allah's sake, open the door, I have a husband in there.' (*In a harsh voice*) 'You talk too much! Go away!

We don't need any wives here! The world is full of 9-year-old girls. The grave is the place for a hag like you. Go to hell! Go back where you came from! We don't need you here.'" Ha... Ha... Ha!... Ha... Ha... Ha... (*Suddenly calms down, looks at the graveyard and calls loudly*) You dead! (*A little quieter*) You had better listen to the words of this drunkard Iskender and stay as you were, asleep! May Allah rest your souls...

(*Curtain*)

Act IV

Scene 1

Hajji Hasan's house, Iskender's room. Hajji Hasan and his wife Karbalayi Fatma Khanim sit thinking.

Hajji Hasan Hey Fatma, get Nazli ready, we have to move her to the Sheikh's room today.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Oh Hajji, so soon?

Hajji Hasan Yes, so soon....

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*after some thought*) Hey Hajji, by Allah, I don't know what to do! I'm totally confused. I don't understand why the Sheikh needs so many women! He takes a new one every day. Now he wants our daughter.

Hajji Hasan I mean, what's so evil or sinful about taking one every day? Allah orders—he takes.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Hajji, you're right in what you say, but I'm afraid that Nazli won't stand for it. And also, by Allah Hajji, Nazli is really still a child.

Hajji Hasan (*angrily*) Don't talk rubbish! I know better than you whether she's a child or not. She turned nine on the 18th of Zu-l-Hijjah,⁷⁹ she'll soon be ten. And still I don't know: what do you call a child? There's no need to spread rumors. Say clearly, once and for all, that you will marry Nazli to Mir Baghir Agha.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim No, by Allah, I didn't say that I would marry her to Mir Baghir Agha! You should know better, she is your daughter after all. Marry her to whomever you want. All I know is that Nazli won't stand for it.

Hajji Hasan I don't give a damn! Girls are all stupid; what do they know about what's good or bad for them?! Anyway, the sister of that drunkard Iskender won't ever be more than that! She should thank Allah

⁷⁹ The twelfth and final month in the Islamic calendar.

that she's getting married to such a being as Sheikh Nasrullah. To become the relative of such a holy man is a fortune very few people in the world have in their destiny. It is a bliss sent to us by Allah and after all, you should know that... (*Quietly*) One must not offend the Sheikh. You must understand what I'm saying.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*quietly*) I understand.

Hajji Hasan To tell you the truth, I've felt a bit strange over these two days. My eyes go dim and sometimes I even feel dizzy.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Oh Hajji, Allah is merciful, everything will be alright.

Hajji Hasan (*thoughtfully*) I don't know... (*Pause*) Well don't stay here Fatma, go. Tell Nazli whatever you have to (*Fatma Khanim exits. Hajji lowers his head and thinks. After a while he looks at the door as if seeing something, suddenly stands up and asks*) What do you want? (*There is no answer. Speaks quickly, to himself*) *Ästägfürullah räbbi vä toube ileyh. Bismillahir-Rähmanir-Rähim.*⁸⁰ (*Calls loudly*) Fatma, Fatma!

(*Iskender enters and asks in surprise.*)

Iskender Father, what do you want?

Hajji Hasan (*to Iskender*) Come here, come here. Let me hold your hand, my knees are trembling. (*He sits down and Iskender holds his father's hand*) *Bismillahir-Rähmanir-Rähim.* Tell them to bring me a glass of water.

Iskender Father don't be afraid. Nothing's wrong, you've just lost your mind a little.

Hajji Hasan (*holding Iskender's hand*) No, Iskender, I'm in my right mind. Don't be afraid, there's nothing wrong with me. Only, my eyes are growing dim.

Iskender Don't be afraid, it's nothing. When a man loses his mind, his eyes go a little dim. That's it. Nothing more. So don't be scared; you just went mad.

Hajji Hasan No, no, *inshallah*,⁸¹ nothing's wrong. Tell them to bring a glass of water.

Iskender Let them bring water, but water is no good for a madman. (*Loudly*) Ali, Ali! (*Ali enters.*) Bring a glass of water. (*Ali exits.*)

⁸⁰ Arabic for "I seek forgiveness from Allah; I repent oh Lord. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." Both phrases are used extensively in informal speech.

⁸¹ In Arabic: "If God wills it." Used informally in speech.

Hajji Hasan Iskender, you're really scaring me. I know that I'm in my right mind. It just seemed to me that I saw something. It was something like a shrouded man. He came and stood at the door. Maybe you noticed something like that, too?

Iskender No father, I didn't see anything. Only madmen see such things. (*Ali brings water, Hajji Hasan takes it, drinks.*) May Allah damn that Yazid!⁸²

Hajji Hasan (*to Iskender*) Iskender, by Allah, it seems you're joking with me. I see everything clearly here. Why are you saying that I went mad?

Iskender Because, in order to trap you Sheikh Nasrullah put the idea into your head that he can revive the dead. Now you believe that you want to give whatever you have to an Isfahani rascal!

Hajji Hasan (*after some thought*) Alright, let's imagine that I went mad for an hour, but what about Mir Baghir Agha? He's a man of a science, so why does he believe in reviving the dead? Is he mad too?

Iskender No, Mir Baghir Agha isn't mad, just a donkey.

Hajji Hasan (*angrily gathers himself, loudly*) Shut your mouth, you incoherent fool! (*pause*) And why does the telegrapher Heydar Agha believe; is he mad too?

Iskender No, he isn't mad. You can tell that he believes because his ears are so long.

Hajji Hasan Sure, everyone in this world is mad or a donkey, and only you are the clever one. And so Hajji Bakhshali is mad, Hajji Kazim is also a fool, and Hajji Karim is stupid. All of them are mad, only Iskender is clever.

Iskender You think there are only a few donkeys in the world? There was only one pair of every kind of animal on Noah's ship, but now look how many donkeys there are in Hamadan alone.

Hajji Hasan (*angrily*) Don't talk rubbish!

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim enters and stands to one side.*)

⁸² Yazid I was the Umayyad caliph whom the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn ibn Ali fought in the Battle of Karbala because he refused to recognize Yazid I as caliph. Yazid I used a water blockade as one of his main tactical weapons. As a result, Husayn and all his supporters were killed, including Husayn's six-months-old infant son. The women and children were taken as prisoners. The dead are regarded as martyrs by Shi'i Muslims, and the battle has a central place in Shi'i history and tradition.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Hajji, I cannot cope with your daughter; perhaps you should try to persuade her yourself.

Hajji Hasan (*a moment's thought*) Woman, Fatma, you know me. Thank Allah, you know that if I get angry I lose control. Go and manage your daughter quietly. Tonight we have to move her. (*Fatma Khanim exits. Hajji Hasan follows her.*) Stop, stop! (*She stops*) Tell your daughter not to make me come and break her ribs!

(*Fatma Khanim exits. With a stare at his father, Iskender spits, "tfu," and exits.*)

Hajji Hasan (*calling after him angrily and loudly*) Damn those who gave birth to you! So this is how you act now? (*Exits angrily after Iskender and then returns. First Patient, a pale man muttering "ow, ouch" and coughing, enters leaning on a stick.*)

First Patient Salam aleykum. Ah! Ow! Ow! I haven't the strength to stand on my feet. Hajji Agha, help me, may Allah save your sons. It has been almost a year since this damned sickness took me over and it refuses to leave. Ouch, ouch, ow! Ouch, ow! (*coughs*) Look, sometimes a pain strikes in this part of my chest, so strong that I can't breathe. At night the cough won't let me sleep until morning. I'm tired of ordering prayers.⁸³ I'm tired of visiting Jafar the barber.⁸⁴ For Allah's sake, Hajji (*coughs*) Help me out. May Allah grant you long life. So now I look for refuge at your door. Either his eminence the Sheikh should take my life right now (*mutters "ow, ow", puts his hand to his chest and coughs*) so that I can rest, or let him give me some remedy. May I be a sacrifice at the Sheikh's feet. All I want is for him to look upon me with a merciful gaze, and I'll be healed. I have no other hope. Allah's mercy is enough for me. Eh ... ouch ... ow! I can't breathe.

Hajji Hasan Good, of course, Mashadi. But his eminence the Sheikh is busy with prayer. Certainly as soon as he is free, I will solicit a cure for your poor soul. Of course.

First Patient Eh! (*coughs*) Eh!... My Allah, what is this woeful thing that I cannot get rid of? A couple of months ago it was a bit better. I coughed less and had an appetite... (*Second Patient, head covered with a towel, enters frowning and interrupts First Patient*)

⁸³ Prayers (*duah*) written according to ritual were believed to heal diseases. Ordering such prayers was a very widespread practice in the region.

⁸⁴ Barbers historically performed bloodletting, which was believed to help ease certain diseases.

Second Patient Salam aleykum, (*to First Patient*) Mashadi Huseyn-gulu, you're here too? It's good that you came. The path to salvation for our poor souls lies behind this door. May Allah not deprive us of uncle Hajji's shadow over our heads! (*To Hajji Hasan*) Uncle Hajji, this headache is killing me; it doesn't give me rest in the evenings or afternoons. When I go to master Jafar he says: your blood has increased; you need a bloodletting. When I go to Mir Baghir he says: your blood has decreased; you need to eat nothing but honey halva.⁸⁵ Uncle Hajji, for the sake of your children, ask his eminence the Sheikh to write me a prayer just as long as a finger (*shows his forefinger*), so this headache will leave me alone. Uncle Hajji, as long as I live...

A man shows up with a child in his arms, the child cries and interrupts Second Patient. Other patients begin to enter one-by-one. Some have their heads in bandages, some their necks, others their arms; all enter sighing. The most seriously afflicted patients sit down on the floor as they enter. Several of them begin asking Hajji Hasan for a remedy.

Patients Uncle Hajji! We take refuge at your door. May his eminence the Sheikh cure us. For Allah's sake, take pity on us.

Hajji Hasan (*moves to stand before the patients*) Alright, I'll do the best I can but now, as you can see, our Sheikh isn't allowing anyone to enter. Please sit in the shade under a tree in the backyard and wait. I'll inform you as soon as his eminence grants permission to enter. All of you will recount your problems and I believe, inshallah, you won't leave without hope.

Patients (*exit slowly, praising Hajji Hasan as they go*) May Allah grant uncle Hajji a long life! May Allah let the father of Hajji Agha rest in peace! For the sake of His Unity, may Allah not deprive us of him!

(*Servant Ali appears at the door.*)

Hajji Hasan Ali, have you served his eminence tea and refreshments?

Ali No, Hajji Agha, the Sheikh hasn't woken up yet; his door is still closed. (*exits*)

(*Karbalayi Fatma Khanim enters.*)

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Hajji, I've tricked Nazli into agreeing. But, by Allah, there's one thing I'm afraid of mentioning.

Hajji Hasan Say whatever you want to say.

⁸⁵ Halva (Arabic for "sweet") is a variety of sweet confections cooked throughout the Muslim world. Halva is predominantly a dense paste made from flour or crushed nuts with sugar or honey.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Hajji, you know how much I suffered when we married poor Sara without a wedding. You said that it was a sin so I said nothing.⁸⁶ I beseech Allah, we were always afraid of committing a sin, but...

Hajji Hasan (*interrupts his wife*) Alright, out with it now. Are you saying we should start celebrating the wedding in our home in front of the Sheikh?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim By Allah, it's none of my business; I'm not suggesting anything. There, your nieces Fizza Khanim, Sakina Khanim, Gulchohra Khanim, Ummigulsum Khanim have all come to pester me about having musicians come.

Hajji Hasan I'm telling you, don't talk rubbish. Let's leave the Sheikh alone for now. Who ever saw a wedding celebrated in a Hajji's house?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Please be fair: Didn't Hajji Alekber celebrate a wedding when he married off his daughter? And what do you say about Hajji Mirtaghi? They invited people for a wedding. Practically the whole neighborhood moved out because of the noise. Or do your eyes only see us? Hajji Bakhshali married his son a month ago. Now ask yourself please, were there musicians and singers or not? Are we the only misfits in the world? We take so much trouble bringing up our children, but when we marry them we behave as if they are stolen plunder; neither relatives nor neighbors know. I don't mean that you have to invite people, set a feast or arrange entertainment. I'm just saying that a funeral is a funeral and a wedding is a wedding. Those poor relatives of ours are already here. What would be wrong with them clapping their hands for just an hour if it would open poor Nazli's heart? By Allah, she's been crying since morning. She isn't some kind of stranger, but your own daughter; so take pity on your daughter.

Hajji Hasan (*after some thought, quietly*) No, tell my daughter not to cry. I won't tolerate her crying. Let's go; I'll have a few words with her too (*stands up*). No, no, I shouldn't let my daughter Nazli cry. Let's go. (*They exit.*)

Servant Ali enters and two old women follow him. Then more, fifteen-twenty women altogether, mostly old and dressed in chadors, enter whispering and sit down on one side. Ali exits. Jalal enters with candy in his mouth,

⁸⁶ Wedding celebrations are not religious holidays and therefore are not supported by Islam. Some Muslims regard such celebrations as a sin.

stands at the door and looks at the women. None of the women speak or reveal their faces. After watching for a while, Jalal speaks.

Jalal Have you come for the wedding too? (*The women look at Jalal in silence. Jalal watches them for a while.*) If you came for the wedding, this isn't a wedding room. (*The women remain silent and just shake their heads. Then one woman speaks.*)

Woman (*low voice*) We came to be the Sheikh's sigha.

Jalal What does it mean to be sigha?

(*The women chuckle quietly. One woman answers.*)

Woman We came to marry the Sheikh.

Jalal (*Jalal starts to laugh*) Heh, how can so many women marry one man? (*Runs out laughing.*)

Several women laugh too. Mir Baghir Agha enters, looks at the women in shock and immediately exits. Fatma Khanim enters with her head covered in chador and Mir Baghir Agha follows her.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Agha, please come and take a seat on that side.

Mir Baghir Agha turns his back on the women, moves to sit in front of them with his back to them. After whispering to the women, Karbalayi Fatma Khanim bows to them.

(*To Mir Baghir Agha*) These women beg you, for Allah's sake, please tell the Sheikh to bestow his name upon these poor souls so that they won't be deprived of Allah's bliss.

Mir Baghir Agha (*with bowed head*) I certainly will. I'll tell him, of course I will. It is a very good deed. Allah is always a friend to his creatures. May Allah bless you. Mashallah, mashallah, sisters!

(*The sound of fingers snapping, a musician playing a saz,⁸⁷ and singing is heard.*)

Mir Baghir Agha (*raises his head to Fatma Khanim in surprise*) My dear, what's going on?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim (*to the women*) And another thing, by Allah, if anyone says anything—they're lying. Whatever is written in one's fate will be just so. Otherwise, who could have imagined that our Nazli would be destined for a man like the Sheikh?

⁸⁷ The *saz* is a plucked stringed musical instrument used in several traditions in Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. It is a long-necked lute with three single or double strings. In the Caucasus, the saz is usually played by traveling storytellers, *ashigs*, and therefore involves singing.

Mir Baghir Agha (*very surprised*) How could it be Nazli, your Nazli?
Karbalayi Fatma Khanim I don't know what to say, Agha. Hajji is giving Nazli away to our guest today.

Mir Baghir Agha (*surprised*) To Sheikh Nasrullah?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Yes, to his eminence the Sheikh.

Mir Baghir Agha (*after some thought*) Really, today?

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim Well Agha, by Allah, I just can't cope with Hajji, but it's certainly wrong to do things in such a hurry. I don't know, by Allah; I'm confused.

(*Mir Baghir Agha bows his head, takes a handkerchief with a red flower pattern from his pocket, covers his face and begins to cry.*)

Hajji Hasan (*appears at the door*) Fatma, take the women to the other room; that's where people will arrive.

Karbalayi Fatma Khanim and the women stand up and exit. Hajji Hasan and Iskender enter. Hajji Hasan sits down while Iskender remains standing.

(*To his son*) Iskender, listen and pay attention to what I'm saying. Mir Baghir Agha is not a stranger here either. You know how much your sister Nazli loves you. Don't let anyone shed a tear in my house today. I made her agree to marry his eminence the Sheikh, but she keeps crying and won't calm down. She says, I don't know, Iskender has to agree or something. I want you to know that I don't care if you agree or not. You have caused me so much trouble that I don't even look at you as a human being anymore. Now it's up to you. If you want the girl to rest easy, then call her here and talk to her sweetly. Well, it's up to you.

In tears, Mir Baghir Agha exits with Hajji Hasan. The sound of music and singing is heard. Iskender reflects. Nazli appears and stands at the door, silent for some time.

Nazli Brother, let me come and kiss you on the cheek. (*She steps forward. Iskender quickly steps back, stands aside and looks at Nazli quietly.*) Brother, for Allah's sake, don't be upset with me!

Iskender If you don't want me to be upset with you then stay where you are and don't move. (*After looking at Nazli for a while, he puts his hand into his pocket, takes out a bottle of vodka and goes to drink it. Nazli tries to stop him. Very loudly and angrily*) Get away! (*He pushes Nazli so hard that the girl falls on her back. Iskender starts drinking the vodka. Nazli gets up, crying, and moves towards the door.*) Ugh! (*Screws up his face*) Stop, stop! I want to tell you something. (*Drinks again from the bottle and puts it into his pocket. The sound of a musician playing a saz and singing is heard. At this, Iskender begins to sing quietly. The musician plays a dance melody and Iskender begins to dance; then he stops.*) Nazli, for my sake come here; come here, let's make up. Now say whatever you want to say. Now I'm your servant, your slave. Come, let's make up. (*Embraces Nazli.*)

(*Mashadi Oruj enters, breathless, a telegraph letter in his hand.*)

Mashadi Oruj (*loudly*) Where is uncle Hajji?

Mashadi Oruj's mother enters crying. Nazli disappears. Hajji Bakhshali, Hajji Karim, Hajji Kazim, Mir Baghir Agha, Heydar Agha and many of the men we have already seen enter, groaning. Many can't find space inside and stand at the door. People look at each other, groaning, and don't know what to do. Hajji Hasan enters very surprised.

Hajji Hasan (*astonished*) People, is everything alright? What's going on, what is it?

Mashadi Oruj (*crying*) Hajji, Karbalayi Fatullah hasn't been revived.

(*Iskender laughs loudly and disappears into the crowd.*)

Hajji Hasan (*to Mashadi Oruj*) What? What do you mean he hasn't been revived?

Many People (*in unison*) Yes, yes, he hasn't been revived.

Hajji Hasan: People, don't say that, for Allah's sake. It cannot and will not be.

Mashadi Oruj: Uncle Hajji, by Allah it is so. And here's the telegraph, here. Read it and see what it says. (*Dries his tears with his gown*

and holds out the paper to Hajji Hasan) Uncle Hajji, didn't a letter come from Karbalayi Fatullah as if he were returning here after the Sheikh had resurrected him? And so, as you know, I telegraphed to Khorasan to find out why Karbalayi Fatullah had been delayed. I sent a telegraph to Hajji Muhammadali. If my brother had been revived he wouldn't go anywhere else but to Hajji Muhammadali's. Now Hajji Muhammadali writes, saying: "You've gone insane. How can anyone go from death to life?"

Hajji Hasan (*taking the telegraph*) What?

(*Iskender laughs loudly from the crowd.*)

Hajji Hasan (*to Heydar Agha*) Heydar Agha, may Allah bring rest to your father's soul, please explain to us: what kind of telegraph is this? I still can't understand how all the things we saw with our own eyes have turned out to be lies. Thank Allah, we're not children, we're not insane. Thank Allah that all these people here have observed the miracles performed by his eminence the Sheikh. Perhaps there is a mistake or something in the telegraph?

(*All speak to one another: "By Allah, this can't be," "No, it isn't so." "By Allah, I cannot understand."*)

Heydar Agha Hajji Hasan Agha I've read the telegraph carefully. There is no mistake in it. I recommend that you tell the Sheikh about this. Let's see what he says—who could have sent this wire and who could set up such a lie?

All as one Yes, yes, that's good advice; we should tell the Sheikh himself.

(*Everyone calms down.*)

Hajji Hasan By Allah, to tell the truth, it's shameful to say such things to the Sheikh. To tell the truth, I'm embarrassed. Look people, by Allah, this can't be. Something strange is going on here. So, by Allah I'm ashamed. I cannot deliver such news to the Sheikh.

Hajji Bakhshali (*to Hajji Karim*) Hajji Karim Agha, you'll do it better; you speak to the Sheikh.

Hajji Karim No, no, I can't do that! (*to Hajji Kazim*) Hajji Kazim Agha, you'll do it better.

Hajji Kazim To tell the truth, I am afraid of his eminence the Sheikh. Don't you see how angry he gets? He screams so loud the whole house shakes.

Mir Baghir Agha (*stepping forward*) Look people, I don't know what is so difficult about this? Sheikh Nasrullah isn't going to eat you! If you

wish, I can go right now and tell him whatever you want. (*Approaches the Sheikh's door.*)

All Very good! Very good! May Allah bring rest to your father's soul!

Hajji Hasan (*moves in front of Mir Baghir Agha*) Agha, for Allah's sake, be a little careful. Whatever you say, say it quite politely so that we don't offend the poor Sheikh.

Mir Baghir Agha knocks on the Sheikh's door. Everyone moves aside, scared. Many people leave the room. Mir Baghir Agha knocks on the door again.

Mir Baghir Agha Your eminence the Sheikh!

Hajji Hasan (*from aside, scared*) Mir Baghir Agha, let's cast lots first.⁸⁸ Perhaps we shouldn't bother the Sheikh at all?

Mir Baghir Agha doesn't listen and knocks even harder on the door. Everyone goes silent, astonished. Iskender suddenly emerges from the crowd and kicks the door forcefully. The door opens, people run out scared and the curtain to the Sheikh's room, which is facing the audience, begins to rise.

Scene 2

There is no one to be seen in the Sheikh's room. Iskender enters the room, looks around surprised, and then approaches a curtain hanging in the corner. As he raises the edge of the curtain, four girls behind the curtain begin to cry.

Iskender (*to girls*) Where is the Sheikh? (*They continue crying, do not answer. Iskender looks around for the Sheikh, then turns back to the girls behind the curtain.*) So where did our guests go?

A Girl (*from behind the curtain*) They gathered their things in the night and said: "we're going to the bathhouse."

Iskender says nothing, drops the curtain, bows his head and ponders for a few moments. People rush in noisily from outside. Then three very angry men, dressed as travelers, armed and covered in dust and dirt, enter the front room.

Travelers (*loudly*) Where are those dead-men-revivers? (*The travelers and their followers enter the Sheikh's room.*)

⁸⁸ The original word is *Isikhareh*, which is a folk custom of telling fortunes by opening the Qur'an or using a rosary, *tasbeh*, to predict whether an activity will bring good results.

Travelers (*to Iskender*) Where are they? Where is Sheikh Nasrullah?

Iskender They have run away.

Travelers (*loudly*) How? Where? (*The room is in uproar. The girls behind the curtain start crying.*)

Traveler 1 Where did they run to?

Traveler 2 How did they escape?

Traveler 3 When did they flee?

Travelers (*Travelers approach and ask the girls behind the curtain*) My child, why are you crying? Don't be afraid, child! (*People become agitated.*)

Traveler 1 My Muslim brothers! Please, calm down. Listen to a few words we have to say, and then you can help us, too. We're from Irevan province, and as we now understand, whatever trouble the Isfahani swindlers brought us, they have done the same to you. So, these bastards, feigning righteousness, came and stayed in our town for four days and by a thousand tricks they married one girl every night, left them all with the obligations of marriage⁸⁹ and then ran away. For Allah's sake, show us where they went; let's arrest and punish them.

(*The girls behind the curtain begin crying again. Several men lead the travelers out. Most of the people run after them yelling.*)

Various People Don't stand around, hurry! Let's run to the Julfa road! Karbalayi Hasan! Mashadi Jafar! Ali! Hasangulu! Mount your horses, hurry; let's find those rogues! (*Most of the people and the travelers run out.*)

Iskender (*stands in the middle of the Sheikh's room repeating to himself the Travelers' words*) Married one girl every night and then ran away! Ha... Ha... Ha!... (*He roars with laughter, then calms down, and turns towards the girls. After a few moments' thought, calls the rest of the people in, one-by-one, from the outer room. To the people*) Come in, come here! Come, come! Come closer!? Come, come in. You come too! Hajji Kazim, you as well, please come in. Everyone come in! For my sake come in, all of you! Here! Come, come! You come in too! And you too. Come, come. (*He assembles everyone in the Sheikh's room.*) So, now it's my turn. Listen to me; let me tell you a few things too. (*People draw in together and remain quiet.*) Hush!

⁸⁹ According to Muslim law, divorce (even in the case of a temporary marriage) is to be granted by the husband, unless he dies.

He goes over to the curtain, pulls it down and throws it aside. People lower their heads in shame. The girls, also ashamed, cover their faces with their hands and start crying. Iskender turns to the people.

Iskender's Speech

Look! Look! Take a good look! Look carefully! This is a page entered in blood into the annals of your history. When leafing through these annals, those who come after you will read this page, they'll remember you and (*loudly*) "tfu!" in your faces!

(He spits on the people. All bow their heads and remain silent.)

Sorry, the drunkard Iskender is behaving a little indecently. But it's my turn now. I'm not asking why you forced these kids (*points to the girls*) into this whorehouse. Clearly, when you told them that you were going to give them to this Sheikh, these poor souls must have yelled and cried and kissed your dirty feet, begging: "Father, for Allah's sake, don't take me away from my mother!" (*Looks at the girls*) Is it true? Am I right?

(Girls bow their heads, crying.)

No, let's not think about that. Besides, while dragging your daughters here you imagined that you were taking them to paradise because the Sheikhs of Isfahan convinced you that everyone who stepped into this blessed room, from death until Judgment Day, would be talking to angels through a window in the grave. But what happened when the matter of resurrection came up, and Sheikh Nasrullah gave you the choice of which of your dead to return to life? You angel seekers didn't agree to revive your dead brothers, sisters, wives or children. Why didn't you agree? It was because you beat all of your wives to death, or married wives of your late brothers, or embezzled the fortunes of your late friends' children. You didn't want them to be revived because they would come and see what you've done and "tfu!" in your face! (*Spits vehemently. All bow their heads.*)

Don't think that by telling you these things I mean to deride you and praise myself. No, no! I know that I am nothing. I'm the weed on the wasteland, the dirt on the street, the stone on the mountain, the ball of tumbleweed, the worm on the trees. I am nothing in this world. If I were something, I would have taken a bomb out of my pocket (*takes a bottle of vodka out of his pocket*), blown this house sky-high in a second, and buried the Isfahani scoundrel alive under the bricks. But don't be afraid, I wouldn't do such a thing. It's just a bottle of vodka and while Sheikh Nasrullah suffocated these little children here at night I was drinking vodka from this bottle too.

(The girls start crying.)

No, no, that's not something I can do. Only a hero can do that. People like you deserve a hero like me. But enough about me. Now let's see: Who are you? My name is Drunkard Iskender, and what should we call you? I will call the mountains, stones, birds, heavens, moons, stars and the whole world here to witness, and I'll show them these girls and ask them: What can we call these people? Then they will answer in unison: "The Dead!" I'll gather all the nations here and ask them to look at Sheikh Nasrullah's harem, and then all the tribes of the world will call to you in unison: "The Dead!" And those who come after us will speak in unison for years and years, every time they recall you: "The Dead"...

(Music.)

That's enough. Come, take your daughters to their mothers. *(takes one girl by the hand)* Whose daughter is this?

(A man steps forward.)

She's your daughter? Come and take her.

(The man takes his daughter's hand. Iskender takes another girl by the hand.)

Whose daughter is this?

Again one man steps forward, takes his daughter by the hand and takes her away. In the same manner Iskender sends off the third and fourth girls. The girls lower their heads and walk out, crying quietly to the sound of music. People stand depressed, with their heads bowed. When the last girl has left, Iskender drinks from the bottle of vodka and slams the empty bottle to the ground. The curtain falls slowly while music plays.

End

June 12, 1909. Tiflis.⁹⁰

NOTES ON SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

1. Pre-revolutionary Written Literature: For more on Russian and Russophone literature in the Caucasus at this time, see Caffee (2013), Hokanson (2008), Layton (2005), and Ram (2003). For more on Jadids and their activity, see Khalid (1998) and Rorlich (1986).

⁹⁰ The former name of Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia.

2. For Abdulqadir “Bedil” of Delhi, “Don’t strain yourself, holding out,” the translator worked from the version of the text found in ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil Dihlavī (1341a). For Khalifa Ashur Muhammad “Yakdil” of Bukhara, “Despair, don’t plant the seed,” the translator worked from the version of the text found in Yakdil (1926). For Abdulqadir “Bedil” of Delhi, “What color were the roses,” the translator worked from the version of the text found in ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil Dihlavī (1341b). For Sadriddin Ayni, “My tulip field,” the translator worked from the version of the text found in Aīnī (1981). The translator would like to thank Iraj Ayni for granting permission to publish this translation.
3. Sultan Kazy-Girei’s “The Valley of Azhitugai” was located in and translated from the original found in “Dolina Azhitugai,” *Sovremennik* 1 (1836): 155–169. For more on the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, see Shenfield (1999, 149–62).
4. Dilshod Barno’s “History of the Refugees” exists in the form of marginalia on the manuscript of her poetry. The manuscript, which the translator has seen but did not have access to for the translation, is incomplete and at points illegible. That is reflected in the 1972 published transliteration of her work which was used for the translation. See Dilshod (1972). The translator has indicated unrenderable portions by enclosing ellipses in brackets or indicating his best guess as to a missing or illegible word in brackets. Additionally, we should note that readers familiar with more elevated forms of Eastern Turkic, especially Chaghatay, whether in the classical style of Nava’i or in the courtly style associated with the Khanate of Khiva in Dilshod’s time, may be appalled by her diction. However, every writer has their idiolect, and the translator has sought not only to render Dilshod’s meaning accurately but also to respect her grammatical and lexical idiosyncrasies. They are, after all, *her* memories, warts and all.
5. Anbar Otin wrote her *divan*, in which “[To Muqimiy]” is found, in 1905. She dates her *Treatise on the Philosophy of Blackness* to 1910. The two translations are based on Fatima Husainova’s transliteration of her *divan* and the *Treatise* from the original Arabic script into Cyrillic, which were published together in a single volume in 1970. See Anbar Otin (1970). Anbar Otin’s extant *divan* of poems and her prose are held at the Literary Museum of Khoqand, Uzbekistan.

6. Mugallym Muhammet Atabay oğlu, “The Intelligence of Turkmen Women,” was located in and translated from the original (Atabay oğlu 1915). Mät Gurban Oğlu, “Turkmen Girl-Selling Circles,” was located in and translated from the original (Gurban Oğlu 1915).
7. For Khislat, “Study, you beautiful child, the time has treated you well...,” the translator worked from the version of this ghazal found in Khislat (1971, 83). The collection does not indicate whether the poem was published previously or only found in manuscript form. Khislat, “I, dear friends, have known the loss of a child...” According to the poem’s chronogram, Khislat composed it in 1330 AH or 1911 CE. The translator used a reprinted collection of Khislat’s poetry for the translation (2009, 112–13). The apparatus and commentary found in the reprinted collection do not indicate whether the poem was published or only found in manuscript form.
8. Abdurauf Fitrat, “Notes of an Indian Traveler,” was first self-published in 1912 in Istanbul. The text was distributed in Bukhara and Turkestan soon after. A.N. Kondrat’ev translated the text into Russian and published it in Samarqand in 1913. The translator was unable to locate these two copies of the text and instead used the glasnost-era transliterated republication of the Persian text found in the Tajik journal *Sadaiyi Sharq* (Fitrat 1988). The editors also referenced Hasan Qudratullaev’s 1991 translation into Uzbek, which has been republished without crediting the translator in various post-Soviet volumes of Fitrat’s collected works (Fitrat 2022a). The translator would like to thank Sevargul Karamatullakhodjaeva for granting permission to publish this translation.
9. Mirza Jalil Memmedguluzade wrote *The Dead* between 1907 and 1909, but only managed to stage it in 1916. Five manuscript copies of the play are held in the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences Manuscript Institute. The play was first published in 1925. The translators did not have access to the manuscripts or that first publication. They used a 2004 collected works publication of the play (Memmedguluzade 2004). For a longer reading of the play in the context of Memmedguluzade and Gogol’s work, see Feldman (2018, 39–79). For more on the importance of the folk figure in Sufi teachings, see Shah (1990; 1993). This translation was originally prepared for publication in the anthology *Five Iconic Azerbaijani Plays*. The editors would like to thank Nijat Ibrahimov and TEAS Press for permission to republish this translation.

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CHAPTER 4

Becoming Socialist

Chris Fort

INTRODUCTION

This section of the anthology gives readers a glimpse of the transformation of Central Asian literatures under early twentieth-century socialism from the early 1920s to the 1940s. Prior to the late nineteenth century, Central Asian cultures conceived of literature in a manner quite distinct from the modern European concept. Of course, poetry had always been prized in the Islamic world as a display of an author's rhetorical prowess, and highly ornate and stylized epideictic prose was praised for its likeness to poetry. The point of *adabiyat*, the word that denotes the verbal arts in Persian and Turkic, was to impart morals, hence its root of *adab*, Arabic for morals or good manners. But only in the late nineteenth century, under the influence of European ideas, did Central Asian intellectuals begin to think of literature in the manner that Europeans had seen it

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throughout the nineteenth century: as a showcase of the nation's character and the achievements of its greatest minds. The previous section in part examined how Central Asians, as they adopted the concepts of literature and the nation, took up European literary genres, such as drama, the newspaper column, and the memoir. Soviet socialism would formally institutionalize the connection between literature and the nation. The Soviet Union sought to demonstrate itself as a benevolent nation-builder for its minorities by ensuring that each Soviet nation had its own national poet, novel, opera, epic, etc. This section therefore introduces readers to some of the new genres that became prominent under Stalinist print culture, such as the novella and the short story.

Despite the advance of print culture in the twentieth century, the networks that supported Dilshod Barno and Anbar Otin, the two manuscript authors of the previous section, continued in new ways under the Soviet Union. Handwritten manuscripts often ran parallel to Soviet print and oral culture, influenced by and influencing the latter, even as they existed in a world apart, hidden from the eyes of Soviet censors. Manuscripts of authors purged in Stalin's Great Terror circulated among Central Asian Soviet writers, despite the official ban, and impacted the work of new generations of authors. *A Modern Woman*, Abdulhamid Chölpon's drama in this section, was a manuscript written in 1928 and only discovered in 1992; however, the few remaining copies of his printed novel, *Night and Day*, continued to circulate after the author's death throughout the Soviet period. Likewise, Islamic manuscripts were passed along and transcribed in much the same ways among Central Asian Muslim scholars who had now gone underground. While the lay population had little interest in such manuscripts, much like in the pre-Soviet period, they were of interest to official Soviet Muslim clerics who were also in textual communication with underground authors.

Yet Soviet socialism's transformation of Central Asian literature was hardly confined to the adoption of print and European literary genres. The first two decades under Stalin witnessed an increasing politicization of literature. Soviet litterateurs, critics, and bureaucrats from Moscow and local republican capitals and writers' organizations began to demand that Soviet writers cast themselves as members of the new Soviet race and that the works they wrote support the party line (*partiinosť*). This politicization did not simply ramp up and never subside, but rather occurred in peaks and troughs. When the Bolsheviks first asserted some control over Central Asia at the beginning of the 1920s, they created an uneasy alliance

with native intellectuals, a group which included the Jadids of the previous section and other like-minded thinkers who were reformers but who were in most cases not communists. This alliance permitted them to enter the Soviet government's more public-facing bureaucracy, though the secret police in its various incarnations remained staffed primarily by Slavs and other Europeans through World War II. During this period, these native intellectuals had circumscribed freedom to pursue a vision of modernity that suited their understanding. As the poems of Sadridin Ayni and Abulqasim Lahuti in this section show, native intellectuals found common cause with the Bolsheviks not in socialism but in anti-imperialism. Toward the middle of the 1920s, the Bolsheviks felt they had trained a new generation of loyal Central Asian communists to carry out their agenda. Those new cadres, which include Ghafur Ghulom, Abdulla Qahhor, Zulfiya, Mirza Tursunzada, and Beiimbet Mailin in this section, began to harshly criticize their forefathers, dubbing them "old intellectuals" to note their datedness. Such "old intellectuals" were denounced for their supposedly anti-Soviet politics and their overly traditional literature. These denunciations drove the "old intellectuals" almost entirely from public life, not least because the denunciations were typically further pursued by Stalin's secret police, the OGPU (*Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*; Joint State Political Directorate) in this incarnation. Those native intellectuals who were not imprisoned, such as this section's Abdulhamid Sulaymon öghli Chölpon, often went silent, confining their literary activity only to translating. The introduction of socialist realism in 1932, however, initiated a brief depoliticization of literature. "Old intellectuals" were welcomed back into Soviet letters and traditional poetics and literary conventions were no longer seen as anti-Soviet. While Persianate poetic traditions would remain a part of Soviet literary practice, as evidenced by Mirza Tursunzada's poem in this section, the respite given persecuted intellectuals did not last long. With the notable exceptions of Sadridin Ayni and Oydin, nearly every "old intellectual" was executed in Stalin's Great Terror (1936–1938). Moreover, once the purges had finished with that generation, denunciations began against the first Soviet generation. Writers such as Ghafur Ghulom and Abdulla Qahhor were denounced but not arrested, while Beiimbet Mailin was arrested and eventually executed.

Despite the waxing and waning politicization of their activity, the writers in this section show that they still possessed considerable freedom in how they went about crafting a new Soviet literature for their national

cultures. Authors might draw on and transform Persianate poetic traditions, as the translations of Sadriddin Ayni, Abulqasim Lahuti, and Mirza Tursunzada show; they might optimistically depict peasants' difficulty in understanding Soviet political jargon, as Beimbet Mailin does; they might exploit the Soviet myth of orphanhood to advance themselves as a child of the Soviet future, as Ghafur Ghulom does; they might compose an ode to Uzbekistan's cotton to mark Uzbekistan as an integral part of the Soviet Union, as Zulfiya (pen name of Zulfiya Isroilova) does; or they might tie notions of socialist class liberation to women's emancipation, commonly held up as a major emblem of Soviet progress in Central Asia, as Oydin (pen name of Manzura Sobirova) does in her poem "Tulips in Bloom."

While many of the writers we feature in this section were enthusiastic about the utopian promises of the Stalin revolution, others were more circumspect, and we include their work here as well. Of particular note is the 1928 drama of Abdulhamid Chölpon, *A Modern Woman*. The conclusion to the piece reveals that the title of the drama is meant to be understood ironically and that irony demonstrates the author's questioning of the Soviet state's politicization of literature.

This section also includes a seminal piece by Uyghur writer Lutpulla Mutellip, which illustrates the profoundly different ways in which Central Asians outside the Soviet Union became socialist writers. While the majority of the pieces in this section show how Soviet Central Asian writers adapted their national literatures to the language of Marxism–Leninism and the Bolsheviks, Uyghur communists a decade later saw an anti-colonial and nationalist ideology in the socialism propagandized by the Soviet Union. To this day, Mutellip's poem continues to be held in high esteem by Uyghurs under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party because, though socialist, Mutellip speaks not of the suffering of the international proletariat but of the downtrodden Uyghur nation.

Chris Fort¹

SOVIET PERSIAN REVOLUTIONARY VERSE

During the Russian Civil War (1917–1923), agitational poetry in local languages was published in newspapers in areas under Red Army control or under Bolshevik-allied local administrations such as the People's Soviet

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Republic of Bukhara (1920–1924). The politics of this poetry were vaguely anti-establishment and anticolonial rather than Marxist or nationalist, expressing Central Asian activists' wide-ranging hopes for social reform and the liberation of the "East" (an important geographical unit of solidarity for Muslim reformists) from Russian and European imperial control. This was in keeping with the poets' understanding of the Bolshevik revolutionary project, which mirrored the big-tent appeals to Eastern revolutionaries expressed by Lenin and the speakers at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920. The general nature of the sentiments expressed in early Central Asian revolutionary poetry may also reflect the precarity of the political situation: anti-Bolshevik tribal and military forces continued to operate in the countryside until well after the formal end of the Civil War, and so excessively clear political commitments might have become a liability. The first poem of this section, by the Bukharan reformist Sadriddin Ayni (whose pre-1917 emulation of a Bedil ghazal is also in this anthology), expresses an anxious inability or unwillingness to define the revolutionary project.

In Transoxania, many poets who had previously written in both Uzbek and Persian/Tajik abandoned the latter language, regarding Turkic as an international language of modernization and Persian as hopelessly backward. In keeping with this divide, some of the Uzbek poetry produced immediately after 1917 drew on formal experiments by late Ottoman poets with rhyme schemes and syllabic meters from the Western and Turkic folk verse, and with Western genres, while Tajik poetry remained, for the most part, more closely tied to classical Persian forms and genres—even when it was the same poets composing in both Uzbek and Tajik. Nonetheless, these revolutionary Tajik poems sometimes foreground the new media with which they were distributed. Thus, whereas the last couplet of a conventional ghazal would include the poet's pen-name, "Ayni," as a signature, Ayni's ghazal "Revolution" instead includes the title of the newspaper in which it was published, *Flame of the Revolution*, set for contrast beside the traditional image of the poet's reed pen. The ghazal itself revolves around a refrain of "it is like," as Ayni offers a series of similes that conjure the effects of revolution. Those similes then reverse as the "sparks" scattered by the poet's "reed pen" are compared to the light of the revolution.

Those poets who did publish revolutionary verse in Tajik newspapers looked to Iranian comrades for a new literary idiom of political commitment, as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) produced

more robust and sustained experiments in political newspaper poetry than the Central Asian experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905. A key vector of this new poetics was the Iranian Kurdish poet Abulqasim Lahuti (1887–1957), who fled from Iran to Transcaucasia after leading a failed revolt in Tabriz in 1922. Like almost all Central Asian pro-Bolshevik poets, Lahuti had no political education in Marxism, but soon after his arrival in Baku, he began composing ghazals whose politics were explicitly communist. Lahuti's ghazal "Red Revolution," which draws on the bloodthirsty rhetoric of the most militant Iranian Constitutionalist verse as it cycles around the refrain "red," caught the attention of Central Asian readers. Several of them, including Ayni, composed formal imitations, an act of apprenticeship that would inform their future Soviet poetic practice and which mimicked the literary sociality of the Bedilian style poems translated in section two of the anthology. Ayni's imitation, "Red Revolution," is translated here; its repeated refrain of "red" points back to Lahuti's ghazal.

Samuel Hodgkin²

Revolution

Sadriddin Ayni

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

The revolution's like the sun,
 Or else it's like a flood of water.
 It spreads lights out into the world,
 The revolution's like the sun...
 Before the revolution's flood, the world
 Is like a bubble before the flood.
 Upon the earth, the season of revolution
 Is like a state of rumbling.
 The unjust reach their punishment,
 It's like the courts of reckoning.
 The East will finally awake,
 Though now this thought may seem to sleep.
 The desire the noble king had held
 Is seen to be like a mirage.

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My reed pen's scattering of sparks
 Seems like the revolution's light.

December 29, 1919

Red Revolution

Abulqasim Lahuti

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

I drink a red wine to the happiness of man,
 For a red sun is dawning from the revolutionary east
 A sacrifice for man! For from the capitalists' blood
 The sea of revolution will fill with red foam.
 I'm glad for the time when by the hammer and sickle's might
 The peasant places a red rope around the king's neck.
 Hey, lord, spill less of the toiler's blood today,
 Tomorrow, the red revolution will call you to account.
 The religious zealot asked me what his future was,
 I showed him a knife, saying, "Here's your red reply!"
 Red wine in the ruler's cup and, from hunger's want,
 Red tears pour from the eyes of the peasant's daughter.
 To wash in the blood of the sheikh, captain, and king is commanded
 By the revolution's law in the text of the red book.
 Lahuti, will the day not come when the hand of wisdom
 Will draw the red veil from the face of the Daughter of the East?

Baku, 1922

"Red Revolution"

Sadriddin Ayni

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

My liver's turned to red kebab in oppression's fire,
 Give me a cup of red wine from the autocrat's blood.
 From the red revolution, this red judgment arrived:
 O oppressed ones, take the king's head and a red reckoning!
 Stick on a skewer the tyrants' hearts and livers!

They'll make this red kebab as dizzying as wine.
 Don't return the sword of revenge to its scabbard
 Until you've turned the world to red ground, from end to end!
 In the sea of the tyrants' and oppressors' blood, surely
 The turmoil will churn the earth to a red foam.
 Rise up, all you downtrodden, be resolved!
 In these worn-out days, make a red revolution!
 Lion-like, shed the blood of your class enemy!
 Why do you goat-heartedly shed red tears?
 'Ayni, to explain things in one ghazal can't be done,
 For the revolution, you'd need to write a red book.

1923

EARLY SOVIET DRAMA AND THE INFLUENCE OF JADIDS

The Uzbek poet, novelist, and dramatist Abdulhamid Chölpon was born in the Ferghana Valley city of Andijan in 1897. In his teenage years, he joined the literary circles of the Jadids. Chölpon began publishing poetry just after Russia's February revolution in 1917 and by the 1920s had solidified his reputation as the premier poet in the Uzbek language. He left Central Asia for Moscow in 1924 to study at the Uzbek drama studio that had been established there in 1921. He penned his first drama, *Bright Moon*, there in 1926. He wrote and staged several more after his return to Uzbekistan in 1927, but unfortunately, all but two of those latter dramas, *The Assault* (1927) and *A Modern Woman* (1928), have been lost.

During this time, Chölpon's poetic fame turned to notoriety. Because of his renown, Chölpon became for Uzbek socialists the paradigmatic example of an "old intellectual." Many former Jadids were arrested at this time, but Chölpon escaped to Moscow in 1932 and lay low there, largely occupying himself with translation work. A lull in denunciations and secret police activity permitted Chölpon's return to Uzbekistan in 1934, whereupon he wrote a collection of poems panegyricizing Lenin and declaring his newfound optimism about the Soviet future. Despite these efforts to reconcile with Soviet power, Chölpon was arrested in 1937, and executed in 1938, and his works were banned in Soviet Uzbekistan until 1988. Nevertheless, they circulated in private among intellectuals throughout the life of the Soviet Union, and during Gorbachev's glasnost, an enterprising group of scholars and writers (among them Hamid

Ismailov, of section V in this anthology, who produced the only Russian translation of Chölpon's novel *Night and Day*) worked to return his writings to the Uzbek public.

A Modern Woman, though written in 1928, was published only in October 1992 in Uzbekistan's principal literary journal, *Star of the East*. According to Uzbek literary scholar Salohiddin Mamajonov, Chölpon entrusted the work to a friend after learning that a number of his acquaintances in Uzbekistan had been interrogated by the secret police (Mamajonov 1992, 8–11). That friend then hid the drama in the foundation of his son's grave, where it remained until the Soviet collapse.

Chölpon's *A Modern Woman* represents a break with some of the Jadid dramatic traditions of the previous three decades. Uzbek and Azeri drama between the 1890s and early 1920s are often similar to Aristotelian tragedies, though playwrights nevertheless made copious use of humor. These dramas typically feature a *raisonneur* figure, a mouthpiece character for the author who comments on the action but does not participate in it, or a passive hero with whom the author more or less identifies. Iskender of the previous section's *The Dead* is a parody of this *raisonneur* figure, a reformer who has turned to decadence because of his inability to influence his peers. Uzbek dramatists of the late 1920s, including Chölpon, parted with this dramatic model by introducing several active women protagonists, who did not passively bemoan Central Asian patriarchy but instead demanded their rights forcefully. Rahima, the eponymous modern woman of the play, is just such a character. She stands up to her abusive husband, Rustam, the chairman of the village executive committee, withstands his beatings, and eventually becomes the chairman of the committee herself after deposing him.

The introduction of strong female characters reflects the transformation of Jadids under the Bolsheviks. While Jadids were reformers in the 1910s, the millennialism of revolution and the intransigence of Jadids' conservative opponents in Uzbek society radicalized them. Before the revolution, Jadids had called for additional rights for women, such as education and the right to choose their husband, but in the late 1920s, Soviet Uzbekistan began what was then called "the assault" (*hujum*), a joint campaign between Bolsheviks, former Jadids, and Uzbek socialists to encourage women to unveil publicly in defiance of the males of their community. We see this more radicalized and Marxist version of Jadid efforts at women's liberation in the petitioners' interaction with Rahima in the play. Rahima, once in charge of the village Executive Committee, uses her power to prevent arranged marriages and to stop a woman from leaving her impoverished husband for a rich man (in balancing the class

imperative to uplift the poor vs. protecting a woman's right to choose her husband, the former seems to win out in Rahima's calculus).

But Chölpon's drama ends not in the victory of socialism found in many canonical Soviet Russian texts but in calamity. The drama's tragic conclusion ultimately reveals the title of *A Modern Woman* to be ironic and thus demonstrates Chölpon's skepticism about the Soviet project to modernize Central Asian women. Throughout the play, Chölpon emphasizes that to be a modern woman is to be a man. Rahima's initial character description in the play refers to her as "man-like." In her violent encounters with her husband Rustam, he threatens her with an obviously phallic knife, associating his position of power with masculinity. When she takes power in the village, she then threatens the impudent Matkholiq with an equally phallic whip. The tragedy ultimately suggests that Rahima cannot be a modern woman, she cannot become empowered, because she cannot be a man—her womanhood holds her back. At the conclusion of the play, Rustam is arrested, but as he is dragged away, Rahima's son, Adhamjon, runs after him crying over the loss of his father, while Rahima collapses in tears. Rahima may have earlier been able to gain Rustam's power through her manliness, but she cannot be a father to her son. She has, for Chölpon, sacrificed her womanhood in the pursuit of modernity. In suggesting that empowerment and modernity are antithetical to womanhood, Chölpon makes a statement that Soviet critics would not have accepted.

Chris Fort

A Modern Woman

Abdulhamid Sulaymon öghli Chölpon

Translated by Chris Fort

I WILL SAY THIS...

(In lieu of a preface)

During my time in Moscow, I wrote this two-act drama, *A Modern Woman*, for the International Women's Day Celebration on March 8 as part of the campaigns undertaken by the "House of Knowledge." We staged the drama quickly and without much care with the help of some enthusiastic amateurs there...

Later I expanded it to make it into a modern drama. At that time, it would have been best to call it not a comedy and not a tragedy, but a drama. The Central State troupe was supposed to stage it, so I showed it to comrade Mannon Uyghur. In submitting the play to him, I excised much of the comic moments and transformed it into more of a tragedy. I went through three drafts before I arrived at its present form. And that's what we have now.

* * *

You hold in your hands a tragedy taken from contemporary life. That is, this is one experience of and one of the first experiences of modernity. Our theater, our art is now in an era of experimentation. We do not yet have a concrete and established style. A piece that will contribute to our theater must also pass through the sieve of experimentation. Let the experiments have what results they will, but in the end, they will all lead to one thing!

We have international Russian theater in front of our eyes. A wide, unembraceable world...

We have struggled to find or define a modern work of art. Some see modernity in a work, and others look at the same work and see the past! Our comrade Sotti Husayn says that "we will still have to expend considerable effort in locating that modern work."³ This drama is one drop of the considerable effort Husayn speaks of.

Just a drop.

But it is a drop which our theater lacks. And which it needs.

And as they say of drops, "a million of them, drop by drop, make a lake!"

* * *

³ Sotti Husayn (1906–1942) was an Uzbek socialist literary critic and scholar.

I wrote this drama in two acts because that seemed easiest. I divided them both into scenes. Whichever way the director decides to go is fine. I have only two desires for it.

1. Have one of the better directors take it up; don't let the talentless bother themselves. I paid particular attention to how the lines are constructed (especially in the women's scenes). Have the actors pay attention to those lines too.
2. I put a lot of thought into the characters in the play's conclusion.
Put special emphasis on those scenes.

Chölpon

Samarqand, May 14, 1928.

The Players in Each Ensemble Are Listed Within the Ensemble.

Rustam—Chairman of the village executive committee.

Sharofat—Daughter of Rustam, 18 years old.

Jöra—The village executive committee's watchman, police officer, guard, all things. Simple and open but sleepy, humorous, mischievous. 50 years old.

Woman in the Paranj—Later revealed as Jahonbu, Rustam's second wife's mother.

Rahima—Sharofat's mother, an energetic, healthy, man-like woman. 40 years old.

Adhamjon—Rustam and Rahima's son. 10–11 years old.

Abdulahad—village teacher, 25 years old.

Abdukhalil—Jahonbu's son. 14–15 years old.

Azimjon—Local landowner. Rustam's ally.

Tökhtasin—Azimjon's son.

Zokirjon—Rustam's secretary and ally.

Sodiqov—Head of the election commission

Ghani—Komsomol activist and teacher. Later Rahima's secretary.

Sharofat's friends: Qumri

Zuhro

Khadicha

Patti

Others

Young Men of the Village: Sodiq

Yunus

Öktam
 Rahmat
 Turdiali
 Böta
 Others

Boy—Azimjon's servant.

Ölmas

First and Second Women—Two women from the city. Of low morals.

Matkholiq—Local landowner. Stout, stupid, of low morals.

Neighbors (men, women, children), Komsomol activists, peasants, petitioners (middle-aged peasant, young man, woman)

Militiamen

Act I

Scene I

An Old Woman Dies of Exhaustion

In the vegetable garden of the village executive committee chairman Rustam. A walled-in, cool place. The walls are low. Sometimes the somber songs of the farm workers in the field can be heard from afar. In the garden, Sharofat sings her own somber song quietly, while she, seated, embroiders. It is dusk.

Ensemble: I

Sharofat Alone

Sharofat is alone. She embroiders and sings a song. Her voice reveals her youth, her words carry easily. Her voice rises with each climax.

Sharofat (*sings*):

The peaches have ripened and fallen, pick one and come, love,
 Tie your sweet-smelling braids and come, love,
 If I open this locket, it contains the name Abdulahad.

(From the right, among the trees comes a coarse, ugly voice. Sharofat is startled.)

Voice (*singing*): Your brother is unfaithful, let me be your brother...

(Silence.)

Sharofat (*looking here and there.*) Voy, who was that? Abdulahad? No... It didn't sound like him. *(After listening a bit, she returns to her embroidery and starts singing again):*

Does rain act on stone with its constant pounding?
Does your power become less with each furtive glance?

I took one quick look into the parrot's cage,
But I found no relief for the pain of a playful heart...

Sharofat This boy is just standing there waiting to talk with me. Is he one of those farmer boys? He heard my song and is answering it now. Well, if that's what he wants then let him... That's what they all want...
(*She stands up and heads in the direction of the wall; she sticks her head over a lower part of the wall and looks around. Jöra quietly emerges.*)

Ensemble: 2

Sharofat, Jöra.

Jöra tiptoes slowly towards the spot where Sharofat had been sitting, sits down, and takes up her embroidery himself. He runs the needle and thread through twice, and then, imitating Sharofat, starts singing in a thin, girlish voice.

I know you well, but your heart isn't meant for me.
I sit here crying, but you won't fulfill my wish.

(*Upon finishing, he suddenly becomes excited. He leaps up, smiling, and looks at Sharofat.*)

Sharofat Voy, God take me now? Who are you?

Jöra It's me, uncle Jöra!

Sharofat (*sad, somber. She wants to somehow answer Jöra in kind but can't bring herself to.*) Oh, death take you! You've fallen in love now? Give me my embroidery! Give it here! (*She takes it and sits down. Starts sewing again. Jöra goes to the other side of the courtyard and sits.*)

Jöra Iyeh, what do you mean? You mean there's no one in love here? How can a person who runs around for the executive committee, doing all these odd jobs for your father, retain his composure? You didn't know that I've been serving your father? Good for you! If you only knew a little, your heart would moan in empathy...

Sharofat (*jokingly*) Aha... that's how it is? So tell me: what have you been doing for my father?

Jöra Yes... Very good! That's what you should be asking! (*slowly*) I... have been showing your father... how much I love you...

Sharofat (*jokingly*) How much you love me?

Jöra Yes, how much I love you...

Sharofat Oh, repent now! You really love me?

Jöra Of course! I may be just an orphan with no parents, a miserably poor young man... But I have a heart! They say that shahs' hearts belong to frogs... You've heard that, haven't you?

Sharofat Yes... So I'm the frog?

Jöra Of course! Wait, no, I'm the noble frog... You're the shah!

Sharofat So then my heart is yours?

Jöra Nooooo... My heart... Alright, enough, you get it!

Sharofat So if you love me so much, why haven't you told me before?

Jöra (*caught off guard*) Why didn't I say anything? Could I have? Oh, God, oh, God take me... Why didn't I say anything? (*Suddenly*) Hey, wait, Miss Sweet-Smelling Braids! If I had said something, would you have married me?

Sharofat Maybe. (*Pauses.*) It'd be better than marrying Azimjon the gambler's girlish son.

Jöra (*panicked*) Voy! My dear girl... You mean Azimjon the gambler's son. They call him Tökhtasin the belly... (*Puffs his stomach out and walks around.*) Like that! No, wait, let me show you. (*Opens his robe, stuffs two pillows in over his stomach. Close his robe and ties it over them.*) Look, look! This is how he walks into the executive committee! (*Walks slowly, pretends he's getting stuck in the door frame.*) Voooooy! He can't even fit through the executive committee's doors, and they're much wider. I had to pull him in while a militiaman kicked him from behind. Even then he barely made it through! And he's as short as he is fat! Look at how he walks. (*Draws his neck into his shoulders and walks.*)

Sharofat Voy, voy! Enough, don't show me! Let that mug of his dry up! (*Closes her face with her hands.*)

Jöra Compared to him, I'm a real catch!

Sharofat Jöra, enough with these jokes! My heart just can't take it. You've tried to cheer me up before like that, but it never works. I've tried forcing myself to laugh, to relax my nerves, but it just doesn't work. I've tried to be strong, to be happy, but I just can't... All these sorrows on my chest just keep pressing down on me...

Jöra You think others don't suffer like you do? We're all moving towards the day of our deaths.

Sharofat Oh, what kind of sorrows can men have? Whatever you do, you still have your freedom.

Jöra You're right. The world is full of free men, but also of people like me, the refuse under their feet.

Sharofat Yes, good. Earlier you upset me with your joking, so now fill me with your sorrows! You see how capable I am of carrying them all... (*She wipes her tears slowly with her sleeve.*)

Jöra When I try to make you laugh, you never laugh. And when I try to commiserate with you, you never shed a tear. What am I supposed to do? I'll leave now, I guess. (*Gets up*) Can you get Rahima?

Sharofat It's funny: a big man like you pouting... (*She laughs*) Just look at you standing there. (*Laughing uncontrollably.*) Come, tell me now, why did you come here?

Jöra (*walks over laughing*) What did you say?

Sharofat (*smiles widely*) "Why did you come here?" I said.

Jöra Oh, now you're asking? Are you trying to make me mad? Firstly, I came to talk with Rahima about a few things. Secondly... I can't say it!

Sharofat Just when you've opened up a bit, you're going to upset me again? Tell me: why did you come?

Jöra The second reason isn't for me. Someone sent me...

Sharofat (*startled*) And who's that? Why did they send you?

Jöra Someone who thought you were sad and needed a little cheering up...

Sharofat (*she understands who but continues to act as if she doesn't*) Jöra, damn you! Who is it?

Jöra Who else could it be? The one who loves you more than anyone, that's who!

Sharofat (*annoyedly*) Azimjon the gambler's son?

Jöra Is he the one that loves you more than anyone? If that's him, then I guess so. And all this time none of us knew.

Sharofat He said that of himself... (*Suddenly*) Jöra, enough with the jokes. What's that damn boy doing? If tomorrow or the next day I somehow end up as Azimjon the gambler's daughter-in-law, then no matter what that other does, no matter what, we'll never be together.

Jöra (*as if he doesn't know*) Who are you talking about?

Sharofat About that boy... That careless... Damn...

Jöra Why are you so embarrassed? Just say it: you're thinking about Abdulahad... The teacher... (*Sharofat blushes, covers her face.*) That boy's turning the village on its head... Busy with all his government work... All the people offended by your father are behind him... Look at me, telling you these things. That's why you like Abdulahad! But don't tell anyone.

If word of your infatuation with him appears on the villagers' lips, things will get very bad for him...

Sharofat Have I told anyone about it? I hear these things about him, and they're in one ear and out the other... What do I care about the government? What I'm worried about is whether the person I love is actually trying to send matchmakers to my father. Azimjon is trying. He's eyeing a wedding as soon as possible...

Ensemble: 3

Sharofat, Jöra, Woman in the Paranj

As Sharofat and Jöra are talking, the Woman in the Paranj⁴ slowly approaches. She stops to listen to them occasionally. They are unaware. As she draws nearer, she stops to listen for a longer time. The two interlocutors are still unaware. Then she takes out a kerchief, spreads it on the ground, and sits on it.

Jöra (*looks over at the woman.*) Hey, get up, let's deal with this woman. Then we can finish talking.

Sharofat Hey! Who is this woman? (*She stands up from her spot.*) Hey, auntie, are you here for *khudoyi*?⁵ We have flour in the house. You sit here, I'll run bring you some. (*She heads towards the house but does not enter and takes a step back.*) But let me first know who you are. (*She approaches with a smile.*)

Woman in the Paranj (*pulls the paranji over herself tightly, speaks as if she's barely moving her mouth*) My dear girl, if you could just give me

⁴ A *paranji* is a traditional robe worn by women and girls in Central Asia, largely before the mid-twentieth century. It became more widespread among urban women in the late nineteenth century with the Russian conquest of the region, which resulted in a larger non-Muslim presence in cities. In the late 1920s, local activists, inspired by the Bolsheviks' goal of women's liberation, called on women in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to publicly discard the *paranji* in an event called the *Hujum* (assault). However, these activists met with a backlash of male violence that led many women who had unveiled to take up the veil again. Towards the mid-century, fewer and fewer women wore the *paranji*, though it was never outlawed.

⁵ For the ritual of *Bibiseshanba* (this is mentioned below *khudoyi*, women in Andijon, Chölpon's hometown, went to seven houses in the neighborhood to gather a cup of flour. The offering of flour was referred to as *khudoyi*, meaning alms or charity. Among urban Central Asian Muslims, the matriarch of a family organizes four times a year a ritual that takes place on Tuesday during which the women of the family express wishes to the Islamic saint *Bibiseshanba* ("grandmother Tuesday"). Women typically use their contact with *Bibiseshanba* to wish for the return of a son or the birth of a son, among other things.

some flour without having to see my face... Just some *khudoyi*... If you're going to look at my face, don't give me anything. I won't take your flour. *Khudoyi* is a delicate matter... I gave the spirits my word that I wouldn't reveal my face.

Sharofat Don't be sad, auntie. If that is your word, I won't look at your face. (*She starts off toward the house again.*) Just wait there, I'll get you a little something. (*Runs inside.*)

Jöra Auntie, what are you doing? Are you doing *Bibiseshanba*?

Woman in the Paranj Yes, my dear, once a year I go around and take *khudoyi*.

Jöra And *Bibiseshanba* is women's what? A prophet or a saint?

Woman in the Paranj My child, she's the greatest of the *chilton*.⁶

Jöra The prettiest?

Woman in the Paranj Voy, God forbid, what are you saying, my child?

Jöra Oh... I had this image of her in my head...

Woman in the Paranj Voy, my child... Have you no fear of God? You talk that way about people you respect?

Jöra Are we talking about a man or a woman?

Woman in the Paranj A woman, my child, a woman. But even though she's a woman, she's still the leader of the *chilton*.

Jöra No woman could be a saint, much less a prophet! How could a woman, a piece of property, reach those heights?

Woman in the Paranj Do you talk this way about your wife?

Jöra Praise God, I don't have a wife.

Woman in the Paranj Well, that young woman, who was she? Was she... your plaything then?

Jöra Her?... No... I swear she's another's toy...

Woman in the Paranj I see. A pretty young thing... She'd be a worthwhile companion for someone...

Jöra "Worthwhile" you say? She's worth worlds upon worlds! (*Sharofat enters.*)

Sharofat Who's worth "worlds upon worlds"?

Jöra You are! No, no! Not you... I'm talking about the... the... the neighbor's cat!

Sharofat Liar! Tell the truth! (*She puts some flour in the Woman in the Paranj's handkerchief.*)

⁶ Forty spirits who are regarded as possessing special powers.

Jöra It's true! It's true! Can I tell you anything but the truth?

Woman in the Paranjī Thank you. Let God grant you never-ending life and countless wealth. God is great! I'll leave now. What a wonderful, joyous, silver-tongued poet you have for a relative, my girl... Let God grant him the wish he keeps buried in his heart!

Jöra Amen! Amen, yes!

The Woman in the Paranjī gets up to leave. Neither Sharofat nor Jöra seemed to notice as they continue conversing. The Woman in the Paranjī throws something on the ground as she exits the stage.

Ensemble: 4

Sharofat, Jöra

Sharofat Well, she really fell for you. Can just one word of praise excite you like that? Do you lose your mind over every little phrase that pleases your heart?

Jöra Would it hurt you so much to show some compassion, to reenter the world as a human and say one of those little phrases that please my heart? That old woman has none of your ardor, your passion... Even if you won't marry me, would it hurt you so much to say "I love you"? What that would mean from a Layli like you to a Majnun like me!⁷

Sharofat So I should just tell you a pretty lie? Someone will tell you "I love you"... You know what we have a lot of in this world? People. Someone will turn up.

Jöra I'm just playing with you, my lady! How could you ever be a wife to me? Your father would never approve, and we'd be driven off. That's the fate emblazoned on our foreheads!

Sharofat It looks more like one of us is fated to unrequited love, while the other is fated to be a slave...

Jöra (*sighs loudly as Sharofat slowly and quietly sings.*)

Sharofat (*singing*):

To this peak a person can
Climb but cannot descend.
What is up there

⁷ Layli (or Layla) and Majnun are the two characters of an Arabic story of star-crossed lovers later immortalized by Nizami Ganjavi in his twelfth-century narrative poem *Layla and Majnun*. Majnun, meaning "crazed," becomes the moniker of the story's poet lover Qays ibn al-Mulawwah because of his mad obsession with Layla.

From which he can never break his gaze?

I gave glass to the goldsmith
And prayed for alchemy.
I gave my heart to my beloved,
And hoped for eternal companionship...

Jöra (*slowly and weakly sings*):

I picked a flower and placed it in a vase,
And spent my nights with drink.
A cup in one hand,
A candle in the other.

Better to burn
In the candle's flame.
Better to be parted
From such a beloved...

With the beloved at my side...

Rahima, in a paranji without a face-covering, enters at the beginning of Jöra's second stanza. She has a small bundle in her hand. Sharofat and Jöra don't notice. She listens to their song and smiles. She starts speaking as soon as Jöra finishes his last line.

Ensemble: 5

Sharofat, Jöra, Rahima

Rahima The beloved at your side is silent, Jöra! (*The two singers are startled.*)

Jöra She's silent like her mother... Come, auntie!

Rahima I have come. Now you come, my child. Why did you stop singing? Tell me! Such a soothing song for broken hearts...

Jöra I'm done. I would go on, but I'm choked up.

Sharofat It's true, he's been reciting the Qur'an since morning...

Rahima (*sits.*) Uh! I'm so tired. Sharofat my girl, bring me a cup of cold water.

Sharofat From the canal? It will be warm from the canal.

Rahima Fine... Just bring me some water. I'm dead tired... God take your father, my child, your father!

Sharofat (*gives water.*) What happened?

Rahima (*drinks water.*) Uhhh... he slandered me at the *Qöshchi*⁸ meeting with unheard of things.

Jöra That! That! I came here to tell you something about that. I've been sitting here all this time, waiting for you. I'm so loyal to you, and you don't grant me as much as a stray glance!

Rahima I know you're loyal. I appreciate it. But what can I do? There's nothing I can do.

Jöra Someone in your position usually rewards her servants... either with a daughter...

Sharofat (*softly*) God take me...

Jöra Or, if not that... (*As if he doesn't want it*) Maybe you'll marry me yourself. (*They laugh.*)

Rahima My daughter's choice, you well know, is her own. And what use am I to you? I'm as old as your mother. Drop it. Let God give you someone younger!

Jöra Yes, let Him... Now... Fine, let's leave it. Tell me what happened at *Qöshchi*.

Rahima You tell me your news first. You came here to tell me something, you said.

Jöra (*scratches his head.*) It was about your husband Rustam...

Rahima What happened? Tell me already.

Jöra The man just can't take that you were elected as an officer in *Qöshchi*. He brought in your boss, whispered various things in his ears. He pounds his fist on chairs, breaks them...

Rahima But you didn't hear what he said?

Jöra No, I heard. He's been telling your boss, the *Qöshchi* chairman, not to invite you to meetings, to not let you know they've happened, to not let you know when he sends someone to the city, that if he sends you to meetings in the city, you'll disrupt them, and... (*thinking*). There was another interesting thing... (*Scratches his head and thinks.*) What was it? Yes... I remember. He's been saying that if the peasants come with a petition to just tell them no immediately, and if they ask why, to tell them,

⁸ Uzbek for "plowman." Here *Qöshchi* designates a union of sharecroppers, farm laborers, and peasants with small plots of lands. This union operated from 1919 to 1930.

“I’m agreed to it, but Rahima isn’t.” “Anything bad you have to do,” he says, “say that Rahima is pushing it.” And Rustam also told him to make the poorer peasants members of Qöshchi, put them to work, and then have them go to the city to decry Rahima’s injustices... Just the other day four of those gamblers were made members of Qöshchi and sent to the city with a petition.

Rahima Someone just came from the city to check on that petition. We had a meeting about it at Qöshchi this morning. An argument broke out, and we started fighting. Rustam started slandering me.

Sharofat (*face turns red.*) And you just stood there silently? You didn’t talk back, tell them everything that you’ve been hiding?

Rahima (*laughs*) I said my part too, my child. I said my part weeping. I told them that there were doubters, there were people asking why they joined Qöshchi in the first place. There was nothing else I could do.

Jöra Yes, well done! You did right. And then what happened?

Rahima What else could have happened? Everyone found out that Rustam had those peasants write the petition. The representative from the city really took it to Rustam and the chairman of Qöshchi. “You’re not fit for your positions!” he told them, shaming them in front of everyone...

Jöra What did they say?

Rahima What could they have said? They stood there silently...

Jöra Thank God... Thank God. We’ll see how they feel tomorrow at the executive committee... I bet they’ll still be pale!

Rahima (*thoughtfully*) Well, hopefully that shameless monster won’t kill me. If he somehow gets me alone, there’s no stopping him. And he’ll want to do it himself. It’s not enough to send someone to off me...

Sharofat (*hangs on her mother’s neck*) Stop, mother, don’t say that! God forbid. Let those who would lay a finger on you die young!

Jöra But you’re no weakling. Those who try to undermine you dig their own graves. Goodbye now. I’m off. It’s late, and I have some urgent business to attend to.

Rahima I’m going to make some pilaf. You won’t have some before you go?

Jöra Oh no... I should go, there’s a couple things I have to do.

Rahima For the committee?

Jöra Yes, for the committee. I have to call in a few people for tomorrow.

Rahima Fine, if that’s the case, then go.

Jöra Goodbye now! (*Gets up and leaves.*)

Rahima Come again, Jöra! If you hear something else, come back!

Jöra (*from offstage*) Yes, yes, of course!

Ensemble: 6

Sharofat, Rahima

Rahima Where is your brother, my child?

Sharofat Adhamjon? You know, he hasn't come back yet.

Rahima Is he at his teacher's?

Sharofat Yes, he went there just before lunch. He said he would be back by sundown, but we haven't heard anything.

Rahima Could he have stayed at Abdulahad's? Or did he get caught up playing some place? Should I go out and look? I'm so tired... (*She thinks*) Wait, you could ask Jöra to ask around, has he left yet? Try calling him back. (*Sharofat goes over toward where Jöra exited and calls. There is no answer.*) No, I guess he left.

Sharofat Adhamjon will come back.

Rahima It's not good for him to go walking by himself. He's so young...

Sharofat Wouldn't his teacher walk him back? He should. He's responsible.

Rahima (*looks at Sharofat intently*) Daughter, your teacher is responsible, of course... If he's with Abdulahad, then Abdulahad will bring him back. But if he ran off to play somewhere, that's bad! (*She thinks.*) Can't you go over and ask? First go to the school; then, if he's not there, check at the mosque.

Sharofat (*with exasperation*) Fine...

Rahima Cover your head with something.

Sharofat Isn't it dark out?

Rahima Doesn't matter. Even if it's dark out, cover up. You're a young girl, it's not right.

Sharofat (*exasperated*) Alright.

Rahima Where are the carrots and onions? I was going to peel them.

Sharofat (*comes back.*) In the house on the shelf in the corner. By the way, a woman came by asking for flour for *khudoyi*. I gave her a bowl.

Rahima (*startled.*) When?

Sharofat Just before you came.

Rahima Was Jöra here when she came?

Sharofat Yes, both of us were.

Rahima What kind of *paranji* did she have?

Sharofat Right. It was white and a little torn. There were patches on her veil.

Rahima And did she have a kerchief to put the flour in?

Sharofat She did. It was a white, cotton kerchief with black flowers on it.

Rahima Voy, my dear, my daughter, you didn't realize...

Sharofat (*comes closer.*) What? What should I have realized? Don't be afraid, what is it?

Rahima I saw her at the end of the street. She's... she's my damn co-wife's mother, Jahonbu! She came to check on you! If she saw you sitting with Jöra, she'll have the whole village talking about it soon...

Sharofat (*scared, grasps her mother.*) Voy, mother, what do we do now? I could die! Why didn't I recognize her? If Jöra wasn't so dumb, he could have told me. He just kept talking...

Rahima There's nothing to do about that damn Jöra and his talking! He just keeps flapping his jaws... Fine, fine, my child, you go find your brother. Don't let him be alone at this hour. My co-wife hasn't done anything after all this time, so I'll just have to hope she's not planning anything. (*Sharofat, near crying, leaves with difficulty. Rahima begins to clean up.*) A woman can endure all these evils, but having to endure her husband is a step too far. Voy, let him die! He's taken away my life with that poison of his... (*She sees something on the floor, is startled, and picks it up. Her face is pale, her arms and legs shake.*) Oh, my child, Sharofat, you don't know the fury of a co-wife! That damn woman's mother put a cursed amulet here! (*She drops the cursed amulet from her hand and, drained of strength, weakly sits on the platform.*)

(*Curtain*)

Act I

Scene 2

Struggle and Love

One side of the schoolhouse. The area is surrounded by screens made of grass. The same clay wall from the previous scene. Abdulahad's things include: chairs, a table, a book shelf, books. At one end is a simple teacher's desk made of unpainted wood. Here and there are pictures of educational leaders: Lunacharsky,⁹ the Commissar of Education of Uzbekistan (just before the land reforms), and others...

⁹ Anatoly Lunacharsky was the first People's Commissar of Enlightenment of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1929.

Ensemble: I

Abdulahad, Adhamjon

Abdulahad (*writing, sometimes reads aloud*) “When two young hearts become one, no dark force can ever part them...”

Adhamjon (*screams with a mouth full of fruit*) Sir! What young heart are you talking about?

Abdulahad (*laughs*) Young heart? Hey... That... what... You and Ölmasjon...

Adhamjon Me and Ölmasjon? Why? I hate Ölmasjon... And you think Ölmasjon is young? He’s already 17...

Abdulahad Well, then you and Ashur.

Adhamjon No way. Ashur’s dad is bald!

Abdulahad (*quickly writes down what Adhamjon said*) “Yes... because Ashur’s father is bald...” (*Thinks.*) Hey! What did I just write down? (*Erases.*) Adhamjon! Don’t interrupt, son. I’m writing a letter.

Adhamjon Hey, I’m just... just bored now.

Abdulahad Hold on. I’ll be ready soon.

Adhamjon Let’s go... it’s already dark. I’m afraid to go alone.

Abdulahad (*thinks.*) If you can’t wait... (*Goes to the shelf, gets a picture book for Adhamjon, and gives it to him.*) Here, this book has some strange pictures. Have a look. (*Returns to his desk.*)

Adhamjon (*without opening the book*) Sir! Are there pictures of spirits and witches?

Abdulahad (*busy with his letter*) Yes... there are... there are all kinds of things there...

Adhamjon Hey, sir! Didn’t you say there was no such thing as spirits and witches? So you were lying then?

Abdulahad Right, they don’t exist, but the book has pictures of them.

Adhamjon (*opens the book.*) Voy, I’m scared... hey, there’s a picture of a train. Oh and here are some little wheels. And here this one looks like the bell player’s *bachcha*.¹⁰ Oh repent! (*Mumbles to himself.*)

Abdulahad (*also mumbling to himself while writing*) “Don’t fear your father’s obstinance! I won’t let another have you... We no longer live in a time when women are married off against their will. But we can stand up

¹⁰ Persian for “boy,” but here indicates a male child used in the practice of *bachcha bazi*, in which young boys, usually by way of coercion or manipulation, dance and have sex with older men.

to your father and his ilk. Be patient! If something happens, and he tries to marry you to another, then we'll escape together to the city. There I'll send you to a women's school... You'll study and then you can be a teacher like me. Then they'll call you 'teacher'!"

Adhamjon (*enjoying himself*) And this one looks just like Tökhtasin's cow... this one here is a yellow calf! Wow! And this snake... a spotted snake... One of those chased Sharofat once. I hope that never happens again!

Abdulahad "I know that Azimjon's son is trying everything he can to have you. And that your father's made all kinds of promises to him. Maybe those promises scare you a bit. But always remember Azimjon and other gamblers' time has passed. They have no power now..."

Adhamjon Voy, sir, this is a really big monster! It has some kind of garland around its lips and neck. Voy, look at its hair. Curly like when Sharofat needs to be combed.

Abdulahad "Curly like when Sharofat needs to be combed. I close my letter with a kiss of your hair."

Adhamjon Voy, what a horse! It can probably run as fast as a train. Who's that on it? He looks like my teacher... Sir, is that not you?

Abdulahad (*puts the letter into an envelope while still engrossed in thought*) Yes, I... I...

Adhamjon That's a strange hat you've put on. Where's your other hat? I should tell Sharofat!

Abdulahad (*gives the letter to Adhamjon*) Adhamjon, will you take this letter, and without showing it to anyone, not even your mother, give it to your sister?

Adhamjon (*his eyes still on the book*) Sir, what is this, a dragon?

Abdulahad No... That's called a crocodile...

Adhamjon A crosandile? Yes... It lives in sand? (*Throws the letter on the table and continues flipping the pages of the book.*)

Abdulahad Adhmajon, you can read the rest of the book tomorrow. Let's go take you home now. Put the letter in your shirt and hide it there. (*Gives him the letter again.*)

Adhamjon Wait! I'll take the letter tomorrow! Hey! Look at these sheep, sir! Ho-ho! So many! Just roaming! Whose sheep are these, sir? Yours?

Abdulahad Yes, mine. I'll give you the little lambs. Now get up, let's go!

Adhamjon How many are there? Just one?

Abdulahad A lot... Ten... A hundred maybe...

Adhamjon Hey, you won't give any to Sharofat?

Abdulahad And I'll give some to her and some to you.

Adhamjon How many?

Abdulahad All of them!

Adhamjon No way. I'll take all of them! You can give this one, after you give it some water, to Sharofat, and that'll be enough for her. Her fiancé will give that one to her...

Abdulahad Yes, her fiancé will give her that one. Good, now get up, let's go. Your mother has been waiting a while now...

Adhamjon Wait! Let me look at these other pictures!

Abdulahad (*thinking*) Fine, let's take the book with us. You and Sharofat can look at it together when you get home.

Adhamjon Yes! Yes! Ok! Ok! (*Quickly closes the book and holds it to his chest.*)

Abdulahad Ok, let's go then! (*He turns the lamp on the table off. Then he takes the lantern from the table. As he exits someone catches his eye.*) Hold on just a second, Adhamjon! Someone's coming. Who's there? (*Harshly*) Who is it?

Voice (*comes forward, raising the lamp.*) Adhamjon! Come over here and let me see that book. (*Adhamjon happily goes over, sits down, and shows the book.*) Try to sit quietly now.

Ensemble: 2

Abdulahad, Adhamjon, Jöra

Jöra (*enters.*) Where were you going now, sir? If it was important, I'll leave. I also have some urgent business.

Abdulahad Sit. I have something, but it's not too important. A couple of people were coming, and I've been waiting for them. I was just going to walk Adhamjon home. He's afraid to go home by himself. Though if I leave, my guests might come and think I forgot them.

Jöra If that's the case, I can take him and come back.

Abdulahad If it's not inconvenient, then that would be good. I had a few things to tell you...

Adhamjon (*starts speaking loudly*) Hey, what's this now? A turtle! It's fighting with a snake! Oh, repent! The snake stands up on its hind legs and spits fire... It burns everything... (*The two men are quiet for a moment.*)

Abdulahad You set the chatterbox off again. Now he's going to be hard to stop.

Jöra He babbles so much, it's hard to get a word in. What should we do? Should I just take him?

Abdulahad I don't think you have a choice.

Jöra Yes, best if we start now. Come on, Adhamjon, get up! (*Goes over to him.*)

Adhamjon Not now. I'm looking at pictures.

Abdulahad You can look at the rest when you get home... The book is yours. Get up now.

Adhamjon You won't take it back?

Abdulahad No, I won't. It's all yours...

Adhamjon (*closes the book and puts it under his arm.*) I won't give it to Jöra.

Abdulahad No, you don't have to.

Jöra (*to himself*) You're going to embarrass your sister with all your caprices. You rascal... (*To Adhamjon*) All right, let's go now, you brat!

Adhamjon Yes! I'll go with teacher.

Abdulahad There's something I need to do, so Jöra will take you.

Adhamjon No! If you don't take me, I won't give Sharofat your letter.

Abdulahad Then I'll take back my book. And I'll only give books to Ashur from now on.

Adhamjon No, no, sir, ok. Ok. I'll go with Jöra.

Abdulahad And you'll give the letter to your sister.

Adhamjon Yes. And you'll never give picture books to Ashur and only to me.

Abdulahad Of course, I'll give them to you.

Adhamjon Ok then. (*They leave.*)

Ensemble: 3

Abdulahad Alone

Abdulahad Zokirjon, Zokirjon! Can such perilous times really come again? The air is foul... But it can't stay this way. Azimjon the gambler and Rustam are just using him. They think that if they get Zokirjon, then they'll create a paradise on earth. But, of course, they won't. That's their mistake. If Zokirjon sinks to their depths, then he will be destroyed with the rest of the bourgeoisie and the other backward classes... (*He opens a newspaper and is silent for a moment.*) Ho-ho! This is earlier than it usually comes! A letter to the editor signed by Zokirjon, son of Rahim... Let's have a look... (*Reads, sometimes aloud*) "The editor is mistaken. He has a personal animus against the executive committee"... What kind

of personal animus do I have against the executive committee? That's a bald-faced lie! (*Reading*) "Azimjon is a middling peasant! He has very little land, enough to feed himself." Who's going to believe this? Oh, Zokirjon, Zokirjon! This shows how low he'll sink! (*Silent for a moment.*) Did someone force him to write it? Did Rustam put him up to it? I'll go talk with him myself, I guess. What will he say? (*Hears a soft noise.*) Someone's coming. (*Stands up and goes towards edge of stage.*) Who's there?

Voice It's us... Abdulahad, is that you? (*They enter.*)

Ensemble: 4

Abdulahad, and Villagers Hasan, Egamberdi, and Later Hushnazar

Abdulahad Come, Hasan! I've been waiting for you. Have a seat! (*They greet each other and sit.*)

Hasan We would have come earlier, but Egamberdi couldn't finish up his work, so we're late. Hushnazar will come a little later.

Abdulahad Not a problem. So what did you do? Will you go?

Hasan (*slowly*) We're leaving tonight. Our horses are ready. We just wanted to meet with you first.

Abdulahad Well, I don't have anything to add. You'll submit these letters at the appropriate places. And you'll explain everything to that comrade Aminov. He'll show you where you need to go. Once you do that, it should fix everything up. Zokirjon has apparently already started to yield to their demands... He wrote something to the newspaper praising Rustam and Azimjon the thief. They've been bribing him, I'm sure. But no need to fear, we're in the right, we'll win! They've turned the country here, and he and some of his friends have turned the center. If they hadn't, we would have already dealt with them... But we won't let this stand! So here, take the letters and go! You know the plan, we've been going over it day and night. You won't forget!

Hasan Well, let's go then. Straight to that Aminov's place, right?

Abdulahad That's right. (*Sees them off.*)

Hasan (*already offstage*) We'll get there by next week, if God wills it!

Ensemble: 5

Abdulahad, Later Sharofat

Abdulahad This will slow Rustam down. Those guys are all members of Qöshchi, poor peasants... If they don't trust them in the city, then who can they trust? (*Sharofat's head appears over the wall. She looks at the ground in front of her and then turns away.*)

Sharofat (*from behind the wall, now unseen*) Adhamjon! Adhamjon!

Abdulahad (*leaps up. Surprised*) Who is it?

Sharofat It's me, Adhamjon's sister. I came to find him. Is he here?

Abdulahad (*confidently*) Adhamjon was here. I sent him back with Jöra.

Sharofat Good. I'll go then.

Abdulahad (*quickly goes up to the door, intending to speak confidently but stutters*) Wait, I had something to tell you...

Sharofat (*anxiously*) What could you need to say? Say it, I'm in a hurry...

Abdulahad How can I talk with you if you're on the other side of the door? Should I scream it so the whole street can hear?

Sharofat No, say it softly.

Abdulahad I'm afraid you won't hear me.

Sharofat Good things are always heard.

Abdulahad And the best, sweetest things have to be said directly into the ear. (*A young man appears in the trees nearby, eavesdropping.*)

Sharofat You need to say it into my ear? Who's going to hear it besides me? Just speak already!

Abdulahad Just come closer if you can... then we can be at ease.

Sharofat (*puts her head over the wall, quickly covering her face with a kerchief*) You can whisper your sweet things at Azimjon's place... There's still time.

Abdulahad (*laughs*) You're really scared? Why?

Sharofat If I were you, of course, I wouldn't have anything to fear...

Abdulahad Not Azimjon, not someone even higher positioned than him can part the hearts of two lovers in this time.

Sharofat This new dawn you speak of will see plenty of lovers' hearts parted and crushed! (*A soft sound. Sharofat hides behind the wall, Abdulahad runs over.*)

Abdulahad (*to Sharofat*) Wait there. We'll continue. (*In the other direction*) Who's there? (*A woman in a paranji enters.*)

Ensemble: 6

Abdulahad, Sharofat, Woman

Woman Teacher sir, is that you, my dear?

Abdulahad Yes, it's me. What did you need?

Woman I have a request for you.

Abdulahad Good, and who are you?

Woman I'll tell you later.

Sharofat (*to herself*) What kind of person is this teacher?

Abdulahad (*looks back toward Sharofat, shivers.*) Very well, speak then.

Woman You're not to mention what I tell you to anyone else... If I speak, will anyone else hear? (*The eavesdropping young man hides offstage.*)

Abdulahad (*shivers again, is silent for a moment. Sharofat has a surprised look as she raises her head over the wall to look.*) Go ahead. No one else will hear.

Woman (*sits.*) I'm afraid you won't believe what I have to say... If you see my face, then you'll believe me (*Abdulahad is silent, in shock, the woman lifts her veil.*) God may not have given me anything else, but He gave me some beauty... (*Hides her face again.*)

Sharofat How can I not cry after seeing that?

Abdulahad (*shaking*) What do you want to tell me? Out with it already!

Woman Why are you shaking? Oh, it's that, sir. Yes, my beauty often brings others to their knees, it's my curse...

Abdulahad (*slowly sits down, his legs hurt.*) Speak...

Woman This beauty of mine has cursed me again, my dear. Recently there was a fight over water by the creek, two men started fighting. Did you hear about that?

Abdulahad Yes, I heard. Get to the point, please!

Woman Some 10 days after the commotion, people came and arrested my husband. They said he had hit some peasants. (*Cries*) Since then he's been in the city jail... Rustam, his secretary, and some of the village government's officials wrote a letter accusing him of all these things and sent it to the city court... (*The eavesdropping young man leads his mother onstage. She is without a paranji, but she covers her head with a kerchief.*)

Abdulahad Yes, and? To the point!

Woman My husband was wrongfully imprisoned. I came to get your advice about what to do...

Abdulahad Your husband was in the fight?

Woman Yes, he took a few blows.

Abdulahad Then they were right to imprison him... If he's not guilty, then the matter will be settled in court.

Woman So many people were involved, and they're right to arrest only my husband? What kind of person are you?

Abdulahad So why did they arrest him then?

Woman He was in the fight, but he didn't lay a finger on anyone. He was the one who was beaten. He told me the whole story when he dragged himself home that day...

Abdulahad So they arrested him for something else?

Woman Of course, my dear! Azimjon the gambler and Rustam sent messengers to my house several times. Come to this or that celebration, they told me... “We’ll give your husband land, we’ll give him water above the limit,” they said. But I never agreed... After a while, I finally got fed up and told my husband... He went and had it out with Azimjon. That’s why he’s been locked up for the last month.

Sharofat (*to herself*) Those bastards!

Abdulahad So that’s it! Have you tried filing a petition anywhere?

Woman I haven’t told anyone about Rustam’s debauchery. I wrote that secretary, Zokirjon, that my husband’s not guilty, that he should be released. He would tell me to come tomorrow or the next day, but after about a week, the bastard told me to come at night to talk with him alone and then he would have my husband released. After that I haven’t gone to see him.

Abdulahad (*to himself*) Hey, Zokirjon, Zokirjon! That boy has destroyed his life.

Sharofat (*to herself*) Voy, what a bastard...

Abdulahad (*having thought for a moment.*) Alright, you should go now. I’ll think on this for a bit, and then tell you what to do next. We’ll solve this so that they not only release your husband, but get what’s coming to them too.

Woman Let God will it, sir! When should I come back?

Abdulahad Not too soon. Let no one know you’ve been here. I’ll send Jöra to you.

Woman Who’s Jöra?

Abdulahad Rustam’s guard...

Woman Voy, can we really let him know about it?

Abdulahad We have to find some way. How else can we save your husband?

Woman (*crying*) God grant you long life, sir! And a beautiful bride! And all your dreams and aspirations!

Sharofat (*to herself*) Poor woman...

Abdulahad Where is your home?

Woman By the creek. Ask for Nishonboy, and everyone will know where.

Abdulahad (*writing*) By the creek, Nishonboy. Good, alright. (*Woman leaves.*)

Ensemble: 7

Abdulahad, Sharofat

Abdulahad What's wrong? Are you that surprised?

Sharofat I really was. There were all these thoughts going through my head: is this what Abdulahad does at night?

Abdulahad No, this is a rather ordinary thing. I'm supposed to be with you, and yet I can't get away from all these matters to do it! The evils and machinations here are sometimes too much to take. We've been so busy fighting the elites of the village, the landowners, the useless bureaucrats. In this life-and-death struggle, there's no time for rest!

Sharofat By the time you have your final victory or defeat, I'll be pouring water for Azimjon the gambler's ablutions!

Abdulahad No, never! Don't even think about such things! He and his class are digging their own grave. Do you know what will happen when we reveal what they did to that woman? Aha! (*Cough from offstage.*) Oh, who's that now? (*Goes over.*)

Ensemble: 8

Abdulahad, Sharofat, Ölmas

Ölmas Assalom alaykum, sir!

Abdulahad Vaalaykum assalom, Ölmas, come in. Sit down! (*Shows him a place to sit at the table.*)

Ölmas (*sits at the table, says a prayer.*) Respected teacher, I'm sorry I came at such an inappropriate time. Please don't be upset. I came to talk about something important.

Abdulahad Very well. Tell me.

Ölmas We recently welcomed a grandson, but it's been a while, and we still haven't come up with a name. I just came from fighting with my wife about it.

Abdulahad I see, why?

Ölmas She said she wanted to call him "Elm." She said she liked that one. I said I wanted to name him "Ilyos." So that he will have a long life like the prophet Elijah. And we've been going on like that. She found a name she liked but I didn't, and I found a name I liked but she didn't. And now, when I came home from work, we started again and got into a fight, so I came to you.

Abdulahad What can I do? I'm shocked... If I give him a name, will you both accept it?

Ölmas First hear some of ours, and then you think of one.

Abdulahad (*looking in the direction of Sharofat*) Very well...

Ölmas Mine are Ilyos, Hizr, Umar, Horun, Aziz, Luqmon, Sulaymon, Haybar, Muslim, short for Abu Muslim. Sayyar, for Nasri ibn Sayyar... maybe Kitob... Ravshan... for Boboyi Ravshan...

Abdulahad (*laughs*) Good...

Ölmas Now the wife's. They're not good. You probably don't need to hear them.

Abdulahad No, say hers too.

Ölmas Alright, I'll go ahead and do it, so she's not offended. She has Elm, Rock, Pick, Storm, Companion, Whip, Axe, Hammer, Sickie, Long, Dog, Cat, Chattels... Ok, enough! Now you suggest some name that the Bolsheviks would like, a name that fits our time.

Abdulahad Neither yours nor hers will do. The best name for a villager would be Dehqonboy—The Peasant is Rich. Use that one.

Ölmas Alright... I'm convinced, but will she be?

Abdulahad Tell her that I said it.

Ölmas She won't believe me!

Abdulahad She won't believe you?

Ölmas My wife's capricious: she grates on me as if she were a khan's daughter! She never believes me. If you could write something, I have a daughter-in-law who's a teacher. If she reads it to my wife, then she'll believe it. Can you do that please?

Abdulahad Alright, I'll write it. (*Bends over and writes.*)

Ölmas Very well, agreed. God grant you safety! Goodbye now!

Abdulahad Goodbye! (*Sees him off.*)

Ensemble: 9

Abdulahad, Sharofat

Sharofat (*raises her head above the wall*) Who was that? Some blabbering old man?

Abdulahad (*approaches her.*) He just asked for a little thing and left, poor man... His name is Ölmas. He's the father of the miller.

Sharofat They just come to ask you for everything, I guess. They never let you be?

Abdulahad What else can we do? We're their lawyers, their experts, their judges... (*Another cough from offstage, a young child enters.*)

Abdulahad (*starts moving towards the child.*) Another one's here.

Sharofat I'm scared.

Ensemble: 10

Abdulahad, Sharofat, Child

Child (*enters.*) Sir! We have someone sick at our house, and he's getting worse. Can you come look? They sent me to ask.

Abdulahad No, son, I don't know medicine. Go tell them to somehow go to the city and find a doctor. The Russians' doctor offers free examinations and gives good medicines. Go, son, tell them.

Child (*slowly*) My parents told me to bring you...

Abdulahad But I don't know medicine. A doctor would be better...

Child The doctor's far away... (*Leaves.*)

Ensemble: 11

Abdulahad, Sharofat

Abdulahad And now they're making me into their doctor...

Sharofat I'm really scared.

Abdulahad Why?

Sharofat You wouldn't understand. My mother's co-wife's mother is a very bad woman. That dumb Jöra came to our house and talked with me in the courtyard before my mother came home... A woman in a *paranji* came and asked for flour. She said she was gathering *khudoyi* and left. When my mother returned, she told me that it was her co-wife's mother and that she had come to eavesdrop on me.

Abdulahad You didn't recognize her at the time?

Sharofat I didn't. My mother told me. Now I really regret everything that I said then. If I had found her out, oh what I would have done... Now she's spreading rumors about me to the whole village.

Abdulahad Let her! Don't worry! Soon enough she and the others will all fall from their cloud.

Sharofat I don't know. What do you believe in, that you can be so careless? Is Azimjon the gambler a joke to you? Is my father just a harmless child?

Abdulahad I don't believe in any ordinary thing. I believe in time. Time is on our side! Don't fear! There is no force stronger than time in this world! Time does what it wants. What it loves, it lifts to the heavens, and what it hates, it buries in seven layers of earth. Azimjon the gambler and all these old Ölmas are jokes and infants before time... Time now ceaselessly moves so that the Sharofats of the world can marry whomever they choose. So that their parents will not impede them, and it will destroy those who do! Destroy! (*Approaches her.*)

Sharofat No, enough! No one will marry me without Azimjon the gambler's permission!

Abdulahad What? What? No one will marry you without Azimjon's permission? No one? Wait, wait! (*Leaps towards her, takes her by the hand, and moves to kiss her. As soon as he does, a voice sounds out from offstage. Jöra enters, dragging the eavesdropping young man and his mother behind him.*)

Sharofat Voy, what is this? Who are these people? (*Covers herself.*)

Ensemble: 12

Abdulahad, Sharofat, Jöra, Abdukhalil, Jahonbu

Jöra Sir, these two here have been eavesdropping on you for a while now. You must not have seen them.

Abdulahad Who are they?

Jöra This woman is from Rahima's co-wife's family!

Sharofat (*lifts her head.*) Voy, Jahonbu! Jahonbu! Jahonbu the debauched! Jahonbu the gypsy!

Jahonbu I'm not the one who was playing around alone with some strange man, girl...

Abdulahad Watch what you say. Are you doing Rustam's bidding here? There's no one who doesn't fear him, huh? And you'll do anything, you'll watch the whole world burn, to ensure that your daughter and her children own this country? What did you see? What?

Jahonbu I saw nothing, child... We didn't see anything... You're right... So no reason to be upset...

Abdulahad Enough with the lies. Save those for Rustam and his friends. Were you planning on reproaching Sharofat and me for our conversation? What right do you have? She loves me, and I love her! And those who stand between us will be ground up... She's mine, and no one will take her away from me...

Jahonbu Well, you're a silver-tongued one, a good man... Fooling around with someone's veiled girl, offending a father's honor.

Sharofat Watch your mouth, you depraved pimp! Who's fooling around? If you mean talk, then we talked, I don't deny that! But I wasn't fooling around!

Jahonbu Is that something other than fooling around? When you spend half the night talking to some unmarried young man, when you kiss him... Look at yourself! I'll tell your father, oh, what I'll make him do!

Abdulahad What you'll make him do! We're not wood here; we're people! See to yourself first! (*Approaches her.*) What is it to come into someone's courtyard in the middle of the night without permission, to sit there like a thief, eavesdropping? What is it according to the law? Do you know?

Abdukhalil You know the law, sir. How should we know?

Abdulahad They'll throw you in a cell for this kind of behavior! Did you know that?

Jahonbu No one but Rustam can touch us. As long as Rustam is in charge, no one can do anything to us.

Abdulahad We'll see! Jöra, lock these two up in the jail here. I'll see to everything else tomorrow morning.

Jahonbu Putting us in jail? What are you now, an official?

Jöra I'm nervous, sir... Rustam...

Abdulahad Rustam has nothing to do with this. I'm a member of the executive committee. Will you follow orders or no?

Jöra I...

Abdulahad Go get my students Rafiq, Shukur, Ghani, Ne'ematjon! Go quickly! Or you won't agree to that either?

Jöra Alright, fine... (*Starts to leave.*)

Abdulahad Wait! (*Takes a pistol in his hand.*) Sharofat, come down from the wall there. Jöra will take you back to your house, then he'll come back here. Go, and don't come back here alone. Jöra, go with her! (*Jöra helps Sharofat down. Sharofat silently bows her head and covers her face with her kerchief. Jahonbu approaches her, and they angrily stare at one another.*)

Jöra We're leaving. Hey, didn't we have something we needed to talk about? When are we going to talk?

Abdulahad See her off and bring the boys here, and then, in the morning, we'll talk.

Jöra Ok...

Abdulahad I'll sit here until you bring the boys! Do you understand? If you can't lock up these two, then they can! (*Sits down across from Jahonbu and Abdukhalil with his pistol in his hand. Abdukhalil's face turns pale, Jahonbu is also visibly scared. She is silent.*) Rustam dug a pit for himself, and you idiots, instead of trying to stop him, leapt down into it with him! You'll suffocate down there! But don't worry: in the darkness you can finally take a breath and relax!

(End of First Act)

Act II

(*in two scenes*)

Scene I

One More Enemy

Rustam's courtyard. There is a porch on the left, a door from the porch that leads inside, and a window opened to the porch. In front of the porch are a few trees. On the right is a platform, a pit for vegetables (an open cellar), and a wall.

Ensemble: I

Sharofat, Later Qumri

Sharofat (*seated on the platform and facing the porch, embroidering. She puts her embroidery away as someone approaches from behind. She begins to speak*) Qumri! Bless my soul! Come over here. Let's talk. I've been feeling cramped, imprisoned in these four walls...

Qumri (*from offstage*) Can a pretty young girl like you really feel imprisoned while singing and embroidering? Imprisonment is what we have, my dear. My stepmother doesn't give me a moment of rest. Now she told me we're going to make green dumplings and sent me out to get greens. I'm on my way to the steppe.

Sharofat I wanted to commiserate with you about that.

Qumri (*from offstage*) Forget it, my dear, I'm not in the mood for commiserating.

Sharofat Qumri! Don't just ignore me, dear. Come sit a little. You can come through our house to the field anyways. Come, my dear. Let's talk.

Qumri (*from offstage*) Oh, Sharofat. I guess you won't drop it. But what am I supposed to tell my horrible stepmother?

Sharofat I'd take your troubles any day. Come, dear friend!

Qumri (*appears on stage behind the wall.*) How am I supposed to get over this wall? (*Sarcastically*) If I hurt myself, what husband will have me?

Sharofat Hey... Over there, by the tandoor, climb over there, dear. Go over there. (*To herself*) Not everyone is the same, I guess. This girl has a mountain of troubles, and she's indifferent. She always has time to laugh and play.

Qumri (*holding a basket in her hand. Inside the basket is a knife, sings as she climbs over the wall*):

If I could be a blue bird,
 And spread my wings and fly.
 If I could lose myself in mountains
 And leave my earthly home behind...
 Yes, my girl, how are you?
 Is my heart a tea kettle
 To put your tea in?
 Am I, in your time of darkness,
 A vessel for your sorrow?

(Speaking) Is that what you sing, sitting here? Oh, my dear girl, my dear.
(Sits down, silent for a moment.)

Sharofat It's as if you found the exact words sounding in my soul. I've had so many misfortunes in my life lately that my heart has filled with blood from worry.

Qumri You don't have a stepmother. You should be grateful!

Sharofat As much evil as a stepmother does, at least she only does it to you. You can endure it if it's on your head alone. Damn that co-wife, damn her!

Qumri How are you talking about a co-wife if you're not married?

Sharofat I mean my mother's co-wife. She doesn't let her alone for a moment, constantly searching, digging for weaknesses... Both my mother and I are dead tired of it. One day when I was talking with that idiot Jöra, the co-wife's mother walked in on us. And then later when I went to get Adhamjon from school, she and her older son Abdukhalil eavesdropped. Abdulahad had her arrested. After that my father said he would run Abdulahad out of town. With all this, a person has to carry her mother's pain, her own pain, and others' pain...

Qumri Ah... that teacher of yours is a strange one... What's he doing, toying with these bastards? If your mother is in agreement, why not just quietly go somewhere and perform the ceremony in secret? Why bother with this law stuff? When will he get sick of it? By the time he finds his law, Azimjon the gambler and your father will get together and have the last word...

Sharofat Of course! I've been suffering trying to get him to do that! Can't that damn Abdulahad think about someone else for a change? No, no, no! He spends all his time listening to peasants' petitions... *(Silent)* Voy, Qumri, if I don't marry Abdulahad fine, but I'll die if Azimjon the gambler makes me his son's third wife...

Qumri What's that freeloader doing taking another wife on top of his two? Let the earth swallow him up!

Sharofat He doesn't have a child from either...

Qumri So he thinks that if he can't get a wife from those two, he can get one from you, dear? He should look at himself, the bastard! It's his fault...

Sharofat Can anyone ever say that? They always blame the woman! Who would ever believe you if you said the man is at fault?

Qumri (*sadly, softly*) I...

Sharofat (*sadly, softly*) You're alone...

Qumri (*sadly, softly*) All of us are alone... (*Silent for a moment.*)

Sharofat (*softly mumbling, starts needlework again. Sings*):

Don't let your gardener die,
Don't let him be like me.
Don't let him be a shepherd
Who, like me, chases his sheep off

Qumri (*sadly*) You still haven't heard...

Sharofat (*suddenly throws down her needlework, her face becomes serious.*)

Qumri I'll soon have a co-wife...

Sharofat (*scared*) Don't say that! (*stares*)

Qumri Maybe you still... Maybe you still have some hope... Mine is gone...

Sharofat (*with the same intonation as before*) How? (*Stares.*)

Qumri (*sadly*) My stepmother said so... It's her relative... He's almost fifty... He has one wife who became ill 3 months ago... She can barely walk...

Sharofat Voy, let the earth swallow him! They can't treat her somehow? That's what men do? When their wives get sick, they just marry another one?

Qumri What treatment? He hasn't even asked about her in the last 3 months. "I don't have time for an invalid," he says...

Sharofat Voy, God take him!

Qumri One of the wife's relatives came to look after her... They say the husband's done the hajj three times... That's why my damn father agreed to the marriage... And my stepmother has just silently seen to everything...

Sharofat Let me just die here now. No need to commiserate...

Qumri I was tormented for a long time, but finally, I agreed to it. Fine, I said, this is the fate written on my forehead. Why keep torturing myself when there's no hope left? You still have hope, even if there's only a little... (*Makes an attempt at a joke*) So go straight to your teacher and tell him to elope with you now! Run away as fast as you can and elope! Let your father, Jahonbu, Azimjon, and Tökhtasin just grind their teeth at your escape... I'll marry that old hajji¹¹ without a murmur of discontent, and that poor old sick woman will die before the wedding... She'll be saved from her unfaithful husband, and I'll be saved from a co-wife... I'm still young. If I set my teeth on one another and endure, I'll also be saved from the damn hajji. And then, if God and fate will it, I'll see my aspirations come about. If I don't get pregnant and don't get old too quickly, my dear. The hajji has no children thus far, thank God...

Sharofat (*her face lights up some*) With just a few sentences you've cheered me up, my dear... What a person you are! (*Embraces her, kisses her on the forehead.*)

Qumri Don't miss your chance... Get your Abdulahad alone somehow and come to an agreement with him.

Sharofat While looking for Adhamjon the other night, I got a chance to talk to him, but if he won't listen, what can I do? When I come from the garden, he descends from a mountain, my dear! How are we supposed to agree? And no one let us talk anyways: first one person comes, then some other. One person has a petition, another wants a letter, and another one asks for medicine. My head is still in a haze...

Qumri I thought he wasn't an official. When our peasants find one of those do-nothings, they never let him leave the house...

Sharofat One old man asked him to name his child...

Qumri A sheltered one, he is... But if you tell him there's no time to dawdle, then he'll have no choice... Be strict with him, tell him "if you don't figure out a way quickly, then I'll marry Azimjon's son, Tökhtasin the freeloader." You're just staring at me! Don't, my dear, you have to convince him... Grab him and don't let go! "You'll die without ever finding your law," tell him. Tell him, "you think you'll be able to come and pry me away from Tökhtasin, from that wet rug's bosom?" Don't be ashamed, give him a kiss or two... Let him take his advance on marriage... Wet his lips a bit...

¹¹ An epithet given to people who have completed the hajj.

Sharofat (*thinks*) Your damned tongue... You kiss him!

Qumri If I were in your place, I would have married him already. Give him his advance, put him in your debt... (*Elongates her words*) My dear! (*Embraces and kisses her.*) My sweet... (*Rustam enters through the door.*)

Ensemble: 2

Sharofat, Qumri, Rustam

Rustam (*glowering, brow furrowed, with a coarse, crude voice, speaks in short, broken sentences, mostly questions*) Sharofat!

Qumri (*turns around*) Voy! Your father's here, my dear. I should go.

Sharofat (*fearful but hides her fear under a bright face. Moves quickly.*) Come in, father! (*To Qumri*) Wait. Hide and I'll let you out the way you came later. (*Qumri hides behind a tree.*)

Rustam Where is your mother? Where is she?

Sharofat Sit down, father.

Rustam "Where is your mother?" I asked you.

Sharofat She hasn't been back since she said she was leaving for work this morning. I don't know... Sit down, father, I'll go put the tea on. (*Starts inside.*)

Rustam I've been looking for your bitch of a mother since morning, and I can't find her! What damn grave is she hiding in?

Sharofat Father... Sit down for a moment, I'll put the tea on, and she'll come...

Rustam To hell with your tea! I'm your father, and you're my daughter! (*Starts to leave. After taking a couple heavy steps, deep in thought, he returns.*) Hey, I'm talking to you! Don't even try to say that you won't marry Azimjon's son! I will bury you if you start talking nonsense! Zokirjon will ask you: "Who do you want to marry?" and you'll tell him "I want Azimjon's son, Tökhtasin"! Do you hear me? If you don't, I'll slit your mother's throat in front of you! And then you'll marry not Tökhtasin, but that addict Jöra instead. A girl who climbs over walls to talk to teachers is just right for an addict! Do you understand? Do you? (*Sharofat turns pale, is silent. Rustam haughtily steps away. Then Sharofat quietly drops down in exhaustion into a seated position.*)

Ensemble: 3

Sharofat, Qumri

Qumri (*comes out and supports Sharofat.*) Sharofat, hey Sharofat! Open your eyes, my dear! Don't be upset, this is what a father does, Sharofat!

Sharofat! Listen! Oh, God take me! (*Runs over to get water from the canal and brings it.*) Sharofat, drink some water, my dear! (*Puts the cup to her mouth.*) Open your eyes (*Sharofat drinks some and opens her eyes.*) Don't scare me like that, I nearly died...

Sharofat (*weakly*) Did my mother come? (*Looks around.*)

Qumri No, she should come soon. Stand up, my dear, keep singing and sewing. Fathers do that. You just tell him "yes, father" and go on about your business. As fast as you can, go find your "lawman," hold him tightly, and have him take you away from here.

Sharofat Now if I can manage to tell him the whole truth this time, maybe I can convince him. If not, then this is my fate. My father wasn't taking other answers...

Qumri Then do that, my dear. I have to go find my greens now. I hope my damn stepmother hasn't started frying yet...

Sharofat (*stands up.*) Go then, I'll see you off through the little door there.

Qumri (*sharply*) I can do it, Sharofat, don't worry yourself.

Sharofat No, I have to lock the door behind you. (*They leave.*)

Qumri (*from offstage*) Be clear with him! Set this spineless teacher of yours straight!

The stage is empty for a moment. Then Jöra enters. One of his eyes is covered with a dirty cloth belt. Jöra stands for moment in somber silence. Sometimes he knits his brow, sometimes he grabs at it, rubbing his head as if in pain. He then moves to sit on the platform and lowers his head. Sharofat returns, mumbling something clearly sad, though not a song.

Ensemble: 4

Sharofat, Jöra

Sharofat (*smiling*) Jöra, is that you? Did you come to hear some good news? (*Jöra is silent.*) Why are you silent? Voy, why is your eye covered? What happened?

Jöra (*sadly*) What else could it be? Your father...

Sharofat Damn him! What did he do?

Jöra We were at a feast. Your father, already drunk, threw a cup full of vodka at my face. The cup cracked and the vodka spilled...

Sharofat Voy, to hell with those damn parties of my father's. Is it bad?

Jöra Yes, of course, I'm down an eye, aren't I?

Sharofat My father was just here, asking for my mother. I told him she'd be here soon, to just sit and drink some tea, but he just cursed unheard of

things at me. I turned white as cotton and fell to the ground. My friend Qumri brought me to. God give him what he deserves!

Jöra Even if God gives him that, you will suffer too. Though God would surely reward the man who beats your father to death...

Sharofat That's definitely true. (*Laughs*) Should I tell you what he said? He said "Zokirjon will ask you who you want to marry, and you'll say Azimjon's son, Tökhtasin. If you don't, I'll kill your mother and give you away to that nut Jöra." There's my good news for you.

Jöra He's still planning on giving me things! He started with this eye... (*Silent.*) Unfortunately, I didn't know about everything that happened here, so I've only brought you bad news.

Sharofat Voy, Jöra, what happened now? My mother hasn't come yet...

Jöra The sooner she comes, the better because I need to tell her what I learned. I have somewhere I need to be.

Sharofat What misfortune is waiting to fall upon my head now? Won't you tell me?

Jöra Why wouldn't I? I will. (*Silent for a moment.*) Another enemy has joined their ranks. But it's a big one...

Sharofat Voy, I wish I'd never been born. Why does my mother have to interfere in all these government matters? Now everyone's become our enemy. Who is it now?

Jöra Zokirjon.

Sharofat Voy, God take me! Zokirjon? The Zokirjon that my father mentioned? Isn't he Abdulahad's closest friend?

Jöra (*laughs some*) Your Abdulahad... Yes, they were close. Before, others couldn't separate them, but now they've gotten to Zokirjon and corrupted him...

Sharofat Who? Azimjon's people?

Jöra Yes, them. Your father, first of all. Recently your father, Azimjon, and all of their sons of bitches hunted down and caught Zokirjon. Since then, he's been saying very different things. He told Azimjon that he would soon get rid of Abdulahad and give you away to him. Now your father is paving the way for that. He wants to kick your mother out of Qöshchi as well...

Sharofat You might as well say all hope is lost. Is Abdulahad alone now?

Jöra Zokirjon is a bad enemy to have. He was a secretary for a *mingboshi*¹² for a long time. He knows the way Rustam is paving very well. When he takes up a task, he doesn't leave it undone. Tomorrow or the next day, they'll drive Abdulahad out of town. (*The two are silent.*)

Sharofat Jöra! (*Puts her hand on his shoulder.*) Jöra... What was I going to say now? I had something to tell you... No, forget it. It looks like it doesn't matter now.

Jöra Speak, speak, you know me. For you, for your mother, I'd give my life. Even for your Abdulahad, if he told me to throw myself into a fire, I'd do it without a second thought.

Sharofat How do I say this? What do I say? (*Silent for a moment.*) That... what... Tell Abdulahad to take me away from here, to steal me away to the city where we'll get married. But don't tell my mother about this...

Jöra Your mother is a strange woman; I couldn't tell her this.

Sharofat If she finds out, she'll never allow it.

Jöra But will Abdulahad accept such an idea? He's on the same path as your mother. They want to do everything openly; they want to throw corrupt people like your father out of government. The two of them are dead stubborn. And they're not people who would sit idle... They must be planning something...

Sharofat Hey, do you think they'll really fight back against Azimjon? The entire village is scared of him. And they have the head of the local government with them, my damn father. Forget it, Jöra. Don't try to get my hopes up. If you tell Abdulahad what I said, you'll be able to convince him. Just try to convince him, friend...

Jöra No one but you can convince him of anything. If you speak to him, something will come of it. Be brave, speak strongly.

Sharofat (*sits down, silent for a moment, then speaks with difficulty*) Jahonbu's swift legs are always behind me; her prying ears always trained on me. How am I supposed to see him, to talk with him?

Jöra (*laughs, speaks quickly*) I'll find a way. As long as you're agreed to it... But don't fear... It will work out. We'll convince Abdulahad that your way is the only one.

¹² A *mingboshi*, literally "head of one thousand," was a tsarist colonial official drawn from the native population to oversee tax collection and other duties in a region known as a *volost*. He was elected by the region's *ellikboshis*, "heads of fifty," who were themselves elected by approximately fifty households.

Sharofat (*thinking*) If there's no other way, then what else can we do? I'll have to convince him. (*Becomes distressed*) But tell me how.

Jöra I'll bring a men's hat, a pair of good boots, a uniform, spectacles, and a pack of cigarettes. You'll put on those clothes and the glasses, smoke the cigarettes, and in the evening, we'll go to the executive committee. You'll be able to talk with Abdulahad until morning. No one will recognize you, and no one will know about your meeting.

Sharofat (*laughs*) Voy, God take me! Would that really work?

Jöra It will. Be brave. If you give up now, then you'll be Azimjon's daughter-in-law. Don't even think about it. We'll do it tonight. I'll go right now, get the clothes, and speak with Abdulahad! (*Sharofat is silent.*) Be ready.

Sharofat (*in thought*) How will I ask my mother?

Jöra (*laughs*) What girl doesn't deceive her mother? You have neighbors, you have friends. Just tell her you're going to see them. Get ready, it's late.

Sharofat (*smiles*) Alright... (*Suddenly*) Voy, no, it can't work. Really, how could it?

Jöra (*jumps up and starts out*) No, it will work just fine! Don't even think about it!

Jöra leaves. Sharofat bends her knees slightly, laughs, smiles while staring at one area of the stage. After a moment, Jöra runs in again.

Sharofat (*startled*) You need something else?

Jöra Her... That woman who was here the other day for flour is coming here again. She's from your mother's co-wife's family. Last time she was up to no good!

Sharofat Yes, yes. She came here to lay a cursed amulet. She probably wants to do it again. Voy, that damn woman!

Jöra She must have figured out that it didn't work. But this time, we'll have a bit of fun with her. You hide inside and lock the door. I'll do the same. Go now, into the house. If she calls, don't answer. I'll hide out here. When she tries to lay another amulet, you come out and grab her. Then call me and I'll come. (*Sharofat gets up and goes into the house, while Jöra hides behind the platform.*)

Jahonbu (*dressed in the same way as the previous time. Goes straight to the porch and sits down. Lays the bundled handkerchief in her hands on the porch open. She sits silently waiting for some time. Then she looks around. Angrily*) Is there nobody here? Hey, where are the owners of this house? People have come for alms. People have come for flour for *khudoyi*! (*Silent.*) Is

there nobody here? (*Angrier*) Hey, good people! My dears! (*Silent.*) It looks like nobody's here. Could they have gone to their neighbors'? Or are they sleeping inside? (*Angry again*) Hey, where are the owners? (*Gets up from the porch and looks around. Stretches her neck out to look inside.*) No, there's nobody here. It looks like my work this time hasn't been for nothing. Oh, what luck! (*Takes a knife out from inside her paranji and begins to dig in the ground with it. Has an amulet in her other hand.*) Oh God, let the pillows of these infidels dry up and disappear!

Sharofat, observing, silently comes out of the house. She suddenly grasps at and seizes the amulet in Jahonbu's hand. The knife falls from her other hand.

Sharofat (*screams*) I caught her! I caught her! I caught our enemy, help, come here now!

Jöra Yes, what happened, what happened? (*Runs in. Jöra takes the knife and amulet. Sharofat raises Jahonbu's paranji. Jahonbu is pale, shakes. She cannot speak. Neighbors, having heard the noise, come in.*)

Voices Voy, what happened?

- What's going on?
- Voy, Jahonbu!
- What have you done?

Jöra This is the woman Jahonbu. From Rustam's wife's family. She came here to bury this amulet and lay a curse on his other wife's family. We caught her in the act!

Sharofat Oh God, let the curse fall on her!

Voices Voy, repent!

- Have you no shame?
- It would be better if you died!
- To hell with her curse!
- Haven't you done enough?
- Repent!
- Look at her shake!
- And how pale she is.
- She deserves anything she gets!

Jöra Enough, ladies. Let's see that she gets back to her home in one piece!

Voices Give her to the government!

- Bring her to the court!
- Let Rahima teach her a lesson!
- What hasn't Rahima suffered?
- Hey, don't you work for the government? Can't you throw her in jail?
- No, can you really put the chairman's beloved mother-in-law in jail? How could he?
- Chairman, citizen—aren't we all equal now? This government wouldn't lose anything by throwing her in jail.

Jöra Ladies! We can't do anything against the law. Even though I'm a policeman, I can't just disobey the law and throw people in jail. Rustam is the one who has to give the order!

Voices Voy, woe are we!

- We will be judged!
- This will be on our heads at Judgment Day!

Jöra Wait! Let me do everything according to the law. We'll remove her veil! We'll tie her hands behind her back. We'll tie her up in her *paranji*! We'll hang her kerchief from her neck! And we'll keep her cursed amulet for Rahima! (*Gives it to Sharofat.*) Her knife—it's a good, sharp knife—we'll keep it as a prize. (*Holds it at his side.*) We'll do all this to her now and see her home in that pitiable state! (*Begins doing these things one by one. At the same time Sharofat tells those assembled what happened.*) Good, we're ready! Now let's walk her!

Jöra pushes her. Jahonbu silently starts out of the courtyard. Behind her is the boisterous crowd. Coming towards them in the opposite direction is Rahima. Her head and her hands are wrapped with kerchiefs. The kerchiefs are wet with blood. When the two women see one another, the crowd suddenly falls into a deep silence and retreats from the encounter. Then Rahima falls into Jöra's embrace. Everyone is awestruck and silent. Jahonbu silently leaves, while everyone is focused on Rahima.

(*Curtain*)

Act II

Scene 2

Bright Nights

The street in front of the village executive committee. On the audience-facing wall there is a sign hanging. From this wall a dim light from the building's lamp falls on the stage. But the light is faint in this bright night. It is just after dusk. A group of young village men are seated, conversing and singing.

Ensemble: I

Young Men: Böta, Rahmat, Turdali, Sodiq, Yunis, Öktam, an
Unnamed Young Man, and Others

Böta (*seated alone at one end of the stage, softly sings in a somber voice*):

A long, long rope
 May I leave it on the ground?
 My black-eyed beloved
 May another take her? (hey friend)

Don't trust your friend, father
 Stepfather will be upset...
 Don't take her by her wrist, father
 Hajji will be upset...

Caravans of camels
 Cross the mountain pass.
 To whom should I complain (hey)
 Of your generous hand? (hey friend!)

Don't trust your friend, father
 Stepfather will be upset...
 Don't take her by her wrist, father
 Old man hajji will be upset...

Sodiq Hey, Böta! What's wrong with you? We're all having a good time, and you're over there by yourself sulking! What happened? Are you depressed?

Yunis Yes, what happened? You look like that teacher, who's always complaining about something he's powerless to stop.

Öktam Hey, tell us! That's what we're here for.

Voices Yes, tell us!

- Tell us!
- If you can't tell us, who can you tell?

Turdali If a man doesn't help another, who will help him? Speak!

Voices (*suddenly*):

- Hey, tell us! (*Silence.*)

Rahmat Let him be. Don't torture the poor boy. If he doesn't want to talk about it, then it's not something that needs to be said. Does everyone tell everyone everything?

Öktam (*jokingly*) Yeah, really. Let him be. Are you going to lay the poor boy's secret out for the world to see? That's no good! Let him sing his song. Böta, go ahead! (*He prods him.*)

Don't let such pain fall
On your humble servant's head.
Let my heart's cry
Never be known to my eyes...

(*Everyone laughs.*)

Böta You're all scoundrels. A person can't express himself in song without your prying now? Only a person in pain sings, and someone who's not doesn't then?

Öktam (*as before*) Sure, Böta. Would a person in pain be singing all the time? Take the teacher, for instance. He suffers so much, but have you ever heard him sing even once?

Yunis Hey, he writes poetry...

Turdali They say the trunks at Rahima's place are full of his letters and lines of his poetry...

Böta It looks like both of us won't be able to walk the streets free of your observations. (*Gets up.*) We'll have to sing at home.

Rahmat Böta, what are you doing? We're just teasing. Why so angry?

Öktam Vinegar and water don't mix for this one. He's not much for criticism.

Voices Since when did he become so damn sensitive?

- Who stressed him out?
- Oh, the poor thing!

Böta (*from the far side of the stage*) These filthy words of yours might just drive me from the village. (*Leaves.*)

Ensemble: 2

Young Men Except for Böta

Voices Oh-ho!

- Get lost!
- If the village is too narrow for you, then just try the city. You'll really enjoy yourself in those narrow streets!
- Forget the real work here and go become a speculator.¹³
- You'll get yourself a car! It'll be great.

Öktam Oh, the anger of that scoundrel! What happened to him, friends?

Sodiq Some tragedy must have befallen him.

Young Man I know what happened to him!

Öktam Why have you been sitting here as if your mouth is sealed shut then?

Young Man I was afraid to talk about it in front of him.

Voices Speak already!

Voices (*everyone*) Speak!

Young Man He's in love with Qumri.

¹³ At the time when Chölpon wrote this play, speculation was not yet illegal thanks to the New Economic Policy. Installed by Lenin in 1924, the policy permitted limited capitalistic economic activities. As Stalin took power in the late 1920s, he and the Soviet press began to attack speculation in agriculture, accusing so-called *kulaks*, comparatively well-off peasants, of hoarding grain and selling at a market price preferable to them. In 1928, Stalin initiated the collectivization of agriculture and *dekulakization*, which saw millions of so-called kulaks across the country expropriated and exiled. The "land reforms" frequently referenced in this play are those of 1925 to 1927. Those reforms sought to expropriate rich landowners, but not to collectivize agriculture.

Sodiq Which Qumri?

Young Man There's that short Qumri, right? She's Tökhfa's stepdaughter and Rustam the lame's daughter?

Voices Yes, yes! (*Several suddenly*):

- Of course, of course.
- Qumri the blabbermouth...
- The she-devil...
- She's turned out nice, right?

Young Man But how's this poor sharecropper boy supposed to offer enough to marry her? How can he do it if he spends half his life planting another's land and then the other half in crippling debt?

Rahmat So that's what this singing was all about? If he really works, he should be able to save enough. If we just sat around saying: "We're sharecroppers. We don't have money to get married," then how did even one of us get married? We're all married, even though we've had to sell near everything we owned and go into debt.

Young Man Even if you tried, what would you be able to do in his situation? He had someone speak with Rustam the lame, who told him that Rustam would agree because they're equals, but the stepmother's word is law.

Öktam That Tökhfa whore? An honorable one she is...

Young Man Right. That Tökhfa whore refused him! She wants to give her daughter to her uncle, who already has a wife.

Sodiq Who's her uncle?

Young Man Böta's boss...

Voices Hey, that old man, Matkarim hajji?

- The one with one foot on the ground and the other in the grave?
- That poor girl!
- But she was always a spirited girl, eh?

Öktam Just at the moment when she matured and was able to enjoy some freedom, her parents are marrying this spirited girl off to an old pile of straw. What a shame, what a shame!

Young Man First she cried and cried, but such is the fate of girls, and she eventually resigned to it, I heard.

Sodiq It's good that she did. Old man Matkarim hajji won't live long.

Öktam If that's the case, then Böta can just wait. No reason to fret. (*everyone is silent*) But, friends, what a bad situation Sharofat has gotten herself into! Tökhtasin the freeloader won't die any time soon.

Sodiq No, he's grown fat on his haram father's wealth. It keeps him alive and young.

Rahmat That lazy Tökhtasin the belly will take a few years from Sharofat too. The poor girl!

Sodiq There's not a better girl in the whole country.

Yunis The teacher can't do anything?

Rahmat Hey, enough with your Abdulahad! What is he already: a teacher, a groom, or a penniless lawman? There's nothing he doesn't have his hands in, for God's sake!

Sodiq You're right. Rahima would be a better leader than him if it came to that... But... Yes, she's an official, but she's powerless before her husband.

Öktam What kind of power does she have anyways? She's just an assistant in Qöshchi. She can only order the poor peasants around.

Young Man Then let's make her a *mingboshi* or an *amin*!¹⁴

Yunis You mean chairman of the executive committee! Say executive committee! Rahima's had such a tough time because Rustam is chairman of the executive committee...

Öktam Hey, that executive committee, for me, is just the flip side of the same coin. They have "com" in the name, like our sandy desert Qizilqum. But do you think that committee could ever step foot in the desert? You step one foot in the sand, and you're no longer on solid ground. In the desert you have to be like Okhunboboyev!¹⁵ He knew how to make a desert bloom!

Rahmat Enough, friend. It's hard to be an Okhunboboyev. You think it's easy to manage an entire country? If our stomachs are full, we should be glad and praise God. That poor Okhunboboyev, no matter how many times he fills his stomach, he never rests. It's hard enough to manage one department as an official. You think it's a joke to run them all?

¹⁴ An *amin* was a tsarist colonial official, elected to oversee the work of village elders and perform basic policing duties.

¹⁵ Yöldosh Oxunboboyev (1885–1943) was the first chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. He served in that position from 1925 to 1938.

Yunis You're right. But our executive committee on its own is no laughing matter. All its power is in Rustam and his friends' hands. Just today Rustam pounded and broke his fists against Rahima's head over Sharofat. You'll see. Nothing will happen to him. If us insects were to do something like that, bam, they'd send us straight to Siberia.

Rahmat No, friend, this government doesn't pity its officials. How many of the powerful has it shot? Do you remember Abdullajon *mingboshi*, who he was? The bastard used to say that he was the god of the people! But they—pop—shot him.

Turdali Yes, this government certainly has a lot of elections... But let's just let it alone.

Yunis Speak softly now. Someone's coming. (*Looks over.*)

Sodiq Who is it? Two people!

Young Man (*stands up and looks*) One of them is the teacher.

Yunis Don't speak. Everyone be quiet! Let them pass!

Öktam No, let's keep talking. What's the problem? We all have our business. (*To his right Abdulahad and Sharofat, dressed as a man, pass.*)

Ensemble: 3

Young Men, Abdulahad, Sharofat

Abdulahad Are you well, brothers?

Sodiq Praise God, sir, praise God. Where are you headed?

Abdulahad (*stops.*) Well, we have a guest from the city. I'm showing him around.

Yunis Come. Be our guest, then!

Voices Yes, stop by!

Abdulahad (*talking to Sharofat as they pass*) You're right, my girl. But there's no need to fear. Be patient. Everything will work itself out... (*Exit house left.*)

Ensemble: 4

Young Men Alone

Öktam That guest was fairly young and took little steps. Do you think he was a *besogol*?¹⁶

Sodiq No, Öktam, don't say such things! The teacher's no childlover.

¹⁶ Literally "beardless," but the term refers to younger men who had sexual relationships with older men.

Yunis Yes, true. Our childlovers usually make men of their beloveds, make them take wider steps, if you know what I mean.

Voices Yes, yes! (*Laughter.*)

Öktam I'm just saying because his gait was so small.

Sodiq Well, don't let this guest fall into Rustam's hands!

Yunis (*softly*) You mean he'll be like Zokirjon!

Sodiq Someone else is coming.

Young Man It's Rustam and Jöra.

Sodiq Be quiet now, brothers. (*Everyone gets up, Rustam and Jöra enter from the right.*)

Ensemble: 5

Young Men, Rustam, Jöra

Voices (*everyone suddenly*) Assalom alaykum, master!

Rustam Vaalay... What's all this?

Öktam Just that, master. Idleness... We're sitting around... Where are you headed, master? You don't want to relax for a minute?

Rustam Thank you... I have some urgent business. (*Pulls Jöra to the side.*) Where is she? She's not here!

Jöra Don't worry, master! If she was here, what would you do? What could you do right now?

Rustam I could do anything! If I found her now, she wouldn't come back alive, do you understand me?!

Jöra Let's slow down a bit. Here, we'll try asking these fellows.

Rustam Ask them.

Jöra Master, it would be better if you asked.

Rustam I can't... I told you to ask them!

Jöra (*addressing the young men*) What... that... did you see the teacher? (*The men are silent.*)

Rustam (*addressing the men*) Why are you silent?

Sodiq (*with difficulty*) I'm... he went that way...

Rustam Was he alone?

Sodiq No... He had a young man with him.

Rustam Who was that?

Sodiq We didn't know him, master...

Rustam "We didn't know him"... Why did none of you know him? You didn't recognize him right in front of you?

Yunis (*fearful*) A young man... He had a hat on...

Rustam And his gait? (*The men are silent.*)

Jöra What kind of gait did he have?

Yunis What kinds can there be. It was fine...

Rustam Shut up! If your house was on fire, you wouldn't know it, all of you! If your wife was fooling around with someone, you wouldn't know it!

Sodiq (*seriously. Comes a bit closer.*) What happened, master? What's going on?

Rustam They gave it to your mother, that's what! "What's going on?" he's asking! (*Holds a fist with his thumb through it up to his face.*) Are your eyes blind to what's right in front of you? Eh?!

Sodiq (*retreats.*) We didn't know, master... (*All the men repeat his words.*)

Rustam Shut up! "We didn't know," they say! (*to Jöra*) You did this, you pimp! You said, "let's go check the school first"! Now what happened? Now where the hell are you going to find her? Tell me!!!

Jöra (*unfazed*) I'll find her myself, master.

Rustam Where?

Jöra Wherever they are!

Rustam Find her! Find her now! If not, I'll rip you apart...

Jöra I'll find her! I'll find her and bring her to you. I swear that I'll marry my mother if I don't find her and bring her to you!

Rustam Yes! I'll be here! (*Jöra exits to the left.*)

Ensemble: 6

Young Men, Rustam

Everyone is quiet. Rustam's eyes flit chaotically with agitation. He watches the direction in which Jöra exited. He slowly turns to the young men. The men stand up to free a space for him to sit.

Rustam "I don't know! I don't know!" Would you say that if your daughters were walking down the street with whoever?

Sodiq We're poor men, master... We don't have enough time or energy to keep track of who goes where with who...

Rustam (*venomously, but softly*) Who passed by here?

Sodiq The teacher...

Rustam Who was with him?

Sodiq A young man.

Rustam (*laughs devilishly*) A young man! Yes... yes... yes! A young man! (*Suddenly*) Which one of your wives was it? Do you know? Which one?

Two or three voices Our wives?

Rustam Or was it your sister?

Everyone What, what? What?

Rustam Hahaha! It was no boy, it was no man, it was one of the village's girls! (*Forcefully*) A new little whore! She was wearing the teacher's clothes!

Sodiq No...

Rustam "No"... You think no! I know! If a snake moves under seven layers of earth, I know it!

Sodiq You, master...

Rustam And you?! You!!! You impotents! Someone's having his way with your wives, and you don't know!

Yunis If we knew, we would never allow it!

Young Men Never!

Rustam We'll just see! Jöra will find her and bring her to me! Then we'll see!

Rahmat Repent! What kind of time is this? A teacher!

Rustam Hahaha! A learned man! A teacher! (*Softly*) It's evening. What do you think he's doing out here at this time? This is no place for a teacher.

Yunis We won't let him get away with it!

Rahmat First we have to be sure...

Rustam (*screaming*) What do you know?! What?!

Yunis The master has said it, so it will be done! When he comes, we'll shut him up!

Voice Agreed!

Everyone Agreed! (*A noise.*)

Öktam (*leaps up and looks*) They're back! (*Everyone gets up and goes to stage left. Rustam sits down.*) It's Jöra and the teacher!

Rustam (*startled*) There's no one else?

Everyone No!

Rustam (*hits his knee*) Arghh! Unacceptable!

Yunis That other one's there, master!

Rustam (*gets up*) She is? Where?

Voices Behind them!

Ensemble: 7

Young Men, Rustam, Jöra, Abdulahad, Then Sharofat

Abdulahad (*puts one hand in his pocket.*) What's going on?

Voices Master! (*Rustam is silent.*)

Yunis Where's your friend?

Voices Your friend?

Abdulahad (*calmly*) What friend?

Yunis The one who came to you! (*Everyone surrounds Abdulahad.*)

Abdulahad (*laughs*) You mean the guest? He's over there, behind us.

Yunis Run, guys, bring him here! (*Young men start running.*)

Abdulahad (*takes a pistol out from his pocket.*) Stop! All of you come back now! I'll shoot! (*They all return.*) Jöra, you said Rustam wanted me to come, right? Where is he?

Rustam Here I am!

Abdulahad You're here? Why are you just sitting there without saying anything? What is all this? What's everyone all riled up for? You are the chairman of the executive committee, aren't you?

Rustam The village is angry. I can't interfere. If I say something, they might just hit me too.

Abdulahad They're going to hit someone? Who?

Young Men You!

Abdulahad (*to Rustam*) Me? (*Laughs*) What did I do to them? Do they think I'm Zokirjon?

Yunis Who's that guest of yours?

Everyone We know already!

Abdulahad If you know, then why are you asking?

Yunis We'll take care of you and your guest right now!

Everyone Yes!

Abdulahad What is this? What did this guest do to you?

Yunis "Who is he?" I said! Tell us now!

Abdulahad Just a young man from the city...

Voices (*mockingly*) Yes... a man...

Abdulahad A Party member...

Rustam (*startled*) The Party?!

Abdulahad A correspondent for the central newspaper...

Rustam A correspondent?

Abdulahad Yes... the sharpest one!

Rustam Not that Komil Aliev?¹⁷

Abdulahad No, his friend Azimov.

Yunis You're lying! Let's have a look right now!

Everyone Liar! Liar! Liar! He's lying! (making a commotion)

¹⁷ One of the more prominent socialist journalists and literary critics of 1920s Uzbekistan. He denounced Chölpon in the late 1920s.

Rustam (*lost in thought*) Silence! (*The crowd quiets.*) The teacher is speaking the truth!

Voices Yes, it's true, it's true!

Rustam (*to Abdulahad*) That's how the village men are. They'll believe anything.

Sodiq (*over to the side, to Yunis*) He really is shameless!

Yunis Hey, voy... We're the idiots for getting all riled up. Let's go!

Sodiq Wait, let's watch. He's changed his tone with Abdulahad. Go over there, let's watch. (*They mix into the crowd.*)

Rustam Why did he come?

Abdulahad I told you. He came to look over the village, turn things over from top to bottom to get to know the situation...

Rustam And he's going to write in the newspaper about it?

Abdulahad Of course, that's his job.

Rustam Well, let's all go to my house. We have some *kumys*.¹⁸ We'll enjoy ourselves. Tomorrow we'll have Zokirjon come in from the city. Then we'll tell him how the village is, and he can write...

Abdulahad I told him already, and he wrote it down...

Rustam (*fearful*) You? You told him?

Abdulahad (*laughs*) Yes, me, me. Do I not know? I know very well. I told him more than he needed to know...

Rustam (*stammering*) You, of course... You know too... Now... It was all Zokirjon's doing...

Abdulahad (*laughs*) So he was the one that hit Rahima?

Rustam (*fearful*) Rahima? He saw Rahima too? But she was unwell!

Abdulahad I told him she was unwell, but he said we should go see her anyways...

Rustam (*silent, shaking slightly*) Well, let's go to my courtyard. (*Gets up.*)

Abdulahad He won't want to. He said he was leaving tomorrow.

Rustam For the city?

Abdulahad No, he's going through the other villages around here. Tomorrow morning he's headed to Chuvalachi...

Rustam Let me go ask him. He'll probably want to stay another day or two... We'll go fishing. (*Starts walking over.*)

Abdulahad Rustam, this man has been all over and hasn't talked with one official... He's avoiding officials... I told him I would take him to

¹⁸ Fermented mare's milk.

you, but he refused. He told me, “if they ask about me, show them my mandate.” (*Gives him the paper.*)

Rustam (*looks it over*) I’m illiterate... I can’t read. Fine, alright, what can we do? You don’t need me to send horses over tomorrow morning?

Abdulahad He has his own horses. Don’t burden yourself...

Rustam Well, tell him that when he comes back, he should come see me.

Abdulahad If he comes back, he’ll come see you, of course. He said so himself. Now, if you’ll let us...

Rustam Very well, fine... (*Slowly sits down. Abdulahad passes. The young men bow. Abdulahad starts talking to Sharofat.*)

Abdulahad I told you, you had nothing to worry about, didn’t I? I fixed your father just right, so just forget everything. I made him sweat a bit. (*Rustam sits silently. The young men stare at Abdulahad from behind as they leave. Then they go to Rustam.*)

Yunis (*softly*) Now what happened, master?

Rustam (*heavily, angrily*) They screwed your mother seven times over, that’s what!

Yunis What should we do, master?

Rustam What can you do? Go home! Go! (*The young men leave one by one. Voices heard from offstage.*)

Voices Disgraceful!

- Shameful!
- And he involved us!
- That’s who he is!
-

He’s scared of those newspaper men like the pantsless fear the stick...

Ensemble: 8

Rustam, Jöra

Jöra sits sleepily at one end of the stage.

Rustam (*thinks for a long while, then heavily*) Jöra, oh, Jöra!

Jöra Yes! (*Stands up.*)

Rustam Come here! (*Rustam approaches him.*) Come closer! Closer! Look. Nobody’s here, right?

Jöra (*still seated*) No...

Rustam Stand up! Come look!

Jöra Alright. (*Gets up. Looks around and then approaches.*) There's nobody here, master!

Rustam (*silent for a moment and then releases his pent-up agitation. Shakes his head. Grabs his forehead. Slowly hits his head. Then suddenly speaks quickly.*) You'll do something for me! One thing! If you do it, money, whatever... If you can't... (*Draws finger over throat.*) Yes! Got it!

Jöra Got it. Whatever you say, I'm your man.

Rustam And if you're not? If you tell someone what I tell you?

Jöra Then do whatever you want to me.

Rustam (*sinks into thought, after a moment takes money out from his pocket.*) Here! (*Silent again.*)

Jöra Alright, I have it... (*Rustam is silent.*) Master?

Rustam (*suddenly*) You have it? We're agreed? Then go! Start tonight and be done by tomorrow!

Jöra Who? What?

Rustam You, ignoramus! Do you get it? "Who?" he asks!

Jöra (*fearful*) Abdulahad?

Rustam No! His time will come. The guest!

Jöra The guest? How? Where? By myself?

Rustam No, no! Nothing gets done with you! Do you have a brain? (*Getting angry*) Enough! (*Chokes up.*)

Jöra No, master, I'll do it, I'll do it. Your slightest whisper is enough. Who can you trust besides me?

Rustam (*idly, slowly*) You speak the truth. I don't trust anyone else. (*Again quickly, decisively*) So it's done! Go do it! Don't mess it up! Do it on some hill! Tonight! Get one or two young men to go with you! Tonight! Go now! If you need money, I'll give you more!

Jöra Who can I trust?

Rustam There are a few boys: Umrzoq, Jalil, Qosim... They're good boys... Right?

Jöra Right... From Azimjon's neighborhood!

Rustam Yes! Good! Good! Now go! Go! (*Picks him up from his seated position from behind the neck and pushes him.*) Go! Don't put it off, do it tonight... If you leave it to tomorrow, it'll be too late! Hey! (*Jöra starts to leave. Rustam grabs his own forehead and sits.*)

Jöra (*aside*) I've got the money. And the names of men ready to kill. But who do we kill? That correspondent is his daughter... Ok, I'll get one or two men ready, have them go to a hill and wait there. Not that guy;

he won't do. They'll wait around and come back. And then the master's heart will be calmed. Our master trusts me with everything. Little does the poor thing know that I'm lying at his breast, feeding him poison! (*Leaves.*)

Ensemble: 9

Rustam, Zokirjon

Zokirjon is drunk, heard from offstage. Rustam lifts his head and looks in his direction, then stands up and goes over.

Zokirjon (*enters, very drunk*) Hey, I said! Who are you? Oy, you're standing in my path! I'll hang you from your mother's... breast...

Rustam Zokirjon! Brother! What happened to you? You're walking around like that in the middle of the night?

Zokirjon Middle of the night? Says who?

Rustam I do, me!

Zokirjon Who are you?

Rustam I... I...

Zokirjon Yes, you... (*Mixing Russian and Uzbek*) Hello, master! Rural Council! Elder brothers! I've seen a lot of elders like you! What did you say? Who are you giving Sharofat away to? To Abdulahad the teacher? Noooooooo! To Azimjon's son? The rich man's son? Noooooooo! Sharofat is mine! Sharofat! My pretty Sharofat! My sweet Sharofat! My dear Sharofat! My honey Sharofat! (*Hugs Rustam. Starts to kiss him. Rustam is in shock.*)

(*Curtain*)

Act III

(*in two scenes*)

Scene 1

The Girls Gather

The porch from the first scene of the second act occupies most of stage left. The porch is raised above the ground. On the porch is a group of girls: Sharofat's friends are seated, playing a game with little stones. Sharofat is among them. But she looks depressed. From the left side of the porch to the right are stairs that lead to a door. It is afternoon.

Ensemble: 1

Sharofat, Her Friends (Qumri, Zuhro, Khadicha, Patti) and Others

Sharofat (*when her turn comes she throws the ball once or twice.*) Uh... Stop moving already! I'm bored of this.

Qumri You're bored of this, you're bored of that, what other games do we have?

Sharofat Enough, to hell with the game! I'm just not up to it...

Zuhro You've become so fickle all of a sudden. Sharofat, what's happened to you?

Sharofat Nothing's happened... I'm just annoyed at something...

Khadicha (*playing with Sharofat's hair.*) You're so pale now.

Qumri Let it be, friend, you can't continue to get upset at everything. Who's made you so angry? You're like one of those rich city girls who are crushed in spirit, upset with everything. The ones that, damn them, always call us bumpkins... The ones that, if they even touch cold water, shout: "Voy, I'm dying, voy, this is the end!" Just the other day two or three of them came to Hamdamjon's place... They say they're such and such girls from the city, daughters of merchants. We said let's go have a look, but we don't hear from them even a salom or an alaykum, no "come visit sometime" or even a "leave!" They fancy themselves so delicate that they need eight mats to sit on! They start eating the ripest fruits. They put their milk, their yogurt, their cream on the table in front of us... But they ate without interest. When we ripped up our bread and put kebabs in front of them, they ripped it further still into eight pieces and then struggled to bring even one of the pieces to their mouths. They chewed and chewed and chewed, like camels... It enrages a person! Blood flows to the heart in anger! A servant brought this Malohatkhon a persimmon in cream, and she told him to bring it back on a fine piece of china. To hell with their caprices! You can't just take some bread and eat it?

Patti Aren't those the people that the Bolsheviks took everything from? Imagine if they still had all their wealth!

Qumri God forbid, my dear! Then they, like Mallakhon's¹⁹ daughters, would shy away from us dirty poor even as they held out their hands for us to pour water over.

¹⁹ Mallakhon (1812–1862) was the Khan of the Kokand Khanate from 1858 to 1862 when he was overthrown. His reign was known for its high taxes to feed his family's appetites.

Patti Good for the Bolsheviks... They did right!

Zuhro My God, no, let the earth swallow the Bolsheviks! They're responsible for all this bloodshed!

Patti (*softly to Qumri*) Did they not find her parents guilty of usury? That's why she's so upset... They did right!

Qumri (*softly*) If she's hurt in her heart, then let the pain eat her nose! (*To Zuhro*) Let's not talk about that, Zuhro. Don't be upset, my dear. You're still ahead of everyone else in the village... Your family has lots of land and water.

Zuhro The Bolsheviks will take land and water too...

Sharofat Can we not talk about this and talk about something nice instead?

Girls What should we talk about?

Sharofat Sing something that you know...

Qumri That'll work! What do we have a lot of lately: girls being married off. Let's sing *yor-yor*²⁰ (*They start*):

If I light a fire in this village

Girls (*join in in parentheses*)

Then its smoke...

(Yor-yor then its smoke)

Is there in this world a perfect family?

(Yor-yor a perfect family)

Should I make a pot of paper, a fire of flowers

(Yor-yor a fire of flowers)

A long-long rope for the swing

(Yor-yor for the swing)

A little shirt befitting a bride?

(Yor-yor befitting a bride?)

Sharofat (*interrupts the song*) You couldn't think of anything better? Is there nothing else for a girl but yor-yor and weddings? Sing something else.

Zuhro What should we sing then? There's nothing else...

Qumri Let's find a *dutar* and play a game!

²⁰ The umbrella name for songs about weddings. *Yor* is derived from the Persian word for "companion."

Girls Yes, yes! Let's find a dutar!

Zuhro Sharofat, what do you think?

Patti And if she doesn't like that either?

Sharofat (*in a thin voice*) Ok...

Qumri Khadicha, my dear, don't you fear! Run, ask Qahhorjon for her dutar. Tell him Sharofat's asking, and she'll give it. Go, my dear, my dearest!

Khadicha (*listlessly gets up, playfully asks*) And if she doesn't give it?

Qumri (*imitating her playfulness*) She'll give it, she'll give it. Could she not? Run, my dear! Run! (*Khadicha starts to leave.*) Oh, my dear. My good girl. Bless you...

Ensemble: 2

Sharofat, Qumri, Zuhro, Patti, Others

Patti By the way, have you all heard the news?

Girls No.

Patti They found a girl for Qahhorjon.

Zuhro (*to Qumri*) I thought he wouldn't agree to anyone besides Sharofat?

Qumri (*to Zuhro*) Will they let him agree to anyone else? His parents... (*To the group*) When did they find her?

Zuhro Who is she?

Patti The other day auntie Saodat went and met with them. She's the daughter of that healer from Qöshköprik.

Sharofat Which healer?

Patti They have that healer, right? Parikhon?

Qumri Yes... I've seen her. She came to Shirmonkhon's last fall. What was her name again?

Sharofat (*slowly*) Malikakhon...

Zuhro Yes, yes, Malikakhon. I've seen her too. Her hair was so long. It touched her shoes.

Qumri Damn her, that snub nose.

Patti You're right. Her eyebrows were really small too. They didn't even run to the length of eyes; they just shrank and disappeared.

Zuhro But she'll still be a respected person despite all that. She's the daughter of a healer.

Qumri So what? Where will that education take her?

Patti If she wants it, she can be a teacher. God forbid—(*Qumri covers her mouth and stops her from speaking.*)

Zuhro Is it bad to be a teacher? You get a big salary from the government, you get to have all these different clothes. You get those Turkish camisoles with pockets that you put your gold watch in. “Who are you?” they’ll say. “A teacher.” Walking around, just the sight of you burns people’s eyes. Any boy would be lucky to have a wife like that. Oh, damn that Qahhorjon...

Patti Don’t damn him. Any girl would be lucky to marry someone like Qahhorjon.

Qumri Oh, the way he plays the *dutar*. Or the way he sings as he plays. Your heart could just cave in.

Zuhro God take him! He’s got a limp... His eyes are slanted like a Dungan’s. Damn him and his *dutar* playing. He doesn’t know anything besides his wedding songs. At my brother’s wedding, all the men gathered by that gorge for a game, and your Qahhorjon just couldn’t follow it.

Patti Sure. And what would you do if you were being married to him?

Zuhro Damn him! I’d have to be crazy to marry that slant-eyed hack!

Patti Then who would you marry?

Zuhro (*softly*) Some poor man...

Patti Great. So you’ll be married off without your agreement.

Zuhro Do you think our fathers would marry us only with our agreement? They’ll give us to whom they like. Look at Sharofat! She has someone she’s agreed to, but her father won’t have it. (*Sharofat looks over.*)

Patti Don’t compare her father to others! A man should have some sense of conscience, and he wants to give his pretty daughter away to Azimjon the gambler’s son Tökhtasin.

Zuhro That’s what I’m saying. She said that if she can’t marry Abdulahad, then she’ll die trying.

Sharofat And I won’t marry another.

Zuhro Enough, friend, don’t do anything you’ll regret... What do you see in that teacher? Is there anything interesting in him besides the fact that he grows out his hair, smokes cigarettes, walks around like a Russian? (*Looks at those farther away intently.*) My father says “that boy is going straight to hell.” That’s what he says.

Sharofat (*upset*) Your father says all kinds of things. Is he going to heaven? He’s a usurer, your father.

Zuhro How do you know he’s a usurer? Ok, he made money where he could, but he fed his family, he did that. (*Crying*) Now he begs for a

loaf of bread. Before the revolution he was able to make money. Now it's officials like your father or teachers like your betrothed that make money...

Sharofat And that's a tragedy to you? A tragedy? That my father, because he's a bureaucrat, makes money? That's what his tragedy is? I'm not betrothed to Abdulahad, so don't sit there and tell me I'm lucky.

Qumri (*to Sharofat*) Enough, don't get upset. That's just what her family is like... They're all foul-smelling goats.

Zuhro (*starts crying*) Oh, just leave it... Fine... We're the foul goats... Your father's a boil on society's neck... Yes, that's it! He just needs to be cut off like a boil. (*Still crying, starts leaving.*)

Qumri We know! We know! He's a bastard! A God-damned bastard! (*Patti gets up to return Zuhro. The two start quarreling.*)

Sharofat Zuhro! Have you lost your senses? You start talking about all this and then you leave? As if we're not suffering from the same problems? Does an adult, a girl who's soon to be married, do that? Sit down, my dear, we'll play a game. (*Khadicha enters.*) Aha, Khadicha's come back!

Girls And she brought the dutar! (*Zuhro, teary-eyed, slowly returns and silently sits off to the side.*)

Ensemble: 3

The Same and Khadicha

Qumri Khadicha, why were you gone for so long? What took you so long?

Khadicha Qahhorjon was in the garden. His mother refused to give me the dutar while he was there, so I went myself and got it.

Qumri (*softly*) What did he say when she gave it to you?

Khadicha (*embarrassed*) I can't tell you.

Qumri Tell us, tell us! There are no men here...

Khadicha (*blushes*) He asked who it was for, and I said it was for Sharofat. When he heard that, he said, "What? If it's for her, then ten dutars are too few!"

Sharofat Voy, God take me. I could die of embarrassment! That slant-eyed...

Khadicha As I was leaving, I sighed, and then I heard behind me, "I'm not a teacher either. Maybe Rustam would fancy me for Sharofat!"

Sharofat To hell with them! Even if he was a teacher, I wouldn't marry him. Let the earth swallow him!

Qumri If the earth swallowed men like Qahhorjon, would there be any men left, my dear? Without those damn creatures, we'd all die of boredom, wouldn't we? But enough! Let's not let them tread on our happiness! (*To everyone*) Now let's start. I've spoken a lot already.

Qumri takes the dutar and starts to strum it. She has first Patti, then Khadicha start dancing. They attempt to force Sharofat to join. After considerable resistance, she starts dancing, clearly better than the rest. In the middle of the song, several "voy!" are heard from outside. With each shriek, the girls sometimes stop, sometimes decrease the volume of their song, or ignore the shriek entirely. After several shrieks, Rahima finally appears in the doorway and again cries "voy!" The girls stop playing. Sharofat sits down in the middle of the group.

Ensemble: 4

The Girls and Rahima

Rahima carefully moves forward and props herself up against the door. Several places on her body are bandaged, she is pale, her appearance frightens the girls.

Rahima (*barely able to speak*) My dears, my girls, I stopped your fun. Keep dancing, please, keep dancing. Sharofat, my daughter, go set a mat out for me and I'll be fine. (*All the girls get up slowly and approach Rahima. Sharofat goes over to support her mother.*) Dance, keep dancing. If I were healthy, would I stop you, would I not let you dance, would I not be dancing with you? Just when you were having fun, I had to come interrupt.

Sharofat Let's go in the house, mother. I'll set you out a nice place to lie down.

Qumri We were all going out to find some greens, when we thought to take Sharofat with us. She was alone here so we all stayed for a bit. We'll go now. We've already been here for a while.

Patti Yes, we danced enough.

Zuhro There's nothing to regret. Let's go. (*Starts walking out.*)

Girls Let's go. (*Start to leave.*)

Rahima You can stay. I'll just go lie down in the house.

Sharofat Zuhro's a strange one. What else does she have to do?

Qumri It's not Zuhro. We've been here too long. We'll leave, go find some herbs...

Voices (*from offstage*):

- Be well
- Feel better.
- Sharofat, come visit us some time.

Sharofat follows the girls to the edge of the stage.

Ensemble: 5

Sharofat, Rahima

Rahima Who could want to sit in a place with an invalid, my child? What girls could hear an old woman's cries when they're at the peak of enjoyment? Come now, make me a place to sleep.

Sharofat Won't you go in the house?

Rahima Quit it with that house of yours. I'm having trouble breathing. I'll lie down right here.

Sharofat It's hot here. It's cooler inside the house.

Rahima Enough, my child. Here's fine even if it is hot. Lay the mat here. (*Sharofat nods and lays the mat down, then she leads Rahima over and helps her lie down.*)

Sharofat I told you earlier not to make things worse, to sit here, but you didn't listen. Look what you've done now.

Rahima What can I do, my child? At a time like this, as much as it will hurt you, you can't sit still. You have to move. If you knew what your damn father is up to... Ever since Zokirjon started helping him, things have turned for the worse. That damned boy sets the music for your father's every note.

Sharofat And does he set the music for you? What about your friends? Do they? And what is that dandy, that Abdulahad doing? All of you just infuriate me!

Rahima What can he do? He does what he can! He hasn't heard from the men he sent to the city! Some guest came to see your Abdulahad the other night, and while they walked around all evening, your father started suspecting that this guest was one of the village girls... (*Sharofat laughs.*) He started talking up the village boys, trying to get them to kill Abdulahad... Why are you laughing? What happened to you? Voy, voy, just look at your face!

Sharofat (*laughs*) It's just funny...

Rahima Then it turned out that this guest was a reporter from the newspaper, your father was terrified... My God, what is wrong with you? Why

are you laughing like that? What's going on? What is this, hey? Enough! Enough, I said!

Sharofat It's just... father's wrong-headed suspicions.

Rahima He was hoping that damn teacher had someone in mind besides you. Your father doesn't know, my child. He won't allow Abdulahad to wed you. So he's always following him, watching him. And he gets caught up in these theories or fantasies because he doesn't know what's going on. (*A noise from offstage. Sharofat jumps up.*)

Sharofat Someone's at the door.

Rahima Go, see who it is. If it's Zokirjon, tell him I'm not here. (*Sharofat leaves.*) When I see that Zokirjon, my entire body starts shaking. Oh, if only I had a silent gun, if I could kill him without anyone knowing... (*Voices from outside.*)

Sharofat Voy, what kind of person are you? Have you no shame? My mother's lying on the porch...

Voice Just wait. Just a bit... Here...

Sharofat Enough, I said! Voy, who do you think you are? What is this? Someone will see!

Voice Fine, fine. Go now. Tell your mother that I'm here.

Sharofat Aha, you know how to tell a person how you feel... Do you know how to do anything besides your government work?

Voice What, what?

Sharofat Just go! Voy, who are you? Enough already! (*Her face flushing, embarrassed, she runs to her mother's side.*) Someone came... He says he wants to see you.

Rahima I know... I know... my child, I know... Tell him to come in...

Sharofat I'll go to Qumri's.

Rahima What am I supposed to do if you leave? You won't stay, put out some bread, make tea?

Sharofat Go... I'm embarrassed.

Rahima Oh, God take you! You're not afraid of someone talking about how you left and refused to serve a guest?

Sharofat What should I do then? I'm so... sick of him... I didn't leave earlier for him, but now I'm leaving.

Rahima Fine... go, do what you think is best. Go, call him in here, the poor thing's been waiting.

Sharofat God take the poor thing... (*Leaves. A moment later Abdulahad comes in.*)

Ensemble: 6

Rahima, Abdulahad

Abdulahad walks in with his shoulders back, very confidently. Rahima sits up with difficulty. While he and Rahima talk, Sharofat repeatedly comes in and exits offstage, clearly observing the two.

Abdulahad Well, how are you? Are you taking it easy? How is the pain? Didn't you say you were going to get some medicine?

Rahima Come in, come sit over here. I was feeling much better, and I had got some medicine, but then I couldn't take it anymore. I worked up all my courage and marched over to the executive committee. I had a couple urgent things to do there—and I did them. I also wanted to write another petition to the city, but I wasn't able to. I ran out of medicine and the pain returned, stronger than before. Some boy helped me get back home. I just got back and had lain down when you came.

Abdulahad I'm tired of writing these petitions to the city. I've written what seems like hundreds, and I never hear back. Are they all deaf and blind, is that it? I just don't know. Or maybe all of them are friends of Rustam and Azimjon the gambler? I just don't get it...

Rahima Whatever they are, things are coming to a head here. It looks like they've managed to turn a few of the young men to their side. Some of the usually smarter ones came to me with a really strange problem. I was taken aback.

Abdulahad You don't know what happened to the ones who went to the city?

Rahima No, I'm afraid that whenever some letter or news comes, that one of Rustam's will get to it first and tell him before we find out.

Abdulahad We have to be careful. It's a very delicate matter.

Rahima I found a man to serve as a guard, I gave him some money. He'll show me any letters first. But I still haven't heard anything...

Abdulahad Do you think they sent people to the capital too?

Rahima To the capital? How could they?

Abdulahad No, you're right. They couldn't have. (*Silent.*) Don't be getting up and going places now. You need to rest, to gather your strength. A day of reckoning might be near. You'll need your strength then. By the way, were you able to do anything about him beating you?

Rahima What could I do? I wrote a petition, gathered witnesses, sent one to the city, another to the capital.

Abdulahad Good. But if you got a statement from a doctor, that would help. But the doctor's in the city, and you can't get there. I'll try to do something.

Rahima Yes, if you can bring him here, that would be good.

Abdulahad I'll try. Don't be afraid, let's not fall into hopelessness. We'll hear something tomorrow or the next day. I wrote to the newspaper about what Rustam did to you; it should be printed within a week. Then the prosecutor will start an investigation.

Rahima Then it won't have been in vain?

Abdulahad Yes, at least your bruises will lead to something? Hell, maybe you could get a few more from him?

Rahima He'll kill me next time. God forbid!

Abdulahad You don't have time to die. You still have some business to finish. You're still young, there's so much to do. I have to go now.

Rahima So soon? Sit down. We'll have some tea. Sharofat, Sharofat!

Abdulahad No, I'll go now. I need to talk with that doctor.

Rahima Sharofat! Oh, Sharofat!

Abdulahad Don't bother, she's not here. I'm leaving. (*Starts to leave.*)

Rahima I think she's hiding from you.

Abdulahad Am I such an intimidating person?

Rahima She's young. Are you really leaving?

Abdulahad Goodbye. (*Leaves.*)

Rahima Come again soon!

Ensemble: 7

Rahima, Sharofat

Sharofat (*enters.*) Why were you yelling like that? You knew I wouldn't come. You're just going to wear yourself out again. Can't you just sit quietly?

Rahima Can you really treat a guest that way? Not laying out the table for him? Think for a minute!

Sharofat Ha, what kind of guest is he? (*Stacks the pillows behind Rahima's back.*)

Rahima Until he's your fiancé, he's a guest, my child.

Sharofat Ha, just drop it! I never said I'd marry him.

Rahima What did you say then?

Sharofat Why do you keep asking? Just stop talking about him and don't bring him up anymore! Enough!

Rahima What did I say, child? You said it.

Sharofat You don't know what you're talking about... What is he, a boy born under the same sky that I'm destined for? Why would I talk about him? (*A noise. Rustam enters. His neck is crooked, his brow furrowed. The women look at him in fear.*)

Ensemble: 8

Rahima, Sharofat, Rustam

Sharofat retreats slightly and stops. Her face is pale and she looks on in fear. Rahima turns her face towards him. Rustam enters silently, takes off his leather overshoes, and sits down against the wall.

Rustam (*to Rahima*) Why are you silent?

Rahima What should I say? (*Silent.*) Why did you come?

Rustam Should I not have? It's my house. Where else should I go?

Rahima If it's yours, then I'll leave. There's no longer any reason for us to see each other.

Rustam Why?

Rahima You see me now and you're still asking why?

Rustam What happened to you? Stand up!

Rahima Don't mock me! That life has passed. I'm dead, and your house has no meaning for me anymore.

Rustam That bad? Maybe if you died, the world would heal a bit...

Rahima Ughh! (*Wipes her tears.*)

Sharofat (*crying*) Mother... don't cry...

Rustam (*to Sharofat*) Quiet! Go sit in the house!

Rahima Sit down here, daughter.

Rustam What are you standing there for? I said get!

Rahima Sit down, daughter!

Rustam Don't worry. I won't kill your mother. (*To Rahima.*) If I were going to kill you, do you think I'd be scared of her, you idiot?

Rahima I'm not afraid of death. I've already died once. Sit down, my dear, sit down! I'd rather look at the poor fate written on your forehead than at your father's ugly mug... (*Silent.*)

Rustam My patience has run out! I came to talk with you! Stop this talk!

Rahima Then speak!

Rustam Stop talking with that pimp teacher of yours!

Rahima And?

Rustam Your daughter's had her fun. Give her to Tökhtasin now!

Rahima And?

Rustam Apologize to Zokirjon!

Rahima And? Is that it?

Rustam And resign from Qöshchi.

Rahima Is that it?

Rustam And never tell anyone anywhere that I hit you!

Rahima Are you done now?

Rustam I'm done. Speak! But know this: I came to hear you say yes to these demands. I won't accept anything else.

Rahima Then I won't say a thing! (*Looks around.*)

Rustam God forbid! This one now! If I give her a good beating, she'll finally get it straight. (*Looks at Sharofat.*) Get up, get out of here! Get up I said! (*Sharofat cries.*) Shut up! (*Stands up and puts his hand over her mouth, pushes her down.*)

Rahima Stop it! Stop it! She'll leave! Sharofat! Go, daughter! Go to Qumri's. Go, my child!

Sharofat (*through tears*) I'm afraid!

Rahima Don't be afraid, my girl, go! Your father won't do anything. (*Sharofat begins to leave.*) Don't say anything to the neighbors! (*Sharofat leaves.*)

Ensemble: 9

Rahima, Rustam

Rustam, clearly afraid himself, follows with his eyes as she exits. After a moment he looks at his waist. He sees his knife and stares at it for a moment. Then he suddenly seizes it. Rahima doesn't see this, but as he lunges forward she shields herself with the mat.

Rustam Speak! Will you do it? Or... will it be the knife? (*Rahima is silent.*) Speak, I said! Speak!

Rahima (*crying*) What did I ever do to you?

Rustam I don't need your tears! I need your answer! Speak! Is it yes or no? (*They are silent.*) Speak, I said! (*Rahima trembles.*) Are you going to speak or no? (*His eyes turn red, he grips the knife tightly in his hand, his hands and knees start to tremble. Rahima turns pale, shakes.*) Speak, I said! (*Forcefully*) Speak!!! You won't speak?!! (*He gets on his knees, chokes up, threatens her with the knife.*) Say something!!! (*Rahima moves, trying to free herself from Rustam's grip. She sticks out her tongue as she is choked. She puts her hands on his shoulders in an attempt to push him off, but is not strong enough. Then she tears at his sides. Rustam's hand with the knife trembles above her.*) Rahima!!! Say something!!! (*Jöra runs in.*)

Ensemble: 10

Rahima, Rustam, Jöra

Jöra Master! (*The knife falls from Rustam's hand, he hops up.*)

Rustam (*stuttering*) What's the matter?

Jöra An election commission has arrived from the capital. They're coming to see you!

Rustam An election commission from the capital? Oh! (*He grabs his forehead, dumbfounded.*)

Rahima An election commission! (*She slowly starts to laugh. Jöra is surprised.*)

(*Curtain*)

Act III

Scene 2

Election

The grounds of a village mosque. Only one thing on the stage indicates it's a mosque: a pulpit that is 4–5 steps above the rest of the stage. There is a small platform next to the pulpit. On top of the platform is a table. The table is covered with a red bed sheet, on top of which are a pen, paper, a bell, and other things. At the far end of the stage is a bench and next to it are stools. The room is arranged this way so that the viewer does not become bored and pays attention during the election commission's speeches and presentations. In order to show the election and the various events related to it correctly, we have divided this scene into several parts. The curtain will not lower in between parts, but rather the stage's single light will dim for 1–2 min, while the players prepare for the next part. In this way, the entirety of the election can be shown in a short time.

Part: 1

Groups at work

Early morning. The sun has not yet risen. There is no one on the mosque grounds. From offstage we hear voices talking. After a moment, Rustam, Zokirjon, Azimjon the gambler, and a few of their supporters, including Yunis and Öktam, enter. They are confused and troubled.

Ensemble: 1

Rustam, Azimjon, Zokirjon, and the Farmers

Zokirjon Rustam, look at me! (*Takes him over to the side.*) Have these friends of yours go away a bit to give us some privacy. Then we'll speak.

Rustam Hang on. I'll tell them. (*Turns to them.*) Go a little farther over there and don't move... (*the farmers move off to the side and continue their discussion. They sit down. Rustam, Zokirjon, and Azimjon move to the opposite side of the stage.*)

Rustam We should have killed the teacher. You stopped me.

Azimjon Of course, we needed to kill him, you idiots...

Zokirjon Killing him wouldn't have been hard. If we wanted to, we would have done it. But there's no reason to. It would only hurt us.

Azimjon How could it have hurt us, idiot?

Zokirjon How, you ask? Rustam would have been imprisoned right away, and Rahima or some other city person would have been made chairman of the committee...

Azimjon Iyeh! What a horrible thing to have more than one wife, Rustam. You're both idiots!

Rustam Enough, don't speak! Have we fixed everything? I swear on your Goddamn fathers... (*Starts to move back to the middle of the stage.*)

Zokirjon (*forcefully*) Rustam! (*Clings onto him from behind.*) Be serious.

Azimjon Yes, idiots, yes. Be serious, you too, Rustam.

Rustam What should I do? I'd just as well knife him right now.

Zokirjon Wait, don't work yourself up! We still have hope, yes. I've been preparing those who have come over to our side for a while now. Let me show you. If we go about this right, then we have nothing to worry about. Let's have this election. The problem with the teacher will solve itself.

Rustam If I let this election go ahead, then your teacher will be dealt with?

Azimjon And then we'll have our wedding, idiots! Isn't that right, Rustam?

Zokirjon All you can think about is that wedding. Forget about it. Is that what we need to worry about right now?

Azimjon What else is there, idiot?

Rustam What do you mean, "what else is there?"

Zokirjon One of us has to chair the session. If it's someone from the election commission, then we don't have a chance.

Azimjon So we'll have you chair it, idiot!

Rustam But know this...

Peasants on the Other Side of the Stage:

First peasant When is that meeting of theirs going to end?

Second peasant It'll end. But what else do we need. It's nice here, cool. We can sit for a while.

Fourth peasant So what should we do? We're slaves in the hands of those men! Whatever they say, we just say yes and nod.

First peasant I've seen a lot of evils in my time, and there's not a single evil man that doesn't come from their ranks. The way they live is bad for the country. I'd be overjoyed if someone took their place. But... I'm indebted to Rustam. He controls my every move and gets rich from my labor.

Fourth peasant Will he forgive your debts?

First peasant He told me that if I take his side in the election, he'll forgive them.

Second peasant Azimjon said he'll give me a pair of oxen. If I don't get them, I don't know how I'll survive.

Yunis We're in the same situation, brothers. We have two *tanobs*²¹ of land, you know where, by the gorge. I borrowed money from Azimjon, and Zokirjon said he would ease my burden if I take Rustam's side in the election. I don't even know what good these positions are to them.

Fourth peasant They know.

Hasan slowly approaches them, stepping heavily. The group of Rustam, Azimjon, and Zokirjon don't notice him. After Hasan enters, another two people come in.

Ensemble: 2

The Same Players, Hasan, and the Two New Men

Yunis Come over here, Hasan. Are you going to the election?

Hasan Yes, we came over to see what's happening with you.

Fourth peasant What do you mean, Hasan?

Hasan What could I mean? We want to watch you raise your hands against those swindler masters of yours and then watch you destroy yourselves.

First peasant Iyeh, Hasan! Hasan, you don't know what you're talking about.

Yunis He's not in debt. He doesn't know.

²¹ A measure of area that varied from 0.15 to 0.5 hectares, depending on the location.

Second peasant If he had our debts, he wouldn't be following his own will like now. He'd be tied to those cut-throats.

Hasan I know, I know. And you've drawn yourselves deeper into debt just trying to get out of it. But you should know this: If these enemies of the poor remain atop the government, they'll turn every one ruble you owe into a thousand.

First peasant That's true.

Second peasant He's right.

Hasan So here's what you need to do...

Group of Rustam, Azimjon, and Zokirjon:

Azimjon (*sees Hasan talking to the peasants.*) Hey, you idiots! Some stranger's come over and he's talking to them!

Rustam Where?

Zokirjon Who's he? Iyeh... that's that Hasan. He's a member of Qöshchi! He's no good.

Rustam Isn't he the one that went to the capital?

Zokirjon Yes, he went to the capital, delivered that petition, and brought the commission here!

Azimjon What are we going to do now, idiots?

Rustam I'll go over there and give him a kick to the stomach. That'll fix him! (*Starts in that direction.*)

Zokirjon (*forcefully*) Rustam! (*pulls him back*) You'll ruin everything. Don't work yourself up now!

Azimjon And if he doesn't show your little mouse? Idiot.

Rustam What do I do then? He's going to turn them against us by the time you finish talking.

Azimjon Yes, idiot, yes.

Zokirjon Go over there calmly and call our people together. Tell them we have a matter to attend to. But don't be specific. (*Rustam leaves.*)

Hasan Got it? There's still a lot to talk over, so listen up. Don't just fall asleep while I'm talking here.

Rustam (*approaches.*) Hey, Hasan! (*Hasan hurries to finish.*) Where's this commission of yours?

Hasan I don't know. You know...

Rustam We know? We're here to know other things! Go look for them! Go!

First peasant Master, what do we do?

Rustam I have some business for you. I'll tell you in a moment. Hasan, go now, be quick, find your commission and bring them here. The people

are waiting. (*Hasan leaves*) What is all this? I should beat you all into the ground! That's one of the teacher's spies. Why were you talking with him? What did he say? (*He is silent.*)

Yunis (*after a moment.*) You're right, master. He was just running his mouth, we didn't understand a thing.

Everyone We really didn't, master! (*Azimjon and Zokirjon come over.*)

Azimjon "We didn't understand"? Oh, you idiots! You didn't understand?

Zokirjon All of you come over here!

Zokirjon leads them toward the other side of the stage. As they follow, the men break into pairs, talking with one another. As they go, the young men from the second scene of the second act come in. After a moment Hasan and the Qöshchi members from the second scene of the first act enter together. Then two to three people carrying folders enter. This is the election commission. Next to them are Abdulahad and a few youth from the Komsomol. They cross the stage. Behind them is Rahima. Abdulahad supports her as she walks, holding her under the arm. Among the people assembled are several women in paranjis.

Ensemble: 3

People, Commission Members, Rahima, Girls

Sharofat Look how many people there are!

Qumri Voy, damn this *paranji*! I'm suffocating in here!

Patti There's no one looking here. Can we just take these things off?

Qumri Right! No one's looking! Let's take them off! (*uncovers her face*) Uff! Thank God, this feels so much better!

Patti I could run around free like this a thousand times, and it still wouldn't be enough!

Qumri Whatever you say, bride to be!

Patti You're a bride to be!

Qumri Oh... my child, I'm the bride? I'm over forty... I have four-five children...

Sharofat And you still haven't married? Oh, repent, you!

Qumri Enough, my dear, no talk of husbands! You could come down with something like that.

Patti Look... over there... It's Sharofat's fiancé.

Qumri The teacher... Oh, repent! Where is he?

Patti There... there! In front of the mosque... Talking with the city people.

Qumri Oh, that's him? In that red flower Tashkent skull cap? What a nice vest he has... (*To Sharofat, who is standing behind them*) Sharofat, my dear, are you embarrassed? Come, my dear, don't be embarrassed. Can a person be ashamed of the man they love? Look at me. Abdulahad really looks great. I'd marry him myself...

Sharofat If it weren't for that smelly old man Matkarim hajji, you'd have one just as handsome.

Qumri Drop it, my dear, don't talk about the old man. It pains my heart too much... (*A singing voice approaches from offstage.*)

Patti There's the city people with Abdulahad. Oh, and Rahima is behind them. And there's Zokirjon with his father.

Qumri I guess the election is starting then. Let's get out of here! (*They cover their faces and run.*)

Part: 2

The lights go out for 1–2 min. On the platform at the committee's table is the committee elected to lead the session and conduct the election. Seated at that table are Rahima, Abdulahad, Hasan, Khushnazar, and a few laborers, peasants, Komsomol youth, and finally the chairman, member of the election commission Sodiqov, who is a representative from the capital. To one side seated on a bench are the former chairman of the executive committee and his committee members: Rustam, Zokirjon, Azimjon the gambler, the mosque's muezzin, and another one or two people.

Sodiqov (*stands up, rings a bell. Then smiles and speaks, still standing.*)

Worker, plowman, peasant comrades! The committee whom you have elected to lead this session has taken its place. I, as a representative of the capital, applaud you. Live long, comrade laborers, for you have elected representatives of the genuine poor, a committee of honorable people! (*Resounding applause, the previous executive committee applauds weakly.*) Respected comrades, this committee has now done me the honor of electing me as chairman and... (*Thunderous applause.*) and... with that it has demonstrated your trust in me. I, here and now, vow to honor that trust. Comrades! We have two matters to address in our agenda. The first is the final report of the old executive committee, and the second is an election. If you will allow it, because it is a hot day in a hot summer, we will dispense with the extraneous talk and formalities and proceed directly to business. We will conduct the election as quickly as possible so that everyone can get back to work! What do you say?

Voices We're agreed! Agreed!

Sodiqov Comrades! Now we will hear from the previous executive committee about their accounts. The first word is therefore granted to chairman Rustam. (*Unenthusiastic applause here and there.*)

Rustam (*walks as if blind to the pulpit. Looks at those assembled and frowns. Then starts.*) It's a very funny thing. Out of nowhere a commission shows up and suddenly we're having elections. What is this, for God's sake? (*Those seated at the chairman's table laugh.*) No one else in the country is having an election right now. So why did they come here? Or is our village the capital now? If that's the case, then no one can have their elections before ours, (*to Sodiqov*) correct? Did you finish with your report?

Sodiqov Yes, now you'll give your report on the work of the executive committee.

Azimjon (*still in the same place off to the side.*) What is that idiot talking about, Zokirjon?

Zokirjon How many times have I told him what to say, but he just does what he wants. He's an animal! (*Visibly angry.*)

Azimjon What an idiot he is!

Rustam A lot of these reports are flying around. They go to the villages, to the cities, to the capital! If you put your finger on them, you'd wear away your fingerprint, they move so fast. So what, for God's sake, is this? Now I have to report to the peasants? Iyeh, what drivel is this?

Sodiqov The peasants elected you! They are your master!

Jöra (*from the corner*) No way. They're saying the peasants are the master's master!

Azimjon What an idiot!

Sodiqov No, brothers! The elected is not the master, the electors are the masters!

Rustam I don't care who the master is. We'll just see who it is later. Now I want to know what provocateur set this up! I will find you all out! Let's just have the election, and then I'll show you and your ancestors!

Sodiqov (*rings the bell.*) Rustam, speak only of your report!

Rustam I haven't read it, alright?! If you need a report, here, here's our secretary. (*Calls him over.*) Zokirjon! Come here and speak! (*Comes down from the pulpit. Everyone is in shock.*)

Sodiqov Rustam!

Rustam (*turns back to Sodiqov*) What do you want now?

Sodiqov Are you going to do the report or not?

Rustam Iyeh, I said my secretary would do it! Are you going to keep asking all these questions?

Azimjon He just doesn't get it, the idiot!

Sodiqov To conclude the report, we give the floor to comrade Zokirjon.
(*Rustam, Azimjon, and the other one to two people with them clap.*)

Zokirjon (*ascends the pulpit, twists his mustache twice, then speaks, mixing Russian and Uzbek awkwardly*) Comrades! Before I begin, I should clear up a misunderstanding. I am not the one who is supposed to give the committee's report. Our comrades especially gave that honor to Rustam. He did not prepare—that's one. Number two—he doesn't know how to speak in front of crowds. Three—he's illiterate. Four—he's something of a prevaricator. And five—he's very anxious.

Abdulahad The perfect chairman! (*Sodiqov rings the bell.*)

Zokirjon You be quiet! Silence! We know that you've been up to all kinds of tricks; you've been eyeing Rustam's spot on the committee! We'll see, comrade!

Sodiqov Finish the report, comrade!

Zokirjon What am I supposed to do when these heroes of pedagogy don't let me finish? Comrade chairman, you should first of all call them to order. (*Everyone is silent.*) Yes, comrades, like that! I have the floor, and I will begin our report... Firstly, comrades, the village...

Part: 3

Debates

The lights go off for 1–2 min, then are turned on again. Abdulahad is at the pulpit.

Abdulahad Like that, comrades! We've had nothing here that could properly be called an executive committee, a government. We've had only gamblers, cutthroats, landowning merchants, sons that are but rinds of their fathers, enemies of women, opponents of freedom... They've all gotten together and...

Sodiqov Comrade Abdulahad! Your time is up. Conclude or I will be forced to conclude for you!

Abdulahad I'm finished! I'm finished!

Voice (*from below*) Zokirjon talked for three hours, and you won't give him a half hour?

Zokirjon He wasn't giving a report.

Azimjon (*to the voice*) Be quiet you, idiot!

Voice You're the idiot!

Sodiqov Comrades! Should we give the teacher more time to conclude?

Voices Yes! Yes! Let him speak! Everything he said is true. He's speaking the truth!

Sodiqov Speak, comrade Abdulahad!

Abdulahad I've said everything I needed to. I'll only say that we have the weighty and important matter of land reform before us. We cannot give such a difficult matter over to the gamblers to address! Comrades! That is all! (*Thunderous applause.*)

Azimjon Not so fast, you swindler. When it's our turn we'll teach you idiots a lesson. Zokirjon! Who's speaking for us?

Zokirjon Juma should speak now. Where is he?

Azimjon (*looking around*) I don't see him. (*Zokirjon becomes visibly nervous.*)

Sodiqov The floor is given to Juma, son of Hoshim.

Voice They're going to have Juma the thief speak now!

Azimjon It's Juma's turn now! (*Juma drunkenly staggers in.*)

Zokirjon Dammit! He's drunk!

Rustam That teacher and his friends got him drunk!

Azimjon Oh, you idiots! He would've turned them all if he were sober...

Zokirjon We can't let him speak. (*Forcefully*) Away with him!

Rustam (*yelling*) Don't let him speak! (*The chairman rings the bell.*)

Azimjon We won't hear from him!

Zokirjon Don't let him speak!

Juma (*ascends the pulpit, frowns at Rustam, Azimjon, and Zokirjon.*) Hey, what are you saying? You're not going to let me speak? I'll be praying... on your father's grave... (*Stops.*) His grave... I'll pray! What did I do to you? (*Laughter among the people, Rustam and his group are in shock.*) You give me this money, these lands and water to speak well of you, to praise you, and now when I'm up here, you won't let me speak?

Azimjon You're drunk, you idiot!

Juma I'm drunk? Me? What are you talking about? You're drunk! I opened a liquor store in this little village. Who gave me the money to do it? You did! Hey, Azimjon, how much money did you give me? Do you remember? Fifteen hundred rubles! Rustam gave two thousand! Am I lying? Am I lying? Tell me I'm lying, swear on your father's grave! (*Comes down and slumps onto Azimjon. The unnamed men around Azimjon remove him from Azimjon and take him away.*)

Sodiqov Comrades! The appropriate organs will determine the appropriate punishment for people who dishonor Soviet elections, come to meetings drunk, and display such crudeness. We express our regret that

this has happened, but we ask that we continue our business. For the last word in our debate is given to Rahima. (*Applause, particularly from the women. Rustam's group is visibly nervous and distraught.*)

Rahima (*approaches the chairman's table with difficulty*) Don't make me go up there to speak. It was hard enough to walk here. Let me speak from here.

Voices Yes, yes.

Rahima I have been a witness to all the events in the village that have been on everyone's tongues. All of them happened before my eyes. Living in this village has brought such pain to its poorest inhabitants, and I know all of it. How do I know? Because everything that the village has experienced, I have as well. From my husband. From my husband!

Rustam Liar! (*The chairman rings the bell.*)

Rahima My husband has turned everything in the village over to a gambler, a thief. There, the thief is over there! (*Points at Azimjon.*)

Azimjon You're a whore, you idiot!

Rahima I always told myself that I would be able to tell my story, bring everyone to tears, and they would rise up and defend me. But that didn't happen... It didn't happen because my husband never let it. I've defended this oppressed land, its poor peasants everywhere, I've taken my husband's every blow, and this is the state I've sunk to! Lies! Lies! Don't believe these men, comrades! My husband tells you that gamblers beat me. Don't believe him! He himself is a gambler, his friends are gamblers! He beat me! Enough now! I won't say anymore! I have only one request for you. Many of you have said that a woman is not a person... For the longest time, I thought that I was worth only half of what a man was... But then this time came, and I was elected to Qöshchi. And you've seen the progress we've made, the benefit it's brought you. So a woman is a person, equal to a man! So my request is this: Because a woman is a person, you must save her from the clutches of these gamblers and thieves, these bureaucrats! Save her! Save... her... (*Slumps down onto the chair behind him.*)

Part: 4

Results

The lights go out for 1–2 min. Then they go on again. Everyone is moving about, talking.

(On one side of the stage.)

First peasant Did Rustam not make it?

Second peasant And what about Zokirjon? Where's Zokirjon? Zokirjon!

First peasant Azimjon the gambler wasn't elected either.

Second peasant None of the old masters' plans worked out.

Fourth peasant What do they do now? They're done.

Second peasant Did they really think Juma would be their bulwark? Look at what he did.

First peasant Just disgraceful people!

Fourth peasant Where is Juma?

First peasant They locked him up!

Fourth peasant Good!

Second peasant Great, but we're still in debt.

Fourth peasant But we're still young, we're still strong. We can break free...

Yunis But you said that we'd get lands and water!

First peasant If that's the case...

(On the other side of the stage.)

First woman Look at that damn Juma! Did he do something stupid here too?

Qumri Let the earth swallow him! Any woman betrothed to him would prefer death!

Patti Voy, so your old man Matkarim hajji is better then?

Qumri Voy, my dear, at least that bastard doesn't drink, his mouth doesn't reek. He'll die any day now... And then I can marry someone else!

Sharofat Enough, stop talking about it! God let him enter the grave before he marries you!

Qumri My dear, come here, let me kiss your sweet tongue! For Abdulahad...

Sharofat Don't talk about him!

Qumri Voy, my dear, did you hear his speech? He spoke for as long as it takes you to make dinner. Everyone was silent, not a peep out of the audience. He knows everything that's going on in the country. Will your father get elected again?

Sharofat You couldn't have spoken out against him at the meeting?

Qumri Voy, would they have let us speak?

Sharofat My mother spoke...

Qumri Your mother's different. Are we the same as her? She's an official...

Sharofat Under their new laws you can. "Women and men are equal," somebody said...

Qumri Sounds like a good law...

Patti The officials are coming. (*They close their faces and back away.*)

Abdulahad, Sodiqov, Hasan, Egamberdi, Khushnazar, Bōta, some Komsomol youth, a few Qōshchi members and some laborers, then a few women, and Jōra come out. All of them stand around the table.

Sodiqov (*comes to the chairman's seat and rings the bell. Then returns to his spot.*) Comrades! Come closer! (*Everyone crowds in.*) The election has concluded, and you've all been waiting to hear the results. Of course, you're all interested to know who has been elected in Rustam's stead after he was unable to achieve even one percent of your trust. The chairman of the executive committee is responsible for all of the departments of the committee. For that reason, it's important to carefully consider who to elect. During the last elections, for some reason, rich people, illiterate, ignorant prevaricators like Rustam, obsequious secretaries like Zokirjon, and unscrupulous gamblers like Azimjon were elected... This time you have elected only the honest poor, plowmen, laborers, young and energetic members of the Komsomol, high-minded teachers who have only the best interests of the people at heart, free women and girls who have stepped into the new life of the future, true servants of the people! Now let me introduce you to the three members of the new executive committee who will be serving you. I will end the suspense now. The new chairman of the executive committee is Rustam's wife Rahima! (*Applause. They present Rahima.*) Her servant and your close friend, a hero of labor with 40 years of experience: Jōra, son of Azim! (*Applause, presentation.*) The first secretary: the teacher and Komsomol member Ghani, son of Sobir! (*Applause, presentation.*) The remaining members, in front of you, are members of the committee! (*Applause, presentation.*)

(Curtain)

Act IV

(in two scenes)

Scene 1

The Deprived

*Azimjon's tashqari.*²² *Open space. There is a large platform. Next to it is a lamp and on top of the platform are mats for sitting around a low table, and pillows. On the low table are various foods... Night, after the evening prayer. Azimjon and his son Tökhtasin are seated together on the platform. A boy pours them tea and sits.*

Ensemble: 1

Azimjon, Tökhtasin, Boy

Tökhtasin It's your fault, father, it's your fault.

Azimjon You don't know what you're talking about, idiot. You're an idiot...

Tökhtasin You're always calling everyone an idiot, when you should just look at yourself.

Azimjon Oh my, my, my... you say that about your father, you idiot?

Tökhtasin Rustam's daughter escaped us now. And whose fault is that?

Azimjon The time, idiot. It's the time's fault! We're witnessing the end of times.

Tökhtasin Enough with your nonsense. It's your fault! Yours!

Azimjon (*losing his temper*) Hey, idiot! How is it my fault?!

Tökhtasin Because you've been lazy, you've been sleeping! Did you even try? You thought they'd vote for Rustam! You...

Azimjon God forbid! Where are these accusations coming from, huh, idiot? Who are you looking to fight? (*Gets up on his knees in front of Tökhtasin.*)

Tökhtasin You! I'll fight you! You! (*Also gets up on his knees across from his father.*)

²² Literally "outside," the *tashqari* is the area of a home into which male guests who are not family are permitted. They are not allowed into the *ichkari* ("inside") where women are unveiled.

Azimjon Hey dog, don't bark at me! I've got a bite! I'll put you in the ground with one blow! Yes!

Tökhtasin Who's going to put who in the ground? You—me? No child of yours would ever be afraid of you!

Azimjon God forbid! Hey, I said, hey! (*Grabs at his son's side.*) I did everything I could to get that whore for you, you dog! What else do you want from me?

Tökhtasin Did you even try to get her for me? Oh, I know how you wanted to be an in-law to Rustam, the village leader! I know! Well, go get her! Be an in-law to him! Soon the land reforms will start. Let your Rustam save you then! All your land is going to be divided up and given to the laborers. What will your Rustam do then?! Your Zokirjon?! You've always relied on your fists, you idiot!

Azimjon Hey, look at me! Is it my land that's going to be divided up by the reformers? You don't have any land? Are my lands not yours? Idiot!

Tökhtasin I don't need land. Take your lands!

Azimjon Yes, you don't need land! You just need a disgusting, immoral wife who's already been the plaything of a thousand men! Should I just tear Sharofat from the teacher, at whose breast she's already rotted and putrefied? Is that what you want? Very good, you idiot! There's no son like you! Let them destroy my lands then! I have no heir! If you, you idiot, don't need land, then I don't need it either! I'll just live to my last day with my gambling winnings!

Tökhtasin I hope I see that last day!

Azimjon And how will you do that? You'll die poor, you idiot!

Tökhtasin Why? Why is that?

Azimjon Because you're useless! Look, you're panting just getting up on your knees. You think you know how to work? (*Noise.*) Get up, Rustam's people are coming.

Tökhtasin Hey, I'll give your Rustam a beating along with you! (*Gets up, leaves panting.*)

Azimjon You'll think he'll let you hit him, idiot? Be careful! (*To the boy*) Get up, straighten things up here. (*Gets off the platform, the boy starts to clean.*)

Boy What kind of father and son are they? Voy, repent... It's as if they have beasts coming out of their mouths, they curse so. The fat one got offended and left... Oh, repent! With that stomach, he's no man, just a fat little child.

(*Azimjon and Zokirjon come in talking.*)

Ensemble: 2

Azimjon, Zokirjon, Boy

Zokirjon Enough, don't ask Rustam. He'll kill someone or just go crazy. He can't stand this defeat, and whoever he sees, he just starts cursing. The other day he yelled at two village boys, started hitting them...

Azimjon He can't just sit still for a moment? What's the point of making a scene and cursing like that? Take care of your business, your women, in private! In private, idiot!

Zokirjon What would be the use? He takes care of the one and then the other... but the rest of them will finish their expropriations, and it won't matter. He'll just end up killing himself.

Azimjon Hold on, Zokirjon! Do you drink vodka? Or maybe you'll have some *boza*²³ or kumys?

Zokirjon Vodka and boza can put you in the mood, and when you're in that mood, you can't go without a little beauty... Give me kumys... (*The boy stands up and walks out.*)

Azimjon (*thinks*) I had some advice for you on beauty, idiot.

Zokirjon (*whispers*) Really? What's that now?

Azimjon A certain someone has a young thing. Maybe you could write a little letter, and I'll send the boy there.

Zokirjon To whom?

Azimjon Write it. Take your pen, and write it to Qurbonali hajji, idiot. He has these two beauties from the city that have been with him the past 3 days...

Zokirjon (*glad*) How did they end up there? (*Takes pen and paper.*)

Azimjon The stress of the city... They must have come here to relax... Qurbonali hajji is that idiot Abdulhay's father. Abdulhay's a city dweller. He brought them out here with that cloth-seller in his covered wagon.

Zokirjon Voy, if it's a cloth-seller and Abdulhay, then they must be... What should we write?

Azimjon The cloth-seller went back yesterday, idiot. Abdulhay's at the market, and his father's an old man. Went to bed unsatisfied, no doubt... Are you writing? Wait! Don't write from your name, write from the teacher's! That'll be great, idiot! The teacher's an official, Qurbonali can't refuse him.

²³ A drink made from fermented grains.

Zokirjon That's a good thought, but can I make my handwriting look like Abdulahad's? Hold on! (*Takes another letter out.*) Hold on, hold on! Let's have a look. (*Starts writing.*) "Esteemed Qurbonali hajji. Peace be upon you... You are to send the two city guests currently in your residence to executive committee member Abdulahad with the boy who delivers this letter. In the event that you do not, you will be held responsible to the extent of Abdulahad's power." That's it, here! Like an original! Looks just like his handwriting! The old man won't know the difference.

Azimjon Let's make sure it doesn't end with that, idiot! Afterwards, we'll have the boy bring back the letter, and you'll send it to the newspaper! Will they take it?

Zokirjon Will they take it? We'll have to make them. After four or five things like this, they'll send another commission, have another election...

Azimjon (*to the boy*) Go to the big house and give this to Qurbonali hajji. Get his two guests, bring them here with you, idiot. Got it? Bring them from the big house. If they ask you who sent you, tell them "the executive committee." Alright, idiot?

Ensemble: 3

Azimjon, Zokirjon

Azimjon Very good, idiot. So should I go get some vodka?

Zokirjon Yes. But wait, let me drink some kumys... Let the master and those two come first.

Azimjon Your idiot Rustam is coming? Are you sure?

Zokirjon Of course, he's coming. He was in the market nearby.

Azimjon Your Rustam, you idiot, is just sitting around idly. So what if he's been removed? He still has his land. Praise God, he has a couple hundred *tanobs*. He has oxen, he has laborers. (*Gives kumys.*)

Zokirjon If he'd stop throwing fits and tried a bit, maybe he could win a few of those laborers over to his side. They may take the lands from him, but he wouldn't go wanting for food. (*Drinks the kumys.*)

Azimjon Yes, of course. (*Noise.*) Someone's here. (*Looks around.*) It's Rustam... (*Gets up and leaves. After a moment enters with Rustam.*) Yes, Zokirjon is here too, waiting for you, idiot!

Ensemble: 4

Azimjon, Rustam, Zokirjon

Zokirjon (*stands up*) Yes, master. Have you come? (*Rustam is silent.*) Great, come sit over here! (*Rustam is silent, sits over to the side.*) Master, sit over here!

Rustam Just sit down.

Azimjon Don't be so gloomy, Rustam. Come over here. We save a spot for you. (*Rustam is silent*) What are you doing, you idiot!

Zokirjon (*gestures for Azimjon to come to him.*) Bring the vodka out here quick. We have to prepare the master before they get here. If he just sits like that, then our little party will be over before it begins. (*Azimjon leaves quickly.*) Master! Sit up here. (*Gestures to the platform where he is seated.*) What's the point of continually tormenting yourself? This is just the way of the world.

Rustam Eh, this is what your world's come to! You call this a world? Just take it if you need it so much! (*Azimjon enters silently, gives Zokirjon the vodka.*)

Zokirjon Master, drink this. It'll brighten you up.

Rustam (*at first refuses, then takes it.*) Fine, give it here, now this is the only friend I have left... (*Drinks.*) Another! Give it! (*Drinks three or four teacups.*) Uff! Do you have anything to eat, you bastard?

Azimjon What do you want, Rustam?

Rustam (*approaches the short table.*) Go bring whatever you find, Zokirjon! Anything that passes your eye! Do you know what I want?

Zokirjon I know, master!

Rustam The bastard that finds vodka can find its pair! (*Suddenly, angrily*) Right?

Zokirjon The owner of the house would know better, master!

Rustam Put out the light! Hey, bastards, now, put it out, I said!

Azimjon It's not lit, Rustam!

Rustam Whatever. You're not drinking?

Azimjon I'm drinking, you idiot!

Rustam Zokirjon! If the person rummaging around in the kitchen doesn't find what the guests need, we usually drag her out of there on her ass!

Azimjon (*bulges his eyes.*) Yes, that's it! We'll get Rahima!

Rustam (*punches Azimjon with a closed fist with force.*) Don't speak her name! I'll kill her! Aaaaa! More vodka! More! Give it here!

Azimjon (*drinking, starting to become drunk.*) And now... now... the floor is given to...

Zokirjon (*also drunk, mixing Russian and Uzbek*) And now... we'll hear the... executive committee's report... the speaker... the elder... Think!? Rustam, son of Doston... Comrade Doston is guilty, guilty. That is, Rustam can talk... Well, talk Rustaaaaam... the report... the report...

Rustam To hell with your report!

(*singing*)

You avoid my embrace and scream,
My lady, my queen, hoy-hoy!
Hoy, hoy, hoy...
My embrace... Sharofat... you scream, "voy!"

Rustam (*hits the tray on the table with his fist and screams*) Where are you, Sharofat?! Sharofat! Give me my knife! Give me my knife! (*Takes his knife out.*) Sharofat! Sharofat...

Zokirjon (*mixing languages*) O... Sharofat! In the embrace of the teacher... Sharofat, my dear! Sharofat!

Rustam (*stabs the pillow that his head is lying on.*) Here Sharofat! Here! Take it! (*Two women in paranjis enter with the boy.*)

Ensemble: 5

Rustam, Azimjon, Zokirjon, the Two Women, the Boy

Boy (*enters.*) Your guests have arrived! (*Silent.*)

First woman (*enters.*) Voy, God take me!

Second woman (*enters.*) Voy, what is this? I can't stay here! We're leaving!

First woman Wait! What are you scared of? They're just drunk! Is there something to be scared of?

Second woman Look at the knife in his hand! He's been stabbing the pillow.

First woman So what? As if we haven't seen it before. A knife in a pillow can't be in your stomach. Hold on, what if we take the knife and hide it? Hey, boy, go take that knife and hide it! (*The boy takes it.*)

Azimjon (*to the boy*) Who are you?

Boy I brought your guests (*Gets off the platform, taking the knife from Rustam's hand with him. He throws it on the ground.*)

Azimjon Guests? (*Looks over.*) Come! (*To Zokirjon and Rustam*) Get up, Rustam! Get up, Zokirjon! Get up, you idiots! The guests are here!

Rustam (*raises his head.*) Guests? Where?

Zokirjon (*gets up and silently heads in the direction of the guests.*) Assalom alaykum! (*Bows and greets them. The women laugh. He bows more than ten times as he approaches them.*) Come over here, my ladies! Welcome! We're all friends here, we're all family! Come, come! (*Leads them to the platform, directs the first woman to Rustam's side.*) Sit down! This man is our master... A big official... (*He sits the second woman next to himself.*) You'll sit with me. We'll have a great time! We'll have a party! It'll be great! Azimjon! You'll serve us! Go bring some kebabs! Now! (*Azimjon is in shock. He stays still and the boy exits.*) Go, I said! (*Starts to get off the platform.*) Go now!

Azimjon Boy, hey, boy! Where are you? Boy, boy!

Rustam (*sings*):

Hey, who's there? My heart is burning!
You avoid my embrace and scream (hey, yor-yor)
I opened my arms for you, come (hey, yor-yor)

First woman Voy, what's this all of sudden? Stop that! Stop it!

Rustam Who are you? (*Looks at her.*) Who? Who is this? Rahima? No... Someone else! (*Embraces her tightly.*)

First woman Hey! Hey, I said! Let's get to know each other first... Talk a little bit... What are you hanging on me like this for without even talking to me?

Rustam (*kisses her and then grabs something from the table and eats it. Then takes something else and gives it to the woman.*) Here... I'm Rustam Dostonboev... I'm the village executive committee... Did you recognize me? Ok, we're acquainted... Who are you?

First woman I'm a guest.

Rustam Where are you from?

First woman From the city.

Rustam The city? Oh! You must be the women who came here to relax! (*Sings*) Let the villager become victim to the city dweller... yor-yor. (*Slaps her shoulder.*) Sing! Sing! (*As this is happening, Zokirjon has the second woman drink a few teacups of wine.*)

Second woman (*hands the cup in her hand to the first woman*) Here, drink this!

First woman Did you drink it?

Second woman I drank three already...

First woman (*takes it and drinks.*) Pour some for me then! (*Drinks another two.*) Pour, if I fall behind you, then they'll make me out to be the slut... (*Drinks another.*)

Second woman (*takes another cup of wine, stands up, and offers it to Rustam.*) Here, sir, drink some!

Rustam (*looks at her.*) Of what? Who are you?

Second woman A guest!

Rustam A guest? This one's a guest too! And you're a guest! Hold on!

Rustam looks at the first woman, then at the second, then takes the wine and downs it. He throws the cup to the ground, and then hangs on the second woman. He pushes her to the ground and lies on top of her. Zokirjon jumps up, gets on Rustam's back, and tries to pull him off, but he's not strong enough. The first woman helps him, and they manage to pull Rustam away. The two women retreat to one side of the platform. Rustam gets up, and, moving quickly, kicks Zokirjon off the platform, and then he clings to the second woman again. Zokirjon again seizes him from behind. Rustam grabs him and wrestles him to the ground. Zokirjon's knees come up against Rustam's chest, and Rustam starts to choke him. Zokirjon gasps for air, flails, and then stops moving. The women, frightened, retreat away from Rustam. Rustam gets up and slowly moves in their direction. The women run down the little stairs from the platform and quickly exit. Rustam heads down the stairs to follow, but he falls onto the ground behind the platform. The stage is now empty. After a moment, from inside the house we hear a shriek of "voy-dod!" That is followed by cursing and screaming. Then sounds of footsteps and Azimjon runs onto the stage. His shirt is ripped, he is bleeding in places. Behind him comes a panting Tökhtasin, wielding a knife. He catches Azimjon by the little stairs to the platform and stabs him. Azimjon falls to the ground with a thud. We see the second woman's head at the edge of the stage as she peeks in. Tökhtasin stares at her with fear in his eyes.

(Curtain)

Act IV

Scene 2

Last Meeting

The executive committee building. It is a converted hotel. On the wall hang various leaders' portraits. Various posters, some of them slightly falling off the wall. A flag on a pole leans against the wall. There is some wild rue in the corner in a pot. There is a table for the chairman and one for the secretary. Both are simple, unadorned tables. Between the tables is a stool and by the table is a bench for visitors.

Above the chairman's table, on the wall hangs a short banner written in a crude hand. It reads "Executive Committee Chairman's Seat." Above the secretary's table is a corresponding banner that reads "Executive Committee First Secretary's Seat." There are a few slogans posted. Two men are seated. One is a middle-aged peasant, effeminate, the other a young man. Both have come with petitions.

Ensemble: 1

The two petitioners

Peasant My child, where did the secretary go?

Young man He's around here. He left in the direction of the market. He told me to stay right here and that he'd be back soon.

Peasant When did you come?

Young man Just a little before you.

Peasant So you think we'll be here another 2, 3 days?

Young man Why?

Peasant Last year I had some business here. I waited for 3 days...

Young man Yes, last year was like that, but it's better now. The new people don't make you wait like before.

Peasant If that's so, then good. We're poor. We have to plant. We can't spend all this time waiting.

The secretary enters. The young man remains seated, while the peasant gets up and greets him.

Ensemble: 2

Ghani, Young Man, Peasant

Ghani (*laughs*) Sit down, mister. There's no need to stand up for officials in our time. Everyone is equal. (*The peasant looks around, then looks at the young man as if asking "is this true?" Seeing that the young man is still seated, he slowly sits down.*) Well, which of you came first?

Young man I did.

Ghani Yes, right. You came first. Come over here then. (*After looking the young man over.*) Wait, comrade. You're young. It just won't do to see you before him.

Young man (*deferentially*) Alright.

Ghani Thank you, comrade. Well, mister, come here.

Young man Can I go outside and drink a little water?

Ghani Of course. I'll call you in when I'm ready. (*Young man leaves slowly.*)

Ensemble: 3

Ghani, Peasant

Ghani Mister, come over here.

Peasant (*slowly gets up.*) Alright, sir.

Ghani Don't say "sir." The time of "sir" has passed.

Peasant Well then what should I say, my child?

Ghani Say "secretary." That will do.

Peasant Very well, *eshon*²⁴ secretary, very well.

Ghani Why do you need to add *eshon*? You can't just say "secretary" by itself?

Peasant Alright, mullah, alright... Now I've got it.

Ghani Well, why are you here?

Peasant I have a petition.

Ghani Good, about what?

Peasant I had a bit of a fight with my lesser half. Thank God, you're here. I was afraid that that *eshon amin* would interfere, so I came here.

Ghani Who were you afraid of?

Peasant The *amin*.

Ghani You mean the "chairman"! The time of the *amins* has passed.

²⁴ A term of respect normally reserved for Sufi masters.

Peasant Right, right. I'm afraid of the *eshon* chairman because before, whoever the chairman was, at least he wasn't a woman. And now that he is, I'm afraid she'll only take the woman's side. I'm just a poor man. (*Softly*) I can't afford to pay both the chairman's fee and a woman's fee. I brought this small thing to give her. Should I give it to her myself or will you give it to her? (*Looks around and again softly*) Or if I give it to you, will you just decide the matter?

Ghani (*laughs loudly. The peasant is frightened.*) Voy, you poor, simple people. Bribes are in your blood! Fine, ok. What else can we do but fight it? It's not your fault.

Peasant (*at first surprised, still afraid, but then overjoyed*) Yes, sir, it's not my fault. My wife's the guilty one!

Ghani No, mister, that's not what I meant. If your petition is about a quarrel with your wife, then you'll tell the chairman yourself. She'll come soon. You can sit here and wait.

Peasant It would be better if you went and gave my gift to her right away. My heart won't rest until you do.

Ghani Why not? Our chairman is the kind of woman who doesn't close her eyes on one gender or age. She sees all of us at once.

Peasant But, whatever the case, she's still a woman... (*Slowly returns to his spot and sits. The secretary goes outside and calls the young man in.*) Where are you, comrade? Come in!

Ensemble: 5

Young Man, Peasant, Secretary

Young man (*immediately goes up to the table and stops. With confidence*) I need a marriage certificate.

Ghani For yourself?

Young man Yes, for me.

Ghani (*looks at him*) Yes, right, but let's think for a moment. Where's the girl? Why didn't she come?

Young man How many times does she have to come? She already came this morning, took it, and left.

Ghani This morning? I don't remember. Wait, what was her name?

Young man How should I know?

Ghani Why don't you know?

Young man My mother knows. That's our tradition!

Ghani True, you're right. Our people don't even know what year they were born in. But wait, have a look in my registry.

Young man (*hurriedly looks, then thinks*) Look at me! Were you not here this morning?

Ghani What do you mean?

Young man I mean, did you leave and go someplace else?

Ghani Yes, I wasn't here this morning. The chairman herself was here.

Young man Yes, good. The girl came then. She got her certificate from the chairman and left.

Ghani (*thinks some*) Good, then when she comes, she'll tell me. What was your name?

Young man My name is Matkarim hajji, son of Madrayim.

Ghani You're a hajji? Aren't you a little young?

Young man (*thinks a moment.*) No... I went with my uncle when I was young...

Ghani How old are you?

Young man 22.

Ghani (*writes down.*) Do you know how to sign?

Young man No.

Ghani Just press your finger down then. The fee is one ruble.

Young man Here! (*Gives him a ruble.*) Where do I press my finger?

Ghani Over here. (*Presses.*) And here is your certificate. (*The young man starts to leave.*) Don't even try to oppress your wife! The Soviet government will not allow it!

Young man (*overjoyed, starts to leave.*) Of course, of course. (*Rahima passes him as she enters, stops the young man.*)

Ensemble: 5

Young Man, Peasant, Ghani, Rahima

Rahima (*enters.*) Stop, what do you have in your hand? (*The young man's face turns pale.*)

Young man (*with difficulty*) A marriage certificate...

Rahima Where? Can I see it? (*After some initial resistance, he gives it to her.*) What? Matkarim hajji, son of Madrayim? 22? That's you?

Young man That's me...

Rahima You? Oh yes, you thief, you cheat! Sit down! (*The young man, shaking, sits down. To the secretary*) And you, young man, you just gave it to him without asking, without looking into him?

Ghani I thought you gave a certificate to the girl!

Rahima To which girl?

Ghani To his fiancée.

Rahima And who's his fiancée?

Ghani You're supposed to know.

Rahima How should I know? Aren't you the one that wrote out this marriage certificate? I didn't give a certificate out to anyone today. That's first. Secondly, I don't interfere with your registration records. Thirdly, this cheat, this thief, isn't Matkarim hajji at all! That's three!

Ghani What do you mean? Who is this then?

Rahima It's some cheat! He tricked you. Open your eyes. Did you ask him what his fiancée's name is?

Ghani I asked. He said he didn't know, but his mother does.

Rahima That's a lie. If he had said it, you wouldn't have given him a certificate.

Ghani (*surprised*) Why? What do you mean?

Rahima The girl is our Qumri. The one who's going to marry our Bōta soon...

Ghani Yes, yes, I know her! I know her!

Rahima The girl's stepmother was going to marry her to her uncle, that Matkarim hajji, the 80-year-old miser. So she sent this swindler boy here to get the certificate. Just wait, I'll teach this boy a lesson! You don't know the village women, so now we have all these parents or their representatives coming in here and getting marriage certificates for their daughters to marry them off. From now on, nobody gets a marriage certificate from this office without my permission. (*The men are shocked.*)

Young man (*crying*) Rahima, it's not my fault. My father and the elders from the village kept tormenting me until I agreed to do it. The *ellikboshi* told me to come in when Rahima's out and get it from the secretary.

Rahima Oh, I know. I know. (*To the secretary*) Write down all their names: the *ellikboshi*'s, the elders', this cheat's name. I'll deal with it myself. Get up, go tell him! (*The young man goes over to the secretary, they start talking. To the peasant*) Alright, mister, what matter did you have for me?

Peasant (*puts his hand over his chest and bows, then approaches.*) My petition, sir...

Rahima You can tell me while seated, it's fine. And don't say "sir."

Peasant (*sits down with difficulty, clearly uncomfortable with sitting. Gets up when Rahima is talking. She laughs in response.*) Sir...

Rahima Another "sir"?

Peasant No, sir... (*Laughs.*)

Rahima Good. Speak.

Peasant (*as if crying*) My lesser half is going to leave me.

Rahima Why?

The young man, having finished telling the secretary the names, leaves. The secretary starts listening to Rahima and the peasant.

Ensemble: 6

Peasant, Secretary, Rahima

Peasant I don't know... Who but God knows a woman's heart, sir?

Rahima Is that right? (*Pauses.*) Maybe you hit her and cursed her, didn't look after her well-being. If you had a girl, maybe you were going to marry her to some man she didn't want?

Peasant (*to the secretary*) *Eshon* secretary, didn't I tell you? A woman only takes a woman's side. Listen to what she's saying! She's going to make my wife's case for her... It would be good if you could step in, set her straight...

Secretary Did you do the things the chairman was talking about? Yes, no?

Peasant God take me if I did...

Ghani Well, if that's so, then ignore her comments and tell us what happened.

Peasant How can I? I can't... (*Bends his head and looks at the ground.*)

Ghani (*to Rahima*) This man says that "I," he says, "didn't do to my wife," he says, "any of the things that the chairman said." He swears.

Rahima Is that so, mister?

Peasant (*with difficulty*) Yes, it is, sir...

Rahima Well then, why did your wife say she's leaving you? What do you think?

Ghani You must have some idea. Tell us! Don't be afraid and tell us!

Peasant I think, sir... It's difficult... Poverty and all... I've been thinking I'll get a little land from the reforms... But I'm still very poor, sir... And she likes to eat well, drink well, dress well... And, sir... Our *ellikboshi* was so rich... Maybe she said she was going to marry him...

Rahima How do you know that?

Peasant It's really difficult, sir... The damn woman is really beautiful... And all the wealthy people act like buyers scouting the market, corrupting wives like mine. Women, sir... they don't understand their husband's wealth and leave when the scent of wealth flits at their noses.

Rahima Alright, alright. And who's this *ellikboshi*?

Peasant (*looks at the secretary*) Should I tell her?

Ghani Don't be afraid, tell her.

Peasant The son of that elder Madrayim, Qöchqor... Qöchqor the strong, they call him...

Rahima Yes... The strong? I know him, I know him.

Ghani I know him too. He's incorrigible.

Rahima (*sharply*) Good! Go now and come back later today. I'll tell you how we've dealt with it then. Bring your wife here, and I'll talk with her myself. Of course, we'll fix this. Don't worry. (*To the secretary*) Write down this man's name, his address. (*To herself*) Our women don't understand the time, so we'll have to explain it to them. (*The secretary starts sifting through papers, then takes down the details from the peasant.*) Here's another petition from the other day... The city sent it back; we'll have to tell the petitioner. (*Writes*) "Inform the petitioner..." (*The peasant starts leaving.*) Are you leaving, mister? Go, don't worry. If your wife was going to leave you because you're poor, she's making a mistake. The time of the poor has come! (*The peasant leaves.*)

Ensemble: 7

Ghani, Rahima, Matkholiq

Rahima I'll take care of the man's problem. A true poor man. There are a lot of stupid women who want to leave their husbands for rich men... We'll have a talk with them. Us women, we'll have a talk.

Ghani A very simple man, poor thing... Just look at him, he doesn't trust anyone.

Rahima That's what I mean. No lies from him. (*Looks at the door furtively, then calls for Matkholiq to come in. He enters. Looks euphoric.*) Come in.

Matkholiq I'm here. How are you, *eshon amin*? (*Sits on the bench.*) Are you taking care of the village? Praying for the Bolsheviks?

Rahima Yes, we're doing what needs to be done. Praying for the Bolsheviks, of course, that's our business, not yours. You curse them, we applaud them. Do you have some complaint, some petition for me? Or did you just come in here to waste time as usual?

Matkholiq (*stands up and approaches, sits directly across from Rahima.*)

Rahima, I have some very urgent business with you. (*Speaks softly. The secretary is busy writing.*) You may be old, but all your beauty is still there... (*Rahima is astonished, continues listening.*) You leave all these young girls behind... How are you? Are you happy? You're not bored? You never come over to us to give us a look... or maybe spend the night...

(*Rahima understands him now. She starts to chuckle.*) We'd do right by you, make you happy... Look at you! You've made it to such heights... You should know your worth... You should have a little fun, enjoy yourself... You don't have a husband... You're all alone... It makes a man pity you... That terrible Rustam tortured you... If you were mine, I'd carry you around the village on my head. On my head...

Rahima (*laughing*) I have a lot to do, Matkholiq... And no time... But, of course, the heart wants what...

Matkholiq (*overjoyed*) Yes, of course. The heart is a fickle thing... Sometimes it pulses for no reason at all... Like this...

Rahima (*to the secretary suddenly*) Step out for a second and take a walk. I'll call you back in later! (*The secretary looks at them, interested, but softly agrees and leaves.*)

Ensemble: 6

Matkholiq, Rahima

Matkholiq (*hurried*) This thing called life is but 5 days... It's here and then it's gone. Are you going to take your work with you to the grave? (*Edges closer.*)

Rahima What else is there? Though I'm old... I have a daughter who's getting married... Who's going to look after me?

Matkholiq (*takes Rahima by the hand, fondles his whip with his other hand.*) Iyeh... you're a fun one. Ride the wind to me here, let me make you happy. You just enjoy it! You're young, you'll have a feast. We just won't let that ungrateful Rustam know. And before dawn comes, before the sun rises, I'll have made you a new woman with another fifty years of life.

Rahima So that's what this is about! That's it! You came here to tell me just that?

Matkholiq Of course... would I be here otherwise?

Rahima Just that?

Matkholiq Yes, just that.

Rahima Then here, this is for you! (*grabs his whip and starts beating him*) Take that! Take it!

Matkholiq (*after a few blows he jumps up, retreats.*) Hey, hey! Rahima... Rahima! What is this? Rahima!

Rahima (*becomes serious, throws the whip aside.*) You rake! Age hasn't taught you any shame? You just try to corrupt the righteous? And you pray five times a day. You even scream and curse those who don't pray

like you! (*Approaches him. He runs away.*) Is that what you came here to do? Let's say that's what you wanted: did you think that if I wanted a husband, that I would know what to do? If I'm going to fool around, I'll find my own man. I don't need people like you! Go, get lost! Don't ever let me see you in a Soviet building again!

Matkholiq I had something else to talk about... I just wanted to make you happy with all that talk... Forgive me, Rahima, forgive me...

Rahima (*sits in her spot behind the table.*) What did you need? Speak!

Matkholiq The village's orphans have about ten *tanobs* of land set aside for them. The commission, when it was here, designated it from our lands. I came to ask about that. People are saying all kinds of things. "We're going to take the rich people's lands," they say... But us, we're not rich... I'm afraid they're going to demand the land set aside for the orphans.

Rahima Who said we're going to take the rich people's lands?

Matkholiq Kids on the street... the plowmen... the sharecroppers... laborers...

Rahima Everything they said is right! They own the country, so what they want, they get.

Matkholiq If it's left to them, they'll stuff us in our graves alive!

Rahima If they need land, then they take it. The poor need land, they need livestock, oxen. They don't need your life, don't be afraid! And everything we'll be done right, according to the law. We won't allow any riots or violence.

Matkholiq Yes, that's right...

Rahima It is right. Now go. And don't try to incite anyone, or we'll teach you another lesson like today's.

Matkholiq Iyeh, no... (*Starts to leave.*) Oh, by the way, where is your husband? Rustam, I mean.

Rahima You and yours should know!

Matkholiq How should we know? Why do you say that?

Rahima He disappeared after he killed Zokirjon and no one's found him. We know he could be in any of your houses over there...

Matkholiq Hey now, stop. To hell with him, the bloodsucker!

Rahima You're lying! We know! We know well! He's holed up with one of his friends. Don't worry, we won't let him get away. No one can escape Soviet power! We'll punish those who are hiding him too! Know that! Now go!

Matkholiq Enough. To hell with him, I said! God forbid we even come close to such evil men!

Rahima Go, I said! We know well enough! Your tongue is like a Qashqar noodle—it twists every which way! But your heart is stone, unmovable... Now go! (*Matkholiq silently stares at her. He leaves without breaking eye contact. The secretary enters.*)

Ensemble: 9

Rahima, Ghani

Ghani What happened? Matkholiq had a long face...

Rahima What else could have happened? He got a taste of his own whip! You know he came here to try to seduce me. He didn't have any real business. Then, after he took a few blows, he started asking about Rustam. He tried to excuse himself that way. I know. But fine, let's drop it. Let's work. Sit down and write! (*The secretary sits down and starts writing.*) Abdulahad will come today. He might already be on his way. I'll receive him here. You go out to the market and tell the people there that if they see Abdulahad, they should send him here. When he gets here, we'll have a session, we'll hear what he found out in the capital about the reforms. Then we'll start working based on that. (*Thinks*) No, wait. Let him take the rest of the day off, he'll be tired. We'll work starting tomorrow morning!

Ghani (*writing.*) Alright. We'll do that. (*Silent for a moment.*) Rahima, wait. When's the wedding?

Rahima What wedding?

Ghani How many weddings could there be? Just the one! Your daughter and Abdulahad?

Rahima You're mistaken. There's not one wedding. There are two. The first is Sharofat and Abdulahad. That will be this week. And so what? Will it be extravagant like the weddings of old? No, just a sweet conversation between two people!

Ghani Good. And what's this other wedding?

Rahima (*smiles.*) Should I tell you?

Ghani If you can, yes.

Rahima I can... Fine, don't get too excited, but... it's my wedding.

Ghani Yours?

Rahima Yes, mine!

Ghani What a surprise! Who are you getting married to? Is it a secret?

Rahima Did I not say "don't get too excited"?

Ghani How can I not? It's so unexpected...

Rahima It is, but what can you do?

Ghani Of course, but who are you marrying?

Rahima Don't be excited about this either: Jöra.

Ghani Jöra? The member of our committee and your assistant, Rustam's former guard—that Jöra?

Rahima Yes, comrade Jöra!

Ghani (*claps*) Live 100 years! 100 years! Alright, I'm off to the market.

Rahima I'll wait for Abdulahad here. Got it?

Ghani Yes, I'll tell them! (*Starts to leave.*)

Rahima Tell the militiaman not to move from in front of the door. I might need him. (*The secretary leaves.*)

Ensemble: 10

Rahima

Rahima Rustam... With all that's happened, he's still my husband... A far corner of my heart weeps for him... But what could I do? He did this to himself... No, now I have to put him out of my mind! Not from my mind, but from my heart! Let him stay in my mind because we need to arrest him. He needs to answer for his crimes. I cannot betray my duties! But I need to excise him from my heart. Need to make a place for Jöra. Jöra... Forty years a servant... What kind of heart does he have? Are all men the same or... (*Rustam opens the door, slowly enters.*)

Ensemble: 11

Rahima, Rustam

Rahima (*with a cry that expresses her womanhood in the fullest sense of the word*) Voy, fate! (*Stands up swiftly.*) Is that you?

Rustam (*maliciously*) Yes, it's me.

Rahima (*eyes bulge, clearly in agony*) Why are you here? Why did you come here on your own?

Rustam I'm tired of running. I came to decide this...

Rahima (*suppressing herself*) You made a mistake.

Rustam Why?

Rahima I have to arrest you for crimes against the Soviet order!

Rustam Is that so? Really? Good... But I came here with a different plan...

Rahima What plan is that?

Rustam You're not a full-fledged person. You're a woman. You need me. The two of us work well together, so let's compromise. You'll feed me. You'll take care of the land reforms so that they don't affect my holdings. I have no demands on your daughter; she can marry who she likes. And I'll get rid of your co-wife. That's my plan.

Rahima My co-wife has a child. I won't let you just get rid of her. She has a right to live too... But do you understand what you did to Zokirjon?

Rustam I understand. I understand very well.

Rahima So what do you expect me to do about that?

Rustam Cover it up...

Rahima Cover it up? How?

Rustam Pin it on Tökhtasin...

Rahima Can I really? Pin your actions on another?

Rustam Yes, you can.

Rahima How?

Rustam Because the government is in your hands.

Rahima Oh, is that it now? Then know this: the government is a light! If it aided your thievery then, now it aids my righteousness!

Rustam So that's that?

Rahima It is!

Rustam Very well then. Arrest me and send me where you need to!

Rahima I will! That's my duty!

Rustam There's only one sin to my name. You can't find someone else more deserving of arrest?

Rahima Only one sin? This murder is just the most recent!

Rustam Then arrest me after the next one!

Rahima Enough! We won't allow another!

Rustam Who won't? (*brandishes a knife*)

Rahima We won't!

Rustam Just you?

Rahima Yes, me!

Rustam Then take me! (*Throws himself at Rahima.*)

Rahima (*takes out her pistol.*) Back! I'll shoot! Get back! (*Militia enters, guns drawn on Rustam. Rustam starts to tremble between two guns, drops his knife.*)

Ensemble: 12

Rahima, Rustam, Militiamen

Rahima Tie his hands! (*Rustam is silent, looks at the ground. The militiamen tie his hands.*) You're a coward and a weakling! This is the third attempt on my life, and you still couldn't finish! You only finished with Zokirjon because he was drunk!

Rustam Enough with your jokes! Just send me away if you're going to! Such talk is just more weight for the donkey!

Rahima I'll send you away! What else would I do? As much as it pains me, I'll do it!

Rustam Then do it already!

Rahima I will! But wait! I can't just leave my co-wife and her children hungry!

Rustam Shut up! Just let the wolves eat me! Let them grow up without a father...

Rahima (*to the militiamen*) Put him in the jail! Send him to the city tomorrow morning! Go now! (*The militiamen begin to escort Rustam out. Just then the door opens and Adhamjon comes in.*)

Ensemble: 13

Rahima, Rustam, Militiamen, Adhamjon

Adhamjon (*enters quickly.*) Mother... (*His eyes fall on his father.*) Iych! Father! (*Runs and hugs him.*) Father! Abdulahad came to our house just now! Sharofat is making pilaf! I came to tell mother! You'll come too! You'll come too! (*Rustam looks at him, cries. Rahima, unable to contain herself, cries as well. The militiamen start to cry.*) Father! Father! Why are you silent? How can such a big man like you cry? Father!

Rahima (*gathers all her strength, manages to slump down in her chair behind the chairman's table. The militiamen carry Rustam out.*)

Adhamjon Father! Where are they taking you? Can't you walk? (*Follows them, hanging on to the shirt of one of the militiamen.*)

Rahima (*stands up and calls her son*) Adhamjon! Adhamjon! Adhamjon, I said!

Adhamjon doesn't listen, continues calling "father, father" and leaves. His calls and crying are heard after he has exited the stage. Rahima moans and cries, slumps onto the table.

(Curtain)

Samarqand, June 13, 1928

EARLY SOVIET UZBEK VERSE

The early Soviet years saw an efflorescence of women's literary production, as young women entered new educational institutions and organized flagship publications for women. These poets became influential both as writers and as organizers of the literary field. One such poet, writer, and organizer, Oydin (Manzura Sobir qizi, 1906–1953), was born in Tashkent to an intelligentsia family. Her father was a *qori*, a Qur'an reciter, and she likely received her early education from a female in-home instructor, or *otin*. She was among the first women to graduate from the *Xotin-qizlar bilim yurti* (Women and Girls' Pedagogical Institute) in Tashkent, earning her degree with honors in 1923. After beginning her career as a teacher at a girls' school, Oydin soon became active as a published author and editor. Her first play, *A Step toward Modernity* (*Yangilikka qadam*), was published and performed at a Tashkent worker's club in 1925. Later in 1925, the young Manzura's photograph appeared in the newfound women's publication, *New Way* (*Yangi yöl*), alongside the caption "one of our newspaper's young, hopeful women poets, Manzura Sobir qizi [daughter of Sobir]." Some in Manzura's community, including her father, viewed it as a disgrace for a woman's likeness and name to appear in print. When her father reacted by threatening to confine her entirely to their home, she took the pen name "Oydin," or "Bright," to avoid the exposure of publishing under her given name; she did not, however, concede to his demands that she retreat from public life entirely, and became an editor and regular contributor to *New Way*. In 1927, in secret from her father, she traveled to Moscow as a delegate for the Trade Union of Education Workers and permanently unveiled; she also appears to have undertaken short-term study while in Moscow. During the 1930s, Oydin was one of the leading figures in Uzbekistan's literary establishment, serving as Responsible Secretary of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan between 1932 and 37, and attending the First Congress of Soviet Writers as a delegate in 1934. Oydin was fiercely denounced and relieved of her duties in the Writers' Union during the Terror of 1937–38, but avoided the dark fates of many of her colleagues, and became a member of the Communist Party in 1943. She continued publishing widely and during the 1940s also served as a literary editor for radio and a number of other publications. Oydin was an influential mentor to many younger writers, particularly younger women such as Zulfiya, and the leader of several folklore collection expeditions.

Oydin was among Uzbekistan's most prolific writers during the 1930s. She published essays, short stories, and poems in nearly every issue of *New Way* and its successors; her writings also appeared frequently in the Uzbek Republic's official literary journal and in republic-wide newspapers. Several of her short story collections also appeared in book form. Although her education almost certainly included training in the classical Persian metrical system, *aruz*, Oydin self-consciously adopted Turkic folk meters and even free verse, as did many of her Uzbek compatriots, including the writers Chölpon and Ghafur Ghulom of this volume. In the 1920s and early 1930s, such folk meters were seen as more suited to a modern Turkic poetry than the Persian meters of 'aruz that we saw in the previous section in Anbar Otin and Khislat's works. In accordance with that Turkic folk meter, in the poem below, "Tulips in Bloom," each line comprises a fixed number of syllables separated by stops (dictated by completed words or phrases) to create regular intraline intervals. For example, a line of eleven syllables, the most common type of line in this poetry, could be read with intervals of 6–5, 4–4–3, or 3–3–3–2. The syllables within each interval can be counted on one's fingers; hence the meter's name, *barmog*, or "finger." Like the revolutionary ghazals of Sadridin Ayni and Lahuti and the springtime socialist poetry of Payrav Sulaymani and Mirza Tursunzada presented in this section, this poem draws on Persianate tropes: the flower metaphor for women's faces, the lyric meditation on the spring. But it also sets this spring on a socialist holiday, International Women's Day on March 8; and maps these conventional tropes onto a novel thematic field: the Soviet women's movement, and in particular, the Party-organized campaign for unveiling. The women show their unveiled "real faces" as active participants in public life; they live a happy life after the "golden" revolution, and work in factories and on collective farms. In its original context on the pages of *New Way*, the poem appeared alongside a photograph of three teenage girls, all unveiled and reading a newspaper.

Zulfiya (penname of Zulfiya Isroilova, 1915–1996) was born in Tashkent, the fifth child and only daughter in the family of a blacksmith. Later in life, Zulfiya fondly remembered early literary experiences with her mother, who was able to recite many verses from classical Persian and Turkic poetry by heart, and regaled her children with stories. After graduating from the Soviet school in her neighborhood, Zulfiya matriculated in 1928 to the Women and Girls' Pedagogical Institute in Tashkent (the same in which Oydin finished her education 5 years previous). She

began writing poetry as a teenager, and presented her earliest work at a literary circle held at the Institute. The circle was led by young poets (Toshpölat Sa‘di and Shukur Sa‘dulla) and visited by other rising stars, including Ghafur Ghulom and Hamid Olimjon. She began building her reputation through publishing in the periodical press, and her first volume of poetry, *Pages of Life* (*Hayot varaqlari*), was published in 1932. In 1935, Zulfiya married Hamid Olimjon, then a prominent member of the Soviet Writers’ Union of Uzbekistan, and matriculated into a graduate program in literature in Tashkent. Although Zulfiya published several volumes of poetry during the 1930s, she later anthologized very few poems from this period, criticizing their naivete, their “primitive meter and vague imagery.” Zulfiya’s best work from the period conveys a sense of hope, optimism, and appreciation for workers like herself, from a working factory girl to a young tractor-driving man.

The poem presented below, “Cotton,” comes from *Pages of Life*. Its short, simple lines and propagandistic tone present a sharp contrast with her later work. Produced when collectivization and cottonization were in full swing in Uzbekistan, the poem clearly articulates the Soviet agenda for cotton autarky in Central Asia. When she described her creative process during these years, Zulfiya said that she began “recalling” verses and tried to remember where she had heard them. It was only when she could not remember where that she realized that she had composed them herself. Consequently, there is a sense of automaticity in the verses: it is as if Zulfiya has reorganized slogans from the newspaper, assembling rather than writing the poem. At the same time, “Cotton,” like many other early poems, condemns an unspecified “enemy”: an ominous rhetoric in the context of the mass arrests and repressions that accompanied collectivization in Central Asia.

Ultimately, Zulfiya experienced those repressions as a secondary victim. One of her beloved older brothers, who had actively participated in Soviet institutions and eagerly supported her poetic ambitions, was arrested and shot at the age of 34 during the Great Terror of 1936–38. Although Zulfiya was not free to discuss it openly during the Soviet period, this silent grief followed her throughout the rest of her career. Another grief soon followed: her husband Olimjon died in a car crash in 1944 at the age of 35, depriving Uzbek literature of a leading figure, Zulfiya of a beloved spouse, and their children of their father. Zulfiya became a devoted custodian of Olimjon’s legacy, and in the aftermath of this triple tragedy,

“separation” (*bijron*) would become a recurring theme in Zulfiya’s later work.

Claire Roosien²⁵

Tulips in Bloom

Oydin

Translated by Claire Roosien

*On the occasion of the March 8 holiday*²⁶

Now the spring has come at last,
Draped in silk of blue.
It sheds rays of light like flame,
It dons a red kerchief.

Every spring I read of it,
Turning through the pages.
The revolution’s golden trace
Brightly smiles, sparkling.

The true faces of the tulips
Have broken into bloom today.
Heroes of the new life,
Worker girls rejoice.

In every office, every workplace,
Today these reading “tulips”
In factories, sovkhoses, and kolkhozes,
Burst out, overflow, shine.
Oh great festival, for you

²⁵ Slavic Languages and Literature, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

²⁶ March 8 is International Women’s Day, widely celebrated in the socialist world.

I will gather many gifts.
I will sing the joyful song
Of blooming bouquets of tulips.

February–March 1930

Cotton

Zulfiya

Translated by Claire Roosien

In the wide fields,
Cotton spreads its rays of light,
It shows its face
And shines.

It makes the garden bloom,
It calls the people.
It brings spirit to
The kolkhoz and the sovkhos.

It saves the Soviet people
From the foreign foe.
Cotton provides for
the factory and production plant.

Traversing the white gold,
Singing songs,
Watching the harvest unfold,
We pick cotton.

White cotton desires these things:
The fulfillment of the Plan,
The proof of victory,
The enemy's heart.

1932

COLLECTIVIZATION AND KAZAKH LITERATURE

Beimbet Mailin, one of the major authors of the early Soviet era in Kazakhstan, was born in the Kostanai region of north Kazakhstan in 1897. He studied at a series of village schools and madrasas in his childhood, culminating with a year of study at the “Ghaliya” madrasa in Ufa in 1915, an experience he later credited with introducing him to the works of Tatar Jadid authors. His novella, *A Tombstone for Shughba* (*Shughbanyng belgisi*), was written at this time, and its account of a poetically gifted young woman who rejects the marriage her parents arrange for her and instead chooses a poor young teacher resembles the plots of other Jadid texts. After the October revolution, Mailin became a strong supporter of the Soviet cause and wrote poetry, short stories, and novels that explored the work of building a socialist state. He typically chose to address these topics from the point of view of characters who were women or poverty-stricken villagers. Early Soviet Kazakh critics widely praised his work for the psychological and social realism he brought to the task of depicting the rural poor. His 1923 novel *Raushan the Communist* (Raushan-Communist) tells the story of an impoverished village woman, Raushan, who begins the story married to a foolish and easily manipulated man but who gradually awakens to an understanding of socialism. In the 1920s, Mailin also wrote his well-known “Myrqymbay” cycle of poems, which take the form of a series of conversations with a poor rural Kazakh named Myrqymbay who wrestles, to sometimes comic effect, with the question of what socialism is. Mailin was criticized for these poems in the early 1930s, but he continued to write and publish through the middle part of the decade and was also one of the organizers of the premier Kazakh literary journal, *Qazaq Ädebieti*, in 1934. He was arrested in 1938 on the charge of being an enemy of the people and executed in 1939 as part of Stalin’s Great Terror. He was later posthumously rehabilitated during Khrushchev’s thaw, and his work was returned to the Soviet Kazakh canon.

“The Black Bucket” was written in 1930 during the early stages of the collectivization drive. The protagonist, Aisha, is a character typical of Mailin, a poor rural woman who both enthusiastically supports the Soviet cause but also sometimes struggles to understand its nuances. In 1928, the Soviet authorities began a campaign aimed at a total reorganization of the life of rural Kazakhs. The first step was the confiscation and redistribution of the herds of wealthy Kazakhs in 1928, and Aisha

is seen reflecting on the wonderful memory of receiving her own cow as part of this campaign. This was followed by a policy of sedentarization and collectivization, the tentative first steps of which Mailin shows. His depiction of collectivization has an almost absurdist quality, as characters repeat slogans without fully understanding them, villagers debate whether wives should be collectivized and if buckets are instruments of production, and Aisha's election as leader of the kolkhoz is partly a prank made at her expense. In 1932, the collectivization drive would bring about mass famine and disease on the Kazakh steppe, ultimately killing between 1.5 and 2.3 million Kazakhs, or over one-third of the Kazakh population at that time. But Mailin wrote "The Black Bucket" before the famine had happened, and he ends his story on a reassuring note, suggesting fears of collectivization are based on misunderstanding and exaggeration. For later authors, in contrast, the famine would remain a largely taboo topic until the coming of Glasnost in the late 1980s. In present-day Kazakhstan, the story is commonly assigned as part of the school curriculum, and people now often read the central motif of Aisha's black bucket—carelessly wrecked by a lazy neighbor—as a metaphor for the larger destruction of the Kazakh *aul* under Stalinism.

Gabriel McGuire²⁷

The Black Bucket

Beimbet Mailin

Translated by Gabriel McGuire

This story began from a black bucket. It was a bucket Aisha had guarded as though it were her grandfather's own head. It was a bucket Aisha had finally made Birmaghambet buy for her from Kasten's store after three whole years in which the bucketless Aisha had been forced to beg the loan of one from her sisters-in-law.

"'Bucket, bucket' you go, until I can't even swallow my own food in peace. From fear of you I've gone and bought you a bucket with the money I meant for my tobacco," said Birmaghambet, putting the bucket in Aisha's hand and hoping to make her appreciate it.

²⁷ Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan

When Birmaghambet said this, he didn't mean to imply that Aisha was sloppy or that she didn't take care of their possessions. He spoke because he wanted Aisha to know he listened to what she had told him. And here it should be said that the whole village knew Aisha as careful, thrifty, and capable of making one count as a thousand. Lazy, sloppy women disliked her, and would always criticize her.

"We'll see what happens when we carry her to the cemetery, cleanliness isn't worth much when you're dead," they would grumble.

But today the black bucket had been lost! Qozhagul's young wife, who never came without asking to borrow something, who never returned the things she borrowed without first having broken them, had come and asked for the black bucket. Aisha usually drove people who asked for the bucket away. "You're not any poorer than I am; if you need a bucket, go and buy one," she would say.

But today she hadn't been able to say a thing. She couldn't say anything, because now for one whole month Birmaghambet had been gone. She had heard whispers and rumors, "Birmaghambet has been made a district representative, he has been made to count the *bais*²⁸ in five villages and to take them to the district center." Who was he for the district? What business did he have with the wealthy? Why did he always wander about, why had they not even seen him even once that month? What kind of a riddle was this? For many days now Aisha had gone about constantly wondering if Birmaghambet was the kind of man who would abandon his wife and child. When she cleaned the hearth of ashes, when she lit the fire, when she drove their pied cow to water, her only thought was of Birmaghambet.

It wasn't just this year alone that Birmaghambet had taken such trips; 2 or 3 years earlier he had begun to travel around in this way. At that time the villagers had elected him as their delegate to the congress of agricultural workers, and since then the words "congress," "collective," and "resolution" were always in his mouth. Since last year, whenever a party representative had come to the village, he would immediately call for Birmaghambet, and Birmaghambet would then be constantly at his side. If the villagers met to compose a progress report and then got stuck and could not agree how to resolve some problem the representative had pointed out, Birmaghambet would jump from his seat:

²⁸ Wealthy flock-owners.

“Comrades!” he would shout.

Everyone’s eyes would turn to Birmaghambet. The people would twitch uneasily as he shot words like darts at the audience. Some he would mock:

“Comrades! Most of us fawn over the *bais*; we are silent out of fear of them. If this isn’t true, why won’t any of you speak?”

The people would flinch at his words and drop their silence.

After the meeting had broken up and everyone had returned to their homes, they would speak to each other in private.

“Why must you always quarrel and play the prosecutor? You won’t die from sitting at home and eating porridge,” Aisha would say.

“Don’t be stupid!” yelled Birmaghambet, glaring at Aisha and knocking his teacup over. Since then Aisha had been silent out of fear that she would again make Birmaghambet angry.

What doesn’t life bring? Was there anything that Aisha and Birmaghambet had not met in life? Serfdom, working like a slave, the blows of the *bai* and the scolding of his wife; all of this had been Aisha’s lot. It had been only 3 years before that they had gained their greatest wish: a home and a hearth of their own. Even then, Birmaghambet had continued to hire himself out as a field hand. It was only last year, when a *bai*’s herd had been confiscated and they had laid their hands on one or two of the cows, that he had been freed from such work.

Since then, Aisha had become ever prouder of their home. It became her custom that their few possessions were always kept spick and span. And even if her belly were gnawed with hunger, even if she herself went about in rags, she set her face implacably against selling or slaughtering their few cows. And when Birmaghambet had suggested selling the brown heifer to buy some clothes:

“What’s this about selling the cow? I’ve got accustomed to wearing rags. We’ve kept alive till now, and we’ll keep alive from now!” she sniffed.

The thought was that even if they started with only one cow, their herd would grow. Their home would grow wealthier. Was poverty the only thing they were fated for? Hadn’t they already had to beg and plead enough in their lives?

Aisha thought like this: but Birmaghambet? Was he no different than Aisha? Hadn’t he seen as many hardships and ten times more even than Aisha? Then, when some cows had finally come into their hands, when there was at last a glimmer of hope in their lives, why did Birmaghambet throw his work to the side and leave? Would he return home? Would he

come back and herd their few cows? Even if all their struggles brought no more than a single coin, couldn't he be like other men and fight for such money?

And all these thoughts were but another kind of work to trouble Aisha. Aisha had her own labor. What she couldn't do, Birmaghambet would do. Together they would make their way. This too was Aisha's task in life, and it was left undone. Aisha herself could not understand why or how this was so. When she thought about it, she grew so confused she could no longer tell right from wrong. If she taxed her brother-in-law Almaghambet with these questions, he would joke and tease her till her head spun. It was in the midst of this confusion that Aisha had, she could not think how, somehow given the black bucket to Qozhagul's young wife.

* * *

A representative had arrived at the village and called on everyone to attend a general meeting in the district center, Shoqtal. There were fewer than twenty households in the village, so everyone had crowded together in Sartai's home. Aisha too had come, for they had been told that even the women of the village must not stay away. The villagers were crammed cheek by jowl in the house. And there in the place of honor, bearded like a goat, sat Qarailap, and with him, his chest puffed-out, Ydyrys. Both had grown fat from the harvest of the spring sowing. And so, at one meeting, Birmaghambet had called out, "How can we call this a meeting of the workers and the poor when we let two *bais* sit here in our midst and disrupt us!" and the two had been driven out. Yet once Birmaghambet had left the village, the two had begun to strut about again, and now both had come and sat together at the meeting! Aisha began to grow angry. If Birmaghambet were to come tomorrow, wouldn't he smash the *bais'* roofs to pieces over their heads when she told him this!

"Aisha, go sit at the head of the meeting! When Birmaghambet was here, he would come and you would stay at home, but while Birmaghambet is gone, you can speak up and solve everything!" joked one of Birmaghambet's younger brothers.

Aisha understood quite well that these words were meant sarcastically, and she grew yet more angry.

Orynbai, the village headman, went about greeting each villager in turn in his stuttering voice. A young man with long flowing black hair looked at him with disapproval:

"Comrade, how would it be if we halted this whispering and opened the meeting?" The young man was a representative from the district center.

The meeting began with the young man making a report about collectivization.

"And thus, comrades, the time of profitless small farms will end, we will build great collective farms, we shall enter the era of socialist industry!"

The people sat quietly, passively, they almost seemed to be sleeping.

"Come, who has questions?" the representative asked again and again, yet no one would speak.

"God help us now!" sighed Qairalap heavily.

"Hey, why are you silent? Speak out!"

"Aisha is sitting at the front. No doubt she has something to say," said one young man.

"She's the wife of a party activist; she'll have something to say," added another.

And Aisha, perhaps moved by her anger, perhaps just because she wanted to speak, stepped forward:

"You may be afraid to speak, but I'll speak out no matter where I am. Save us from the likes of you, sitting there silent, terrified of the *bais*."

The representative's head snapped forward and he stared at Aisha. She stumbled over her words and paused, hesitating.

"Don't stop, sister, speak your mind," said the representative, smiling.

"Then I say, first of all, there are two men sitting here with us who are fat and greedy *bais*. When they are gone, I will speak!"

The villagers looked at one another. Satybaldy stared at Aisha out of the corner of his eye and shook his head in surprise. The representative went up to the village headmen and asked who were the two *bais*, then turned to Qairalap and Ydyrys:

"Who asked you here?"

"Oh sir, we came because it was said let everyone in the village come to the meeting, let no one stay behind. We were afraid if we didn't come, we would be punished." Kairalap spoke in a loud, blustering voice, before running from the meeting in a panic.

"Alright, sister, the *bais* have gone, go ahead and speak," said the representative. Aisha couldn't think of a thing to say. But once the

representative had told her to speak, there was no way she could stay silent.

"I say, what the representative said was right, and I will join the collective!" said Aisha.

"If you join, what do you lose? It won't be a herd raised from the sweat of your brow, but just cattle confiscated from the *bai*. Let others speak," said Qusain.

In truth, Aisha had completely failed to understand that the cattle would have to be given to the collective. She hadn't understood because she hadn't bothered to listen to the representative's report. Aisha had been so busy thinking of her own troubles that his words had gone in one ear and out the other quite without her having grasped their meaning.

"I have a question," said Zhaman, "look, we are to be a collective. We'll all contribute what we had from our parents. Then do we return to our homes? Do we keep living separately as we do today, or must forty people slop together and eat from one pot?"

"Of course, we must all squeeze in around one pot," said Qusain, jumping in before the representative could answer.

The representative then set about explaining that Qusain was wrong, and for some time spoke of when the collective would be organized and how its members would live.

"Comrade representative!" said Tymaqpai, "what about a poor man like me? Who's alone and who drifts from place to place. Who cooks his own food and mends his own clothes. What about such a man, would the collective take him?"

After Tymaqpai had spoken, Zhusip, Qadibergen, and Zhaqypтар all had some words to say. From every speaker, Aisha understood, "The cattle will be given to the collective. They will be held in common." What was this? They had raised their few cows for this? Since last year, they had gone hungry, they had gone about in rags. And now, their cattle would be given to the collective? Her beloved pied cow, whose great udders gave a full bucket of milk morning and night. When Buzaubai's herd had been confiscated the year before, a party representative had taken Aisha and said, "Sister, it's clear that this herd contains more than a little of Birmaghambet and your labor. Come and choose one of these cows for yourself!"

Many of the cows in Buzaybai's herd were marked with a white blaze on their forehead. It was from this bloodline that the pied cow had come. Aisha had run forward and wrapped her arms around its neck. And if this

ped cow now went to the collective, if her milk and butter would now belong to Qozhaghul's young wife, what else might happen? Was everything to be given this instant, when the pied cow's owner Birmaghambet wasn't even home, wouldn't they even wait for him to return, would the cow be lost this very moment?

The time for questions had ended and the meeting's director had called for a vote:

"Come, let those who are in favor of the collective raise their hands!"

The villagers looked at one another and did not know whether they should raise their hands or not.

It was at this moment that Aisha remembered Birmaghambet. "*Yes, raise your hands!*" he would have called out. And Aisha, forgetting her own thoughts, shouted out, "Yes, raise your hands!"

One by one the villagers began to raise their hands. One by one all who had come to the meeting raised their hands and then with one voice shouted out the resolution: "We shall collectivize!"

And now someone began to say that they would need to choose people to administer the collective.

"If you take my suggestion, you will elect our sister, comrade Aisha, to lead the collective!" said the representative.

"Oh my," Aisha gasped in surprise.

"Most people would not be against her election, but she can't read or write..." said Qusain hesitantly.

"If she can't read, she can learn. I too support our sister Aisha's election, come, raise your hands!" said Dosym, and when he raised his own, so in turn did the other villagers begin to raise their hands.

In this way, Aisha was elected as director of the collective farm New Life.

The events of that day still seemed like a strange dream to Aisha. Director! she couldn't understand how this role had fallen upon her or what she would do as director. Would Birmaghambet be happy about it? If he had been there himself, would he have done the same? Or would he have opposed the collective? Aisha had a 7-year-old son, Quandyyq, and when she came home she found that he and the other village children had turned the entire house upside down in their play: hay was strewn about, ashes from the hearth everywhere, water spilled on the floor. The children scattered as Aisha came in, thinking that she would scold them. This was Aisha's usual way: she would come in angry, and then a little later it seemed she wouldn't hurt a fly. The children rushed together for

the door, but Aisha had no thought for them. She sat leaning against the hearth and stared out the window at a snowstorm. A thick drift had formed in front of the window, and above the drift the wind blew the soft snow about like smoke. The bottom panes of the window were buried in snow, blocking the light and leaving the inside of the house dim.

“Collective!”

Would this work bring happiness, or would it end in sorrow? At the meeting, some of the villagers, perhaps as a joke and perhaps seriously, had said “we will hold our wives in common, too...”

“Ha, we know you have your eye on Zheksen’s young wife!” another had replied.

If it were true, if wives too would be collective property...

It came into Aisha’s mind then how Birmaghambet was jealous, short-tempered, and fierce. “I love you like you were my own soul, if another so much as looks at you, my blood boils,” he would sometimes say. Was what they had said true? If they were correct... Oh, let it go, don’t think about what hasn’t happened, thought Aisha, and she stopped speculating.

Qozhagul’s young wife came to the house. Her headscarf was filthy. She sat down without taking off her heavy leather galoshes, panting as though she had been chased by enemies, and slumped against the hearth like a sick sheep.

“Oh Lord, what won’t happen today? A never-ending blizzard, always a blizzard, we’re beaten unconscious by this blizzard. Oh, and now people come for this meeting, four or five people from Shok Qaiyn have come to the house, and they lie about like they were my own father. What is it with people nowadays? We killed only one miserable little horse, barely better than a donkey, and now yesterday we’ve gone and cut up the last of its rump meat, there isn’t a thing else in the house...” she grumbled to herself.

Qozhagul’s wife had been almost running when she came in, and now she said:

“I need to go make tea for them now, but if I go for water with only one bucket, well, it’s hard to keep coming and going in this blizzard, better to have two buckets. Will you give me yours, sister?”

Aisha barely heard these words and didn’t grasp what Qozhagul’s wife had said or what she wanted. The only word Aisha caught was “bucket.” She usually kept Qozhagul’s wife and her endless chatter away from her. If she didn’t give the bucket, though, the woman would give her no peace,

and Aisha was in a hurry to be rid of her. Aisha wanted to be left alone, and she gave no more thought to the matter.

"It's over there. Take it!" she said.

And in this way the black bucket left her hands.

In the evening, when it had grown dark inside the house, Aisha thought to go fetch water but there was no bucket. It was at this moment that Aisha remembered Qozhagul's wife had taken the bucket. Aisha's heart leaped into her mouth, for things that fell into Qozhagul's wife's hands were never the same when they came back: if she took a cup, it would come back broken in two, if she took a kettle, the spout would be snapped off, and if she took a bucket...

Aisha couldn't wait but ran from the house. Snow was piled so high between the houses that Aisha sank in up to her knees, but she would not stop until she reached Qozhagul's house, until she saw the black bucket.

Qozhagul's wife sat in front of the hearth, her hair hanging loose as she raked the coals. She had an irritable expression on her face, and even when she saw Aisha in the door, she did not put down the tongs with which she tended the fire. The coals spilled from the hearth and spread out glowing before it.

"I came for the bucket," said Aisha, and felt obscurely afraid.

"Ahh, that bad child... I gave him what he deserved..." Qozhagul's wife muttered to herself by the fire.

Aisha, suspicious and afraid, strode over to Qozhagul's wife, who looked up with a frightened expression as Aisha loomed over her:

"Why are you standing over me? Why don't the young respect the old? Look, the bucket's over there," she said.

When Aisha looked at the door, she saw the black bucket, bent in two and with its bottom torn open! Aisha's heart leaped into her mouth. She grabbed the bucket and slapped Qozhagul's wife. Angry tears poured from her eyes.

"Oh, she'll kill me, the bitch!" Qozhagul's wife raised the roof with her shrieks.

Qozhagul came in with a lamp. Melting snow covered his face and dripped from his beard. His eyes widened and for a moment it almost seemed he would leave the house. He stood for a moment, clicking his tongue.

"Look, dear daughter, can't I ask you not to hit my wife?" he sighed.

"She shouldn't break and ruin someone else's things!"

"You are right to say, 'don't break it,' but, you must leave off saying 'someone's.' You used to say it's yours, but what did the party representative say? Didn't he say, 'The instruments of production will be held in common'? And, of course, this bucket is such an instrument. It should be held in common. I too would say with you, 'Don't break it.' But is it acceptable to go about beating people and calling them 'wreckers'? The party representative never said that! You yourself have been elected director. Don't you know that if a leader is brutal, we can write an official complaint, we can say, 'Our director beats us,' and they will take you away to prison?"

Qozhagul grew more and more vehement as he lectured Aisha. Aisha said nothing. She herself thought her behavior was shameful. Aisha had forgotten that it had been announced "Property would be held in common" at the meeting. In truth this had been said, common property, anyone could take and use it. Would even those who broke tools keep this right? Aisha wondered. As she thought, the battered black bucket flickered before her eyes like a mirage. Qozhagul's wife, lying in front of the fire with her hair hanging loose, flickered like a mirage. Aisha's entire body began to shake, perhaps from anger, perhaps from fear.

Night. The window buried in snow. Outside a blizzard, and the wind moans, whistles, shrieks. In the dark house, Aisha lies with Quandyg pressed to her chest. Sleep has fled. Dark thoughts fill her, she sighs.

Someone jerked again and again at the door. Aisha lifts her head in fright:

"Who is it?"

"Me!"

A familiar voice. Aisha sprang from the bed.

It was a short young man, crusted all over with snow and red-faced from the cold. His mustache was frozen stiff as a ramrod and he breathed heavily as he took off his coat. "Oh, why did you come through a blizzard?" said Aisha, tenderly helping him out of his coat.

"Hey, my darling, have you got all thin and withered? Let me hug you!" He wrapped his snow-cruled arms around Aisha and pulled her to him as she squirmed like a young girl and lifted her face to his.

It was Birmaghambet. But when would he leave? When Aisha had been angry that day, she had thought that if he came, she wouldn't look at him. And now she is kissing him. Birmaghambet was always like this. When other Kazakh men returned from a trip, they wouldn't kiss their wives,

they wouldn't even say "my dear." They would barely even greet them. But Birmaghambet always went his own way.

Aisha began to tell Birmaghambet everything that had happened while he was gone from beginning to end. Birmaghambet didn't even once say she had done wrong. When she told him that they had decided to become a collective, and she had been chosen as director, Birmaghambet glowed with happiness. He grinned and he roared with laughter.

"Oh, shut up and stop laughing! There's one thing more," said Aisha.

"Oh, come on, tell me!"

"Someone wants to send me to prison!"

"Who?"

Here it was that the story of the black bucket needed to be told. When Aisha spoke of the black bucket, she shook and her voice seemed to choke in her throat.

"Foo, you were afraid of this? Is Qozhagul someone who can send people to prison? Don't you know who he is? He's a mullah and a merchant. Just this fall didn't he come and take the red calf as payment for reading prayers at Berikbol's funeral? But no matter how many times I told Käkimzhan's son, he never taxed the man. We don't need his sort in the collective. Tomorrow, gather all the members and I'll list every one of his crimes and drive him out. And, even if we are a collective, why would that mean that anyone could just take collective property and break it? And anyway, would buckets even be collective property?"

"The cow... will the cow be collective property?" said Aisha, and she sighed.

Black night. As Aisha lies in the bed, the pied cow with her full udders seems to flicker before her eyes. The broken black bucket flickers like a mirage.

1930

FROM THE PAST

Abdulla Qahhor (1907–1968) was born in Kokand, the son of an itinerant blacksmith. Unusually for a man of his social status, Qahhor's father was literate, so he received his early education at home and then in the home of a female instructor, an *otin*, as did Sadridin Ayni and Oydin of this volume. Although old enough to remember the Bolshevik revolution—his father fought in the Red Army during the Civil War—Qahhor belonged to the first Central Asian generation that was largely the product

of the early Soviet system. Later, Qahhor would claim that the Revolution was a kind of coming-of-age (Qahhor 2015). Beginning in 1917, Qahhor attended a Jadid school, and his earliest influences were Jadids: the first contemporary texts he recalled encountering were the poetry of Abdulla Avloniy and Tavallo, the pen name of Tölagan Xöjamyorov, and during his time in Kokand he met and studied with prominent figures in the movement, including Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy, Abdulhamid Sulaymon oghli Chölpon of this section, and Rafiq Mömin. He transferred to a Soviet school in 1919, and received his higher education from the pedagogical institute in Kokand in 1924. After ascending to a leadership position in the local Komsomol in 1924, Qahhor quickly became active in journalism, both as an editor and a regular contributor to Soviet publications—feuilletons and short poems were his earliest works. Qahhor's first published work, a satirical poem about ignorant villagers' reaction to a solar eclipse, was later read as an anti-religious work, but in fact sat squarely within the Jadid tradition of critiquing "superstition" as incompatible with modern Islam. In the mid-1920s, Qahhor studied Russian and attended workers' courses (*rabfak*) in literature at Tashkent's Central Asia State University, where he read the works of Gorky, Chekhov, and Gogol. He began writing short fiction, and quickly became known as one among the leading prose writers in Uzbekistan. His reputation was solidified in 1934, when his novel *Mirage* won second prize in a competition for Uzbek Socialist Realist novels. Although the novel was critiqued later in the 1930s and briefly suppressed, it resurfaced in 1956 with Khrushchev's Thaw and, (in a snub to Chölpon, who, despite posthumous rehabilitation, remained *persona non grata*), was hailed as one of the earliest Soviet novels in Uzbek. Qahhor's major later works included a novella about collectivization, *The Lights of Qöshchinor*, a memoir about his pre-revolutionary childhood, *Tales from the Past*, and several plays. Among early Central Asian writers, Qahhor had remarkable longevity, narrowly surviving multiple purges and dying a natural death in 1968.

The story presented below, *Pomegranate*, is among Qahhor's most widely anthologized and critically appreciated. First published in 1935, it belongs to a cycle of stories Qahhor subtitled as "From the past," a designation that marked them as representative of a dark pre-Soviet reality, rather than the "bright" Soviet present. The poem adopts many techniques from the Chekhovian realist short story, mapping them onto Central Asian cultural realities. Despite the story's apparent verisimilitude, its premise is unrealistic: it is unlikely that a pomegranate would have been

beyond the reach of a poor Central Asian man. The pomegranate thus functions primarily as a symbol of the unattainable luxury enjoyed by his wealthy neighbors; the marital conflict and domestic violence portrayed in the story are the direct consequence of that social inequality. The story's sensitivity to detail and its subtle representation of the everyday frustrations of marital life made it effective both as an ideological narrative and as a human drama.

Claire Roosien

Pomegranate

A Story from the Old Days

By Abdulla Qahhor

Translated by Claire Roosien, Andrew Saperstein, Gulbahor
Normuradova

The world is full of bread, but my child is hungry.
The canals are full of water, but my child is dying of thirst.

From the past

As Turobjon came excitedly through the door, the sleeve of his *yaxtak*²⁹ caught on the latch and ripped up to the elbow. He was upset, but managed to control himself. Seeing the bundle in his hands, his wife, who was grinding corn, set the pestle on the mortar and ran over to him. The mortar tipped over clumsily, spilling half-ground corn onto the floor.

Turobjon teased her, hiding the bundle behind his back.

"Tell me what it is, dear!" he teased.

"Please, dear, please!" she responded.

"What are you going to give me for it?"

"I'll give you half my life!"

Turobjon gave his wife the bundle. She sat down right there in front of the door and opened it. Immediately her shoulders slumped. She lifted her head slowly and looked at her husband. Turobjon, standing there pleased with himself, noticed her eyes filling with tears.

"Do you know what it is?" he said, "It's a honeycomb. It's full of honey! Look, if you squeeze it the honey comes out. This is white beeswax—there's nothing wrong with it. See, you can suck on it or you can chew it..."

²⁹ A *yaxtak* is the tunic that comprises part of Central Asian men's traditional costume.

Biting her sleeve, his wife stared down at a spot on the floor.

"She doesn't believe me, for heaven's sake," he said, digging through the cloth packet he'd brought. "Here, chew some for yourself. Try some and tell me what you think afterward."

Turobjon blushed. He felt just like he had when he had taken a watermelon to a sick friend and later found it in the manger for the cows—it must not have been a sweet one.

The lame cat that wandered around the yard sniffed at the spilled corn and, apparently not pleased with it, looked up at Turobjon and meowed at him complainingly.

"Get up! Pay attention to your corn. Look, the cat's getting into it."

His wife stood up and burst into tears. "What a curse this is! Why couldn't I have a craving for clay, or salt, or dirt clods like everyone else?"

Turobjon took off his cap, and as he was about to dust it off on his wrist, he noticed his torn sleeve again. He cringed inside—it was a brand-new *yaxtak*, only washed three or four times!

Putting his cap back on his head without dusting it off, he said, "Have your cravings, but within reason! Pomegranates! Pomegranates! A pound of pomegranates costs so much! And for carrying water from Saharimardon, chopping wood and burning the straw I earn thirty-five tanga a month. With no brothers to help make ends meet, what can I do?"

The man and his wife stood there silently. The wife returned to grinding corn, muttering under her breath as she poured it from the mortar and into a bowl. "You probably think I just *want* pomegranates..."

"No, I understand. But what am I supposed to do? You want me to kill my boss and take his money, or indenture myself to an Indian, or what?³⁰ Are you crazy or something?"

The wife attended to the cooking pot. Her husband's words stung: "Have your cravings, but within reason!" She felt hurt and humiliated. A lump formed in her throat.

The meal was ready. The stew had turned dark in the rusty pot; not even yogurt could correct its color. Turobjon had two bowls, but his wife could not even eat half a bowl. Something about her hesitation reminded Turobjon of the cat. That, in turn, reminded Turobjon of his torn sleeve and darkened his expression even more. Turobjon's wife, interpreting his

³⁰ Indian merchants were prominent in Central Asian markets before the Russian revolution, often practicing moneylending.

expression to mean that he regretted the corn, firewood, and yogurt wasted on the meal, finished her bowl even though she wasn't hungry. She went behind the house and came back out, her eyes red and the veins on her forehead protruding.

"You're already calling an unborn child a scourge of the earth!" said Turobjon, getting angrier and angrier.

His wife started to clear the table without saying anything. She put some water in the pot and muttered in a voice calculated both to be heard and not heard:

"You could have bought pomegranates with the money you spent on honey."

"Yes, I could have!" said Turobjon sarcastically, "But I didn't, did I? I bought honey!"

"Of course you could have! But you didn't buy pomegranates! You bought honey!"

At times like these, your tongue freezes and refuses to move. And even when you do get your tongue to move, it behaves more like a fist than a tongue.

"It serves you right," said Turobjon, shaking all over. "I hope your liver falls to pieces!"³¹

Only a woman who has experienced cravings understands how those words affected Turobjon's wife. After uttering those words and seeing his wife's reaction, Turobjon completely stopped being angry. If not for his pride, he would have stroked her head and pleaded, "Don't be mad; I only said that because I was angry."

"You really make my heart hurt!" he said after a while. "How could I possibly have bought honey? Even people with horses can't afford to eat honey, and we're still on foot! A friend of my master's brought honey for him, and I asked for little bit from his guest. My master's friend gave it to me himself. It's delicious! I thought you would be glad. Or is it not delicious? How many times in your life have you eaten honey? Even I have only eaten it once. When the confectioner, Shokirkhoja, was making honey syrup, my aunt's chicken fell into it, so I took it out and licked it."

Turobjon's words sounded like babbling to his wife's ears. It had been 3 years since she had made her home with Turobjon, and it was as if

³¹ In Persianate idioms, the liver is often the seat of emotions and serves to express endearment, which makes this phrasing particularly powerful in the original Uzbek.

Turobjon had been babbling all 3 years, and this was just the continuation of everything that had come before. Suddenly today Turobjon had uttered precisely six words: "I hope your liver falls to pieces!" The one person in the world she had relied on, her husband, and the one thing she wanted, pomegranates, had both vanished at once.

The wife went inside the house. After a while a faint ray of light came in through the door. Turobjon was coming in too. The wife was sitting near the window, her head on her knee, and looking out at the gray-blue sky. Turobjon didn't know what to do, so he just stood straight in the middle of the room. The fifth little lamp on the shelf flickered and a large moth fluttered around it. Turobjon also sat down next to the window. A crackling sound came from somewhere in the ceiling; somewhere a lizard was rustling. Turobjon's ears were ringing. He too looked out at the sky, at the dim stars. A reddish flash that came up from behind the old black poplar in the mosque courtyard left a fiery path in the sky, flew very high, and then made a sound as if it had crashed into the sky and shattered.

"Fireworks," said Turobjon, "In Judge Mullajon's garden. Judge Mullajon is having a cradle party."³²

The wife didn't say anything.

"Some nobles from the city came," said Turobjon.

Again, the wife said nothing. She had never seen Judge Mullajon's garden, but she had heard a lot about it. She imagined it in her mind's eye: *not just a garden, but a pomegranate orchard... Pomegranates, big ones, on the pomegranate trees, hanging down as big as teapots.*

"One firework costs three *miri*," said Turobjon, "if there will be a hundred fireworks, that comes out to seventy-five *tanga*."

The husband and wife were quiet for a long time. Turobjon opened his mouth wide, yawning and sighing at the same time.

"Here, mend this," he said, taking his shirt off. "Here!"

The wife took the shirt and put it beside her; her face showed that she had no intention of mending it right away.

"Hurry up!" said Turobjon after a while. "Take it, I'm telling you!"

"All right, all right! Don't be so pushy... I'll sew it up, no need to rush..."

The hair on the top of Turobjon's head stood up straight.

³² Festival on the 40th day after a child's birth.

"You don't have to be so snooty! What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Did I say anything to you? Of course, I'll mend it!"

"If we turn bitter over every little thing ... it'll make things harder," said Turobjon, putting his *yaxtak* back on. "Poverty..."

"To hell with poverty!"

The wife spoke those words as a complaint, but Turobjon took them as a reproach.

"What, when I married you did I hide my poverty? Did I borrow someone else's robe and boots for our wedding night, like Erkaboy? If you're still not satisfied, just marry someone richer!"

"Shame on you, if you would hand your wife over to a rich man just for two pomegranates!"

These words injured Turobjon's pride. He felt the same way his wife had when he said, "I hope your liver falls to pieces!"

"Hey, haven't I ever bought you pomegranates?" said Turobjon in a voice that was both soft and fearsome, "have I ever brought you pomegranates?"

"No!" said his wife, raising her head suddenly.

Turobjon lifted his head, and his eyes went still.

"Oh, so it must have been your lover who brought the pomegranates you ate last Sunday, then?"

"Yes, it was my lover!"

Turobjon could not remember: did he kick his wife in the shoulders first, and then stand up, or did he stand up and then kick? He found himself near the sink. His wife was pale, her eyes wide open; she was looking at him anxiously and whispering, "Calm down, calm down..."

After a little while the door to the street opened and closed, and Turobjon left.

The wife cried for a long time; she regretted speaking harshly to her husband, she cursed herself, and she wished to die. When she grew tired of crying, she went outside. It was dark, and far and near dogs barked. Opening the door to the street, she looked in both directions—silence. In the direction of the crossroads, only one light flickered dimly. The teahouses were closed. She went back inside.

Behind the roof, the rooster spread its wings and began to crow. The door to the street opened. Before the wife could turn around, Turobjon had come in with a large bundle on his back. He threw the bundle in the middle of the room. Pomegranates spread out in all directions; some

of them fell into the drain on the ground. Turobjon looked at his wife. She was very afraid when she saw his face—so pale! Turobjon sat down, clutching his forehead. Quickly his wife came up to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

“Where did you go?” she said, sobbing. “What did you do?”

Turobjon did not answer. His whole body was trembling.

1935

THE SOVIET PICARESQUE

Ghafur Ghulom, one of the most celebrated poets and short story writers of Soviet Uzbek letters, was born in Tashkent in 1903. Like many other members of the first generation of Uzbek socialist writers, Ghulom was orphaned at an early age. In 1919, Ghulom joined the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League, and was subsequently entrusted to teach other orphans like himself at a boarding school created by the nascent Soviet state’s Commissariat for Enlightenment. It was that experience that led him to author his first poem “Children of Felix” (1923), in which he declared that these orphans, thanks to the Communist Party’s unprecedented care for them, had become Lenin and Felix Dzerzhinsky’s children (G’ulom 1983, 16). Dzerzhinsky is best known as the head of the first Soviet secret police organization, the Cheka, but his role as chairman of a Commissariat for Enlightenment commission on boarding schools prompted Ghulom’s poem.

Ghulom, however, would only publish that poem in 1928, just as the Bolsheviks had decided to oust Jadids like Chölpon from their midst, and promote, in their stead, men and women like Ghulom, who had gotten their education from communist institutions.³³ Because of this changing of the guard, Ghulom found himself that year working in the offices of the newspapers “Red Uzbekistan” (“Qizil Özbekiston”) and “Poor Peasant” (“Kambaghal dehqon”), publishing articles, poems, essays, feuilletons, translations, and scholarly philological work. He was denounced in 1937 at the height of Stalin’s Great Terror, but, unlike some of his cohort who met much grimmer fates, Ghulom managed to retain his position in the

³³ In all likelihood, Ghulom had a hand in his rise in the Uzbek professional classes at the expense of Jadids. According to Nabijon Boqiy in his investigation of the arrest and execution of the first Uzbek novelist, Jadid writer Abdulla Qodiriy (1894–1938), Ghulom signed an affidavit declaring Qodiriy an anti-Soviet nationalist (Boqiy 1991, 44–45).

Uzbek Writers' Union.³⁴ He died in 1966 as one of Soviet Uzbekistan's most celebrated writers.

Like the poem with which he began his career, *The Mischievous Child* focuses on orphanhood too. This picaresque novella follows an unnamed child narrator, who, to avoid his mother punishing him for his latest prank, abandons her and wanders the Central Asian countryside in search of work. His eventual aim is to return to his mother with some money, but he never achieves this goal. This is because his employers and the other people he meets represent the dregs of urban Central Asian society. Among them are poorly educated mullah charlatans (as seen in the following excerpt), adulterers, polygamists, irresponsible rich men, thieves, and opium den owners. His employers exploit his labor, and the child narrator, undeterred by their power over him, plays pranks on them before escaping their service.

Ghulom first published the novel serially in the late 1930s but later returned to *The Mischievous Child*, reworking parts of it in the 1960s. Throughout all his work on the novella, accounts suggest that he did not write but rather discussed memories with childhood friends, tested orally the funniest manner in which to retell the events, and then dictated the episodes to a typist from memory.

The broader ideological message of the novella's episodes of exploitation and revolt is two-fold. Firstly, it shows Ghulom's narrator, and Ghulom himself via his identification with his pseudo-autobiographical character, as a Soviet citizen in waiting. As a child in pre-revolutionary Uzbekistan, the narrator understandably has no knowledge of class conflict; therefore, Ghulom shows his character as implicitly on the path toward class consciousness via Marxism–Leninism's unique historical dialectic. Marxism–Leninism, in difference to other Marxisms, held that, before achieving class consciousness, the oppressed classes of the world demonstrate “spontaneity,” a quality that explains impulsive, uninformed revolts against class power at various times. In his frequent revolts, Ghulom's narrator exhibits precisely this spontaneity: he plays pranks sometimes out of a brief, immediate knowledge of his exploitation and sometimes out of mere boredom. He is not yet the class-conscious individual he would later become, but his spontaneity suggests that he is on

³⁴ David C. Montgomery notes that Ghulom was not expelled from the Writers' Union because he “made a tearful recantation of his views and actions” (Montgomery 1986, 213).

that path. Secondly, the novel's allegorical form also denotes pre-Soviet Central Asia society as one in entropic decline, populated by unfit surrogate parents incapable of siring the next generation. Each of Ghulom's employers takes the boy into their service in recognition of his orphanhood. They style themselves as surrogate fathers to him even as they exploit him. The allegorical message of his abandonment of them is that urban Central Asia, as represented by these backward classes, is incapable of properly producing a new generation and is thus doomed to an inevitable death. Rebirth will only be brought by the October Revolution, which will produce fit surrogate parents.

The excerpt translated here, in which the narrator and his friend ally themselves with a mullah charlatan, demonstrates some of the features typical of other episodes in the novella. The narrator does not prank the mullah here, but rather joins him in exploiting a group of unsuspecting nomads. However, the episode reveals the hostility of Ghulom and his Soviet intellectual contemporaries toward the Islamic clergy by painting them as ignorant and exploitative.

Chris Fort

Chapter II of The Mischievous Child

Ghafur Ghulom

Translated by Chris Fort

After three hours of walking, we came to a place called Tepaguzar. An old grocer was opening his store. We bought a few things that we would need for the journey: a pound of salt, two pounds of dried apricots, six naan, some string, a needle, and a pair of bruised melons. It was seven kopecks. The *domla*,³⁵ our recent travel companion, extracted four kopecks from a secret pouch in his robe, and we paid the other three.

We walked for another half hour and stopped under a willow at the mouth of a spring that the locals called Oynabuloq. There we ripped up our bread and split our melons to have some breakfast. The *domla* used our short breakfast as an opportunity to introduce himself:

"We humble servants are from Bukhara the Great," he began, speaking of himself using the royal we. "Now we reside in Tashkent's Pushtihammom neighborhood. Our grandfather held the esteem of all of

³⁵ A teacher or learned man. Short for *domullah*, the typical term for a teacher.

Bukhara as a great *eshon*.³⁶ Our father, heaven be his, had only to say one word from the Qur'an to make water flow upstream and a second word to make the blind see again. There were few in Bukhara who had not professed their admiration of him.

Our mother too was descended from a line of great men. She was an *otin*, a teacher of girls, known throughout the city. Many came to her to have their fortunes read by her tambourine and to have their dishes engraved with spells to solve all the concerns of lovers and families. They took pride knowing she bastinadoed the feet of their children. My father raised me to take on his profession, but when I proved unfit, I began to act out. I started playing the role of the *bachcha*³⁷ at a few parties to earn some extra money. In the process, I picked up a marijuana habit. I turned to pickpocketing to support myself. But such a career didn't suit someone high-born like me. One day I was nearly trampled at the bazaar. But thank God, I found my path and was able to follow in my father's footsteps. I've managed a life for myself here in the steppe reading prayers for people and writing talismans for them. My father had a lot of duties, but I'm doing a few of them.

I've never seen the inside of a madrasa, but I taught myself to read. More or less. Well, even if I can't read, I know enough to get the gist. Enough to make an amulet with some saffron and write *Al-Ismul A'zam*.³⁸ I have a number of devotees among the villagers here. Some of them call me *eshon*, others *gori*,³⁹ and still others mullah. My name is Mullamuhammad Sharif binni Mullamuhammad Latif ibni Ghavsil a'zam."

He clearly had something in mind for us—he wouldn't have wasted all this time trying to impress us otherwise—and he immediately proceeded to it after his equivocating introduction. "If the three of us put our heads together, we can make some money and fill our stomachs out here. You

³⁶ A Sufi master. Sufis were devotees of Islamic mysticism. They typically belonged to orders (*tariqat*) and had a spiritual master, an *eshon*, that instructed them on how best to transcend their earthly existence and unite with God.

³⁷ Literally "boy" in Persian. In this context, the *domla* uses the term to indicate that he became a lover of older men and the dominated party. Homosexual relationships between pairs of older and young men were common across the pre-modern Islamic world, a practice borrowed from the Greeks.

³⁸ Arabic for "the greatest name." Used in prayers in reference to Allah.

³⁹ A reciter of the Qur'an who sings the text.

two just need to say ‘*hazrat, hazrat*’⁴⁰ behind me, and I’ll call you my apprentices. I’ll teach you what I know of Sharia, and in no time at all, we’ll return to the city with reputations!

When no one’s around, you can call me Sharifjon or mullah just fine. Whatever we make, we’ll split it. Four ways. Two parts to me and one part to each of you. And whoever breaks this deal, let his face be forever turned from the *qiblah*.⁴¹

We all turned toward the *qiblah* and prayed.

We dawdled at the spring a bit longer until a dust storm rose up in our direction. We got up to seek cover when we suddenly saw a silhouette moving through the dust. From behind the curtain of sand shot an Uzbek on horseback. The galloping horse was exhausted, foaming at the mouth. The robe of the mounted man opened wide as he flew up the hill. He barely brought the horse to a stop in front of us.

“*Assalomu alaykum*, brothers, where are you headed?”

“Wherever we can earn some money.”

“Brothers,” the young man began, “is there one among you who knows the Sharia, who can wash the dead?”

The *domla* looked at us, signaling with his eyes, and we bowed at the waist.

The *domla* cleared his throat and begin speaking with flair and self-importance:

“Indeed, one stands before you. What service do you require? We are,” he again spoke of himself in the plural, “Tashkenters, the son of an *eshon*, the descendant of a madrasa-educated, wise mullah. As we have now a temporary hiatus in our lessons, we have come to partake of the changing winds of the steppe here. These two are my apprentices.”

The nomadic Uzbek, like a madman happening upon a plum pit, was overjoyed to hear this long-winded introduction.

“Oh wow, good sirs, oh yes! God has surely sent you! Come, let’s go. Our camp and herd aren’t far from here. One of our men fell ill and died, and we have no one to wash his body and perform the funeral. My dear sirs, God has delivered you here. Let’s go!”

Omon gathered up our things, while the Uzbek man dismounted and hoisted the *domla* onto his horse. Three of us on foot, the *domla* on

⁴⁰ His holiness, a title used in reference to religious authorities.

⁴¹ The direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, which Muslims face when praying.

horseback set off. It was a long road. We stopped a few times to rest. After we descended from a cliff, we saw a camp and a few pastures in the distance. The Uzbek stretched out his hand in that direction.

“Ho, that camp over there is ours. We’ll be there soon.”

We got there just as the sun had reached its highest point. These people’s main grazing lands were a few hundred miles further on, in the middle of the steppe. All their things, their wives and children, were there. When their man had fallen ill at that faraway camp, some twenty young men and a few elders had set out with him to find a healer, but the man died on route. They had decided to bury him here but had no one to perform the rites.

When we arrived, the camp started buzzing with excitement. The men all ran up to greet us, placing their hands on their breasts to show respect. Our *hazrat* asked where the body was. One old man pointed to the abandoned fortress.

The inside of the fortress reminded me of some rich herder’s yard. Strong outer walls with few openings, a double-leafed gate. But time had had its way, and the reinforced wood had rotted, just waiting for some angry animal to test its strength. In the middle of the enclosed fortress was a small pool that the inhabitants had dug deep to fill with underground water. All kinds of mold had overgrown the edges of the pool. A willow stood at one end, its roots reaching deep into the water. The corpse was in the cattle pen.

Admittedly, neither I, nor Omon, nor the *hazrat* had ever washed the dead in our lives. I was no coward, but I was certainly afraid of the dead and even kept my distance from the dead cats that the neighborhood boys used to drag around. The *hazrat*, on the other hand, tried to pass himself off as if he’d never done anything but wash the dead in his life. He stepped slowly, whispering prayers and incantations as he repeatedly brought his hands to his face and slowly lowered them. Omon and I easily saw through this charade. A trick he did to fill his belly.

At the *domla*’s signal, Omon began to usher the others out of the fortress. Once they got to the gate, he asked them for a burial shroud. A younger man brought him a long cloth of cheap cotton. Our *domla* then told them: “Don’t approach, don’t peek inside this fortress until the deceased is washed and ready. Those that look will be committing the greatest of sins. A sin that is the surest road to hell!”

Everyone left. We closed the gate and rolled a large stone in front of it in case the warning wasn’t enough.

The *hazrat* looked at us, and we looked at him.

"Now what do we do? Have the two of you ever washed a corpse?" he asked.

"No," we both answered at the same time.

"Me neither. But I already made a deal with those Uzbeks for ten rubles. If we don't wash it, we'll lose all that... or worse..." he paused. "I'll take five, and each of you will get two and a half."

"Fine, but you're washing it," I retorted.

Suppressing our apprehension, we followed the *domla* into the little cell where they had placed the corpse. The body lay there on its back, legs bare; its face was covered with an old robe. They must have been searching for someone to wash it for a few days now because the corpse had already started to rot. The *hazrat* suddenly stepped away, overwhelmed by the smell. He nearly fell over as he backed into us. When he regained his footing, he cursed a bit under his breath. I barely noticed; it felt as if the spirit of the dead man still lingered in the room. My heart started pounding.

Ahead of me Omon suddenly shrieked and fell to the ground by the dead man. The *domla* jumped toward the entryway, pressing his back to the nearby wall. My dulled senses carried me forward until I saw why Omon had fainted: the corpse, which we were supposed to wash and bury, had come back to life! Under the robe that covered his face and torso, he had begun to raise his head!

My heart nearly burst from my chest, and I turned to run but an outstretched arm caught my foot. I had tripped over the unconscious Omon's limbs. I looked up at the *hazrat*, who was now in front of me. He was deathly pale. He was whispering something to himself, blowing to ward away the evil spirits. My breath caught in my throat; I shot up and sprinted toward the exit. As I ran, I looked back as if the corpse would be chasing after me. When I got out to the courtyard, I started yelling for help, my voice high and broken from lack of breath.

The nomads outside started to panic as they heard my terrifying screeching. They threw themselves at the door, but it didn't budge. The stone we had placed in front of it held in place, and I didn't have the strength to move it.

As for our *domla*, he was already out in the courtyard with me, hurriedly washing himself at the pool. Two of the Uzbeks climbed over the wall and opened the door for the rest of them. Still trying to catch

my breath, I started telling them what happened. Their eyes bulged forth from their sockets as shock ran across their faces.

Suddenly I remembered Omon. I had to go back for him! I started back toward the cell with the Uzbeks behind me, all the way eyeing the exit and again suppressing my fear.

As we entered the cell, whooping and hollering to scare off the living corpse, we saw the dead man's robe, now on the floor, somehow skitter about. It mounted the unconscious Omon, and then suddenly a steppe cat sprung out from underneath it, ran between our legs, and exited the cell. Our faces went blank. The apparent resurrection was suddenly clear.

As we now looked at the corpse, we realized what had happened: a steppe cat had crawled under its robe, warmed itself on the dead man's chest, and, at some point, gnawed off the corpse's nose.

Seeing their noseless friend undoubtedly upset the nomads, but they had a good laugh at the "bravery" of us three young, inept corpse washers.

The nomadic Uzbeks then left us to continue our work. We pushed the stone up against the door again. We brought Omon, who was barely hanging on to consciousness, to the pool and sprinkled some water on his face, but he still didn't fully return to us. His face looked like an old, faded cloth.

"Hold on, brother, hold on. Let me try a bit," the *hazrat* said. He began to mutter his prayers and to blow on Omon. "Ok, that should do it. Now you've come back to yourself. There can be no doubt in the power of prayer!"

"Get up now. There's nothing to be scared of; it was just a cat," I added.

"No, no. I've had enough. You two do the rest if you want..." Omon said.

"The Sharia requires three people to wash the dead," I protested.

We begged Omon repeatedly as we set him on his feet. If he left now, we might all be found out. He agreed.

We all headed toward the cell again, everyone trying to yield to someone else: "You go first, I'm behind you."

The *hazrat* turned to us and smiled: "Well, let's get started. How should we wash it? They're getting impatient out there."

"The *hazrat* will do the washing; we'll pour the water. He'll rub and wash the corpse, make sure it's not damaged, take care of the nose, or at

least the spot where the nose used to be, and then the money can be his. We'll take the cloth they gave; that's enough for us."

"Hey, wait a second," the *domla* stopped us, "what about 'the youth serve, the old rest'? You two wash; I'll pour the water. I'll do the praying too."

"Save the prayers for yourself. You'll wash him, sir, and if you don't, I'll tell all those men about your ruse here."

"Yes, we'll both tell," Omon repeated.

"Hey, hey!" protested the *hazrat*. "I thought we were friends. Come on, let's go. You two take him by the head, I'll take him by the legs."

"No, sir, you take the head, we'll take the legs."

All this arguing was done at a whisper, while we kept our eyes on the door. God forbid the nomads would hear us. The men outside were carving the trunk of a willow tree into a travois to carry the corpse.

After the *hazrat* had given up arguing, Omon turned to me.

"Can we find a couple lengths of rope?"

"Why?"

"I thought of something," he said, a smile spreading across his face, "Come on, let's go look."

After a thorough search of the fortress's several cowsheds, we found a good bit of rope tied to a stake near a feeding trough. We untied it and went back to the cell with the corpse. The *domla* was in the corridor, rubbing his hands against one another as he whispered to himself.

This time Omon, perhaps because he had already fainted and recovered once, proceeded far more confidently. He called the *domla* in and ordered him to pick up the corpse. The previously stubborn *domla* surrendered. He turned his back to the corpse, and with disgust on his face lifted the body's legs. Omon tied tight knots on each of the corpse's legs at the ankles. The three of us then took the rope and dragged the body toward the pool. As we dragged him, his arms caught on the ground behind and moved up in an inviting embrace. If the poor man had been alive, he would have been screaming incessantly at us for tearing the skin from his back.

We stopped when we reached the edge of the pool.

"The best way to do this, friends," Omon started, "is to lower him, head first, and then dunk him three or four times. Then he'll be halal and ready to be buried."

"If God wills it," said the *hazrat*, "then, of course, he'll be *halal*. As God said of the matter: this pool for ablution is *halal*," he added in stilted Arabic.

"No, the best way would be if you were the corpse," I quipped.

We all laughed. The plan was good. We took the rope and slowly dunked the corpse into the water, dragging it from one end of the pool to the other. Because we were new to the profession, we took a special interest. We didn't stop with just three submersions, but kept going until we had dragged him out of the water for, perhaps, the fifteenth time. The corpse became so waterlogged that it began to look like a shriveled grape.

When we felt like not even an accomplished washer of corpses could have washed this man more thoroughly, we began to pull him out, but he suddenly stopped submitting to the ropes. It was as if he had dug his nails into the bottom of the pool. Omon's face again turned pale. The *domla* panicked. His lips formed the words, "help, dear God, help," as he gripped the rope tighter and pulled. I thought about crying for help again, but I quickly understood what a stupid idea that was and shut my mouth. Omon must have realized what I was thinking about.

"Stop, you idiot," he said, "what do you think you're doing?"

"Shouldn't I call for help?"

"You should be using any strength you have to pull the rope!" he barked at me with a nearly closed mouth.

The three of us put our feet up against the willow and pulled as hard as we could. The poor corpse's lumbar cracked and stretched by at least a few hand lengths.

Just then, someone knocked at the door. The *domla* ran over to prevent them from coming in.

"Just keep waiting there. We still haven't finished washing the deceased's waist. We'll let you know when we're done."

He came back, and we started pulling again. But the already fraying rope that had been sitting in the heat and dampness of the cowshed since last summer suddenly snapped, and the three of us fell on our backs all at once.

It was getting late. It would have been dangerous to dawdle. Omon, having gathered his courage like a legendary hero, quickly stripped down and threw himself into the pool to look for the submerged corpse.

"Hey, sir, you strip down too, or you won't get those easy ten rubles you were hoping for," I said.

"And what if I don't?"

“I’ll go tell the family members and raise hell about what you put us up to!”

The *domla* looked at me with fury in his eyes. “Swine,” he said as he took off his shirt and white pants and dove in. What does this “swine” mean, I thought to myself. Was he cursing at me? Or was he impressed?

The two of them set to searching. A leg surfaced suddenly, and after a second, so did Omon, his arms tightly wrapped around the corpse’s waist. He swam toward the edge of the pool. I handed the broken rope to the *domla*, and he tied it around the remaining bare spot on the corpse’s leg. But the head was still stuck somewhere among the roots of the tree under water. I pulled the rope from my spot at the edge of the pool. Omon and the *domla* clung to the corpse’s waist, desperately trying to pull it free. Finally, they ripped the body from the tree’s deep-set roots and brought it to the side of the pool. But when the torso surfaced, its noseless head was gone!

As soon as he saw the corpse’s suddenly empty neck, Omon dove back to the tree’s roots to retrieve the head. He handed it to the *domla*, and the two of them got out of the pool. The *domla* grabbed his travel bag out from his long shirt, took the needle and thread from it, and in no time had a six-layer stitch across the corpse’s neck, reaffixing the head to the body.

It was funny: the *hazrat* lied about his qualifications at every turn, but apparently, he had a few skills.

Everything started to come together. We quickly basted the burial shroud and used it to hide the disfigured body as best we could. But the cloth we had for the shroud wasn’t long enough to cover the corpse’s feet. The abrasions on his ankles from the rope hit the eye like a beet on black coals.

We emptied out the *domla*’s travel bag and put its contents in our waistbands. We then covered the corpse’s feet with the bag and sewed it to the shroud.

Omon put his shirt and pants back on, while the *domla* donned his pants, turban, and robes. He made himself up splendidly, as if for Friday prayers, put his hands together, gave himself a prophet-like countenance, and began to whisper something to himself as he stood over the corpse.

I went over to the door and removed the stone. The mourners were already standing outside, waiting for the funeral to begin. Outside, a travois made of willow wood had been prepared for us. Its parallel bars

made it look like an Uzbek two-wheeled cart. Harnessed to those parallel bars were two horses.

The family members of the deceased surrounded the corpse; some of them began caressing him and crying. One of them brought his hand to the deceased's head and suddenly shouted:

"Why is his head on backwards?"

In our rush, we must have sewed his head on the other way around!

Clearly flustered, but trying to maintain his previous composure, the *hazrat* explained, "he must have committed many sins in life, and therefore God saw fit to turn his face around."

Again, I was amazed at the *domla*'s quick thinking. All that book learning of his really is useful, I thought to myself.

But the *domla*'s skills weren't enough. The secret was out. Everyone knew that we had dismembered the corpse and then sewed its head on backwards.

The family members left the corpse and surrounded us. Because he was the leader and much older than us, they all kept their eyes trained on the *hazrat*. Omon and I ran. We shot through the narrow spaces between the nomads and headed toward the street. Behind us were two Uzbek men, who had clearly spent most of their lives on horses and weren't used to pursuing on foot. We decided to split up. "Go left," I yelled at Omon. I turned right. The *domla* got lost somewhere in the crowd. I don't know what happened to him. If he stayed alive, it would only be because he managed to dig himself out of the grave they put him in, and if not, well then may he rest in peace.

1936-7

STALINIST SPRING POETRY

The question of what role classical Persianate models could play in the construction of Soviet Central Asian national literatures was a vexed one. Those Uzbek and Tajik poets who published traditional ghazals on themes of love and springtime, or even included such themes in their political poetry, came under increasing attack over the course of the 1920s. Poetry about roses and nightingales came to be a byword for oriental indolence and political disengagement in polemics of the First Five-Year Plan years (1928-32), and excessive interest in classical verse also put poets and critics under suspicion of potential covert nationalism.

In “May Day and MOPR” by Payrav Sulaymani (1899–1933), an early and radical innovator in Tajik poetry, we see the near-complete displacement of the ghazal poetics of spring renewal. In traditional Persianate poetics, the spring equinox festival of Navruz was the most important single occasion for poetic composition, particularly associated with panegyric verse that reaffirmed the sovereignty and generosity of the ruler as part of the renewal of nature. Sulaymani almost entirely effaces the classical poetics of spring renewal in a celebration of the communist spring holiday, May Day, and a Soviet instrument of patronage and renewal, the International Red Aid organization that advocated on behalf of communist political prisoners (referred to in the poem’s title by its Russian acronym, MOPR—*Mezhdunarodnaia organizatsiia pomoshchi bortsam revoliutsii*). The description of the poem’s prisoner is in a realist style completely removed from classical convention, as is the rhyme scheme (ABBACC), and the affecting sketch of his family draws on European Sentimentalism. Only a concluding reference to the sweet-scented breeze connects this work to classical spring poetry.

Payrav’s enthusiastic iconoclasm is perhaps owed to his exceptionally broad education: his Bukharan merchant family had sent him to a Russian school before the revolution, and in the early 1920s, he traveled in Afghanistan and Iran. Although capable of producing de-Persified verse and translations of Russian poets, he was also a sensitive reader and writer in more traditional Persian forms, and was attacked by younger “proletarian” critics for traditionalist tendencies. Payrav playfully defied these critics in “You, Gardener,” a poem whose non-traditional form contains an extended exploration of the classical ghazal trope of nightingale and rose as lover and beloved.

The later promulgation of socialist realism and Soviet national literatures (1932–34) rapidly turned classical Persian literature from an object of suspicion into Tajik heritage. At the same time, the development of the literary Stalin cult generated a market for Persianate panegyrics in all the Central Asian literatures. Spring imagery played a particularly important role in this repertory, and the Iranian émigré poet Abulqasim Lahuti established an image of Stalin as the careful gardener of the nationalities that soon appeared even in Russian literature. With the composition of “Spring,” by the young Tajik poet Mirza Tursunzada (1911–1977), who would later become one of the leading voices of Tajik literature under Stalin and after, this about-face was complete. “Spring” is an accomplished panegyric ghazal, distinguishable from classical poems that

performed the same function only by its emphasis on the figure of the gardener, occasional reference to contemporaneous slogans, and refusal of the natural cycle of the seasons. Written as the Great Terror (1937–8) murdered most of the older Central Asian writers, “Spring” celebrates the Soviet gardening state.

Samuel Hodgkin

May Day and MOPR

Payrav Sulaymani

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

A night pitch-black as the idol's tresses
Behind an iron prison grate
One naked, sitting in grief and despair
Skin and bones from head to toe
But his eyes electric with knowledge
His heart strong, his hope plain to see

His arms and neck are bound in iron chains
Rough, hard, and black as the conquerors' hearts
The chains' assaults have left him bent as a bow
Weak, weary, wretched: O! for this prey
Respite! How heinous, how unjust
In whose claws, what hunter's game is this?

He's done no murder, theft, plunder, nor fraud
Nor took bribes like a judge, nor butchered like a guard
Nor was he like the kings and clergy drunk
Nor freeloaded like the wealthy on another's wage
Why then?...
His crime: he was for the laborers' rights
He sought humanity's liberation

With each breath, laments came from his burning heart
As before his gaze blazed an image:
His wife on the sickbed, his children by her side
All crying out in hunger:

bread!!!

What tyranny is this, capable of such brutality?
What kind of heart, on which such evil leaves no mark?

All at once, a sweet cheering breeze
Comes on his senses, opens his eyes, he sees
Thousands of red banners from all sides
In yellow letters: "LONG LIVE MAY DAY!"
Don't be heartsick: all bonds will be loosed
For after each dark night, the sun returns

1928

You, Gardener

Payrav Sulaymani

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Say, gardener,
What's this commotion about?
Nothing but blabber,
Pointless and vain!
I did not see, I did not pick,
A single rose!
I watched from a distance,
Merely caught a hint of a glimmer;
I took a glance,
Stayed on my guard,
And stepped away –
Loyal to my lover.
I did not breathe, I did not woo
A single rose.

Come on and listen,
Be reasonable!
It's the season of blossoms and spring,
Cheer up and celebrate!
Don't wrong me, heart,
Don't be cruel!

Show some patience
 With these teasing roses.
 Spring has blossomed anew,
 Bringing countless promises
 Me, I didn't see, I didn't pick
 A single rose –
 I did not smell, I did not woo
 A single rose.

In the spring of the youths
 A time of pleasure and wine
 Evenings in the garden
 Under the shining moon
 I had a rose
 Musky and fragrant
 Every heart envied
 The locks on her proud head
 I'm crazy about her
 I'm a moth to her flame
 I've given her my heart
 Prepared myself for her
 I know no other
 I sing of no other
 I did not see, I did not pick
 Another rose
 I did not smell, I did not woo
 A single rose.

Suddenly, autumn
 Fell in the garden
 The rose's color fled
 Its fragrant petals fell
 A truce, nightingales
 Lamenting and heartsick
 We've lost the rose...
 What a blow to the heart!
 Tranquility is lost
 Not a single rose remains
 I could not see, could not pick
 A rose any more
 I did not smell, I did not woo

A single rose.

I saw on all sides
 Green peeking out
 Tulips branded
 By the mark of their sorrow
 Cascades rushing
 Over the rocks
 The eyes became springs
 Tears fell in torrents
 The wind lamented
 The sea beat its breast
 Yesterday, a nightingale
 For love of a rose
 Tore out its feathers
 Shed wet tears
 Saying:

Alas!

I did not see

Crying

I did not pick a rose.

I did not smell, I did not woo

A single rose.

1930

Spring

Mirza Tursunzada

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Spring removed the veil from its beautiful face
 Winter's cold packed its garments to leave the homeland
 My gaze fell upon the roses and tulips of the garden
 I saw everything arranged, everything fresh and moist
 The cypress of the field is tall-statured and has flourished
 Like the free son and daughter of man
 A sweet scent blows and a zephyr breeze carries
 News from that life-restoring aroma to my nose
 An intoxicated nightingale on the garden's blooming rose-branch

Sings from its glad heart at the time of dawn
 When I saw the blooming rose, out of it came
 Into my sight the beloved, laughing mouth of the Age
 I said, "O rose, where did you find this rosiness of face?"
 It said, "the color of your beloved's face left its mark on me
 When the dawn comes out of its house, following my work
 It will pass through this garden with joy and delight
 I have only flourishing, the zenith, and blooming
 There's no sign of autumn for me any more"
 I became glad at the rose's good answer, I smiled
 The thought of my garden-nurturing master came into my head:
 The gardener tended to the garden, heart and soul
 Every shoot that he cared for bore fruit
 He gives light to humankind's eye of wisdom
 The sun and moon bow their heads and submit before him
 O minstrel, strike up the harp, that we all may dance
 In the springtime of the glad homeland, to the song of victory

1937

UYGHUR POETS IN A TIME OF REVOLUTION

In the mid-twentieth century, northwestern China's Xinjiang Province—reorganized as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955—was a contact zone for many of Eurasia's major competing ideologies: most notably, nationalism, socialism, and an increasingly globalized Islam. Particularly in the north of the region, the USSR cast a long shadow, with many young people embracing socialist ideology, Soviet cultural forms, and the Uyghur national category adopted by their relatives in Soviet Central Asia. By the 1930s, left-leaning literati in Xinjiang found themselves in ideological conflict with religious conservatives, while in the 1940s Uyghur nationalists and pan-Turkists debated their community's identity in the press.

On both sides of the Xinjiang-Soviet frontier, poetry, long the foremost literary genre among the Turkic-speaking agriculturalists of the region, proved a key tool for nation-building intellectuals. Into the early twentieth century, the poetry of their forebears had been dominated, on the one hand, by ornate Persianate verse circulated by manuscript, and on the other, by popular verse transmitted orally. In Soviet Central Asia's emerging Uyghur cultural scene, the 1920s saw not only the codification

of a modern national identity and language, but the emergence of a poetic style drawing on Russian modernists like Vladimir Mayakovsky as well as reformist Tatar poets like Ğabdulla Tuqay. Their influence was reflected in the work of Soviet Uyghur poets like Ömer Muhemmedi (1906–31) and Ismail Sattarov (1916–44), who helped flesh out a Uyghur literary language hewing closely to everyday speech.

In addition to its linguistic novelty, the new Uyghur verse of the early twentieth century differed profoundly from its predecessors in form, theme, and circulation. Largely jettisoning the complex rhyme and meter schemes of the Persianate tradition, the predominantly young practitioners of Soviet Uyghur poetry preferred free verse or “finger meter” (*barmaq wezin*), a popular Turkic poetic form in which syllable counts are matched between lines. The besotted lovers, holy men, and heroic warriors of classical poetry gave way to new subject matter: the struggles of the poor; the wonders of industrialization; the superiority of socialism. The medium was part of the message; the new poetry was distributed by mass print, which the Soviet state vigorously promoted in the native languages of Central Asia and other parts of the USSR.

Some of these print products, in Uyghur and other Turkic languages, made their way to Xinjiang, where their influence on young literati was considerable. By the 1930s, Uyghur-language newspapers in the north of the province regularly carried new-style poetry in their pages. A small but growing number of Uyghur children in northern Xinjiang were educated in Russian- or Tatar-medium schools; a larger number were exposed to socialist ideas and cultural forms in other contexts. From the mid-1930s through the early 1940s, Soviet influence deepened throughout Xinjiang after Governor Sheng Shicai struck an alliance with Stalin: in exchange for Soviet economic and military aid, the province would be remade along Soviet lines. Along with centralized economic plans and secret police, Soviet-style nationality and cultural policies were soon officially adopted in the province.

This was the political and cultural context in which Lutpulla Mutellip came of age. Born in Soviet Turkestan in 1922, Lutpulla immigrated with his family to northern Xinjiang’s Ili region while still a boy. He remained closely connected to Soviet cultural trends, attending Tatar and Russian schools in Ili and devouring the work of Uyghur, Russian, and Tatar poets from across the border. Lutpulla published his own early poems in the *Ili Xinjiang Gazette* and soon developed a vigorous, often colloquial style

that proved effective for his preferred themes: the struggle against nationalism and imperialism; the imperatives of diligence and sacrifice; the power of literary creation. The mid-1930s onset of Soviet-style administration in Xinjiang came at a propitious time for the young leftist poet, who landed a position running the literature page of the province's largest Uyghur newspaper, the *Xinjiang Gazette*, while barely out of his teens.

Lutpulla's star burned ever brighter in the first half of the 1940s, as his poetic talents matured and his personal network gained increasing influence in literary and publishing circles. Yet the political circumstances that had helped empower him were changing rapidly. In 1942, Sheng Shicai broke with the Soviets, began purging left-wing intellectuals, and invited the Chinese Nationalist Party into Xinjiang. Two years later, Moscow struck back by supporting a rebellion in northern Xinjiang that led to the creation of an Eastern Turkestan Republic in three northern districts, with Uyghurs from Ili playing a central role. Lutpulla, then working in southern Xinjiang at the *Aqsu Xinjiang Gazette*, was involved in underground organizing in support of the rebellion. The provincial government quickly caught wind of his organization, however, and imprisoned Lutpulla together with numerous other activists. With the Eastern Turkestani army at the gates of Aqsu, Lutpulla was executed in autumn 1945 alongside dozens of his comrades.

While Lutpulla's own voice had been silenced, his reputation only grew in the years that followed. The poet's former associates promoted his work and his memory, while both the Eastern Turkestan Republic and the Chinese Nationalists attempted to claim Lutpulla for their respective causes. After the newly founded People's Republic of China absorbed the Eastern Turkestan Republic in 1949 and reintegrated it into Xinjiang, Ili intellectuals came to dominate the province's Maoist cultural bureaucracy, enabling them to solidify Lutpulla's place in the Uyghur national pantheon. While the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76 saw the denunciation of Lutpulla and the burning of his works, Uyghur intellectuals and artists in the 1980s resumed the project of commemorating the late poet, who was featured in novels and textbooks, songs and poems, plays and films. Today, Lutpulla Mutellip is one of the most recognizable figures in modern Uyghur culture, and his most famous poem, "Answer to the Years," is universally known by Uyghur-speakers.

Composed in Aqsu in 1944, the poem's central metaphor of mocking, thieving years echoes Ömer Muhemmedi's 1929 poem "I Will Plow No More": "Damn the years, the years!... / Daily they preen in the mirror

/ mocking me: / “I’ve stolen your youth / and in its place left you with a beard!” Yet whereas Muhemmedi’s poem is a free-verse satire of ignorance and a playful ode to industrialization, Lutpulla Mutellip used his anthropomorphized years as the central metaphor for an extended contemplation of creativity as an answer to mortality. Written the year before Lutpulla’s death, “Answer to the Years” is often taken as proleptically addressing the poet’s own demise. Its straightforward rhyme scheme and loose meter are typical of Lutpulla’s style, as is its defiant optimism. While the poem begins with a wistful meditation on the finitude of youth, it builds toward a resounding celebration of creativity—and especially poetry—as the ultimate riposte to the mocking years.

Joshua L. Freeman⁴²

Answer to the Years

Lutpulla Mutellip

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

Time hurries ahead, it waits for no one,
years are the great steed on which time rides by.
Rivers flow and dawns break, they never repeat,
the galloping years run away with our lives.

The years chase each other with quickening pace,
without looking back they abscond with it all.
Nightingales barely fly in the orchard of youth
before the leaves start to crumple and fall.

So graceful a chapter of life is youth,
yet the end of the chapter comes much too soon.
Each page that is torn from the calendar
is a petal that falls from youth’s delicate bloom.

This tree without leaves grows so dry and forlorn,
as the tracks are buried by a wind of years.

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The generous years never come empty-handed,
to girls they bring wrinkles, to boys they bring beards.

Yet cursing the years is no answer at all,
let them pass ever onward and make their own plans.
Man too will collect what he chooses from time,
the wilderness flowers to life in his hands.

So much can be done in the years' great expanse,
triumphs rise up like peaks as the years make their way.
Only last night the infant still lay there so small,
yesterday he was crawling, he's walking today.

Young people chase fearlessly after the years,
their fearless grandchildren will come in their wake.
They'll gather up flowers to place on the graves
of those martyred last night for a better world's sake.

Let the years gild my face with a beard if they will,
I too will grow strong in the years' wide embrace.
My creation, my poems will all leave their mark
on the neck of each year that passes in haste.

In the hour of struggle I shall not grow old,
my verse lights the way with the blaze of a star.
In the mountains of struggle, to fall back is death,
those who dare and endure are the ones who go far.

I'll hold fast to the hand that was hardened in gunfire,
with my banner held high, I won't stray from the path.
In the wastelands of struggle I'll never grow tired,
we will march on the wide road of triumph at last.

There is no need to howl with laughter, oh years,
I won't rage against you—I'd rather be dead.
Your efforts to age me are all made in vain,

my son will fight on in the battle ahead.

Oh ocean of years, though your waves may be fierce,
our ship cuts its way through the furious roll.
You may threaten us all with the passage of years,
we answer that creation makes the years grow old.

Aqsu, January 1944

NOTES ON SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

1. For more on the *hujum*, the Soviet campaign that encouraged women in Uzbekistan to unveil, see Kamp (2006), Khalid (2015, 342–62), and Northrop (2003). For more on Jadid and Central Asian theater as well as early Soviet theater at large, see Allworth (1964; 1986), Floor (2005), Gérin (2018), and Senelick and Ostrovsky (2014). For more on the Soviet novel and Socialist Realism, see Clark (2000).
2. Sadriddin Ayni, “Revolution,” was first published in the newspaper *Shu‘la-i inqilāb* (Ainī 1919). The translator consulted the source found in the author’s collected works of 1981 (Ainī 1981a). For Abulqasim Lahuti, “Red Revolution,” the translator consulted the source found in the author’s collected works (Abū al-Qāsim Lāhūtī 1357/1938). For Sadriddin Ayni, “Red Revolution,” the translator consulted the source found in the author’s collected works of 1981 (Ainī 1981b). The translator would like to thank Leila Lahuti and Iraj Ayni for permission to publish translations of Lahuti and Ayni’s poems.
3. For Abdulhamid Sulaymon öghli Chölpon, *A Modern Woman*, the translator made use of the first publication of the work (Chölpon 1992). The translator wishes to express her gratitude to Sharipakhon Mirzakhojaeva and her family for their help with the translation and extending the rights to its publication. For more on Chölpon, see Fort (2019). For additional information on the ritual of *Bibise-shanba*, see Karimova (2012) and Ducloux (2012).
4. The translation of Oydin, “Tulips in Bloom,” was initially published in the Alexander Street database *Women and Social Movements in Modern Empires since 1820* (Roosien 2016) and is republished here thanks to the permission of the translator. The translation itself is

- based on the first publication (Oydin 1930). For Zulfiya, “Cotton,” the translator worked from the first publication (Zulfiya 1932). She wishes to express her thanks to Atabek Alimdjanoʻv and his family for kindly providing the rights to publish this translation.
5. The first publication of Beimbet Mailin, “The Black Bucket,” was in the Kazakh literary journal *Zhanga adebiet* (Mailin 1930). The translator used the version of the story found in a 1988 anthology of Kazakh literature (Mailin 1988). The translator would like to express his gratitude to Saltanat Mustafina and her family for granting permission to publish this translation.
 6. For Abdulla Qahhor, “Pomegranate,” the translators worked from the first publication of the work (Qahhor 1937). The translators wish to thank Nodira Jalolova for kindly providing the rights to publish this translation.
 7. Ghafur Ghulom, Chapter II of *A Mischievous Child*. The novel was first published serially in *Mushtum* (*Fist*), No. 22-24, 1936; No. 1-7, 1937; No. 4-9, 1941. Ghulom edited and republished the work in 1963 (Ghulom 1963). The translator worked from Ghulom’s collected works, which republished the 1963 edition. See Ghulom (1986). The translator wishes to thank Shakhruzod Khondamirovna Gulyamova and her family for providing the rights to publish this translation. For more information on Ghulom’s writing process, see the memoirs contained in *Ghafur Ghulom zamondoshlari xotirasida* (Karimov 2003). For a scholarly analysis of the novella as autobiography, see Mamajonov (1966).
 8. For Payrav Sulaymani, “May and MOPR,” the translator worked from the version of the poem found in the author’s collected works (Sulaymoni 1970b). For Payrav Sulaymani, “You, Gardener,” the translator worked from the version of the poem found in the author’s collected works (Sulaymoni 1970a). For Mirza Tursunzada, “Spring,” the translator worked from versions of the poem found in the author’s collected works (Tursunzada 1971). The editors would like to thank the daughter of Mirzo Tursunzada for granting permission to translate and the Tajik Academy of Sciences for their assistance.
 9. The first publication of Lutpulla Muttellip, “Answer to the Years,” is presumed to be in 1944, but the earliest located publication, and the one used by the translator is L. Muttalib (1947). This translation was previously published online (Muttellip 2024); the editors would

like to thank Joshua L. Freeman for agreeing to its republication here.

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Late Socialist Literature

Samuel Hodgkin and Ali F. İğmen

INTRODUCTION: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING ABROAD

The Second World War was a watershed for the unification of Soviet culture. The mobilization of a generation of young men from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the front coincided with several other massive population transfers. Nationalities suspected of disloyalty, including Koreans, Germans, and several peoples of the Caucasus, were forcibly relocated to settlements in Central Asia, while Russians, Jews, and others were evacuated to Central Asian cities from Eastern Europe and the central regions of Soviet Russia. Non-Russians were exposed to Russian literature and culture on a far greater scale, and this shift was cemented in

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the immediate postwar years by an official campaign against “nationalism” in literature and the arts. Among the younger generation, some writers began composing their works in Russian or translating their own works into Russian in order to ensure a circulation beyond their home republics. Even writers who composed in their national languages and relied on Russian translators for wider recognition felt the homogenizing effect two generations of state schooling had on literary culture. This effect was further increased by Union-wide writers’ training courses, such as those offered by the Gorky Institute in Moscow (founded in 1933).

While the late Stalin era created a more homogenous all-Soviet culture, the period known as the Thaw, which ran from the death of Stalin in 1953 through the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev years (1956–1968), saw increased autonomy for republican literary culture. During the Thaw, direct control of many cultural institutions devolved from Moscow to the national republics, and national writers’ unions, periodicals, and academic institutions developed a higher degree of independent self-governance. Abdulla Qahhor’s “The Earthquake” explores the profound uncertainty and soul-searching that this period entailed for writers who had survived, and participated in, the forging of socialism and socialist realism under Stalin. Thaw decentralization gave national literatures a greater degree of internal coherence and distinctness from each other (Kalinovsky 2018, 43–66). At the same time, Moscow-based institutions and periodicals, some of them experimenting with a higher degree of permissiveness in the volatile political environment of the Thaw, provided a haven for writers who fell out of favor in their own republics. These included certain younger writers of rural origins who were judged to be too controversial in their home republics (Hutchinson 2020). As products of this cultural transformation, younger writers sought to explore the particularities of local or national experiences through Russian and Western literary forms, at an increasing remove from traditional genres and canons. The module “Intimate Publics” shows Central Eurasian writers infusing a new concern with private emotion into established socialist realist plots.

By the 1960s, a Union-wide repertory had solidified for representing national specificity in literature, both at home and abroad. As the module “Two Easts” shows, Soviet Eastern writers became important players in Cold War cultural diplomacy, presenting foreign committed writers with a model of decolonization, Soviet-style. In the module “Time Travel,” we see how Central Eurasian writers’ role as national representatives on the world stage contributed to their growing interest in the possibilities

of an increasingly global world and simultaneously in the recovering or mourning of a pre-Soviet past lost to that globalization. Literature had become a national institution, but it was no longer clear whether it could remain a Soviet institution.

Samuel Hodgkin¹

DISCUSSING STALINIST TERROR IN CENTRAL ASIA: ABDULLA QAHHOR'S *THE EARTHQUAKE*

In 1953, Stalin died. Three years later, at a closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Stalin's successor Khrushchev delivered the so-called "Secret Speech," in which he condemned the cult of personality around Stalin and the "excesses" it had produced. These shocking developments inaugurated a period of relative openness often called the "Thaw," after Ilya Ehrenburg's groundbreaking Russian-language novel published in the mid-1950s. During the years that followed, millions of prisoners were released from Gulag labor camps, censorship requirements were relaxed, and international networks opened up as they had not for decades. In literature, it became possible to experiment with form in new ways and to address previously taboo topics, albeit still within limited parameters.

Abdulla Qahhor, by that time widely known as one of Uzbekistan's leading prose writers, was an active participant in these developments. He produced a draft of his own novella on the effects of the Terror in Uzbekistan, beginning work on the text in 1959 (Normatov 2007). The novella was never completed and never published during Qahhor's lifetime. The novel traces the fate of a family of devoted Soviet public servants after the unjustified imprisonment of the father, professor Sobir Salim. Sobir is denounced by one of his former colleagues, Mirvohid. Outside the prison, Mirvohid convinces Sobir's wife, Gulandom, that the only way to save herself and her son Ismat from social ostracism and economic ruin is to publicly divorce and denounce her husband as an enemy of the people. Mirvohid arranges a job for Gulandom and forces himself on her sexually; when Ismat finds out, he runs away from home and is found drowned sometime later. Gulandom, her reputation burnished by her decision to

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denounce her own husband, becomes a Party member and lands a job as the secretary to an important Party functionary.

Although incomplete, *The Earthquake* is a rare example of a Thaw-era response to the Terror in Central Asia. While Qahhor follows the official line in critiquing Stalinist “excess,” he also emphasizes the Terror as the initiative of a few bad actors, such as the vicious and self-indulgent Mirvohid. The inmates Sobir encounters in prison are clearly divided between innocent true believers like himself and “genuine” enemies of the people, including a former adherent of the anti-Bolshevik Kokand Autonomy. The novella makes it clear that Sobir himself is a victim, but is somewhat less forgiving of Gulandom, who makes the tortured decision to betray him in the context of abuse and intense pressure from Mirvohid.

Claire Roosien²

The Earthquake

Abdulla Qahhor

Translated by Claire Roosien

Professor Sobir Salim, the institute’s academic director and an instructor of language and literature, had been condemned to be shot, and for the past twenty hours or so he had been awaiting his end in an execution room.

The city had been restless for some time, and rumors about a fifth column were proliferating. But Sobir Salim knew himself to be pure as the driven snow, and assumed his arrest was the result of some sort of misunderstanding. In at most an hour, he thought, the truth would come out and they would apologize and let him go. It was because of these assumptions that, upon his arrest, he didn’t see any need to call his wife home from the party she was attending next door, or to wake his son who was sleeping in the next room—let alone to grab some bedding.

Before the revolution, the jail had been a textile merchant’s warehouse. The warehouse was now divided in two. Half of it had been converted to six solitary cells, while the remainder of the warehouse formed a long corridor. Sobir Salim was silently locked up in one of these high-ceilinged, narrow solitary cells. It had gotten quite late, so it did not trouble Sobir

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that he had to wait until morning for the truth to come out. "They are people too—they have their own families to attend to," he thought.

In the morning, Sobir was let out to wash and then locked up again. His breakfast was passed through a little opening in the door. The cell door only opened again so his lunch could be passed through. After three days, bedding, a comb, and a bar of soap arrived from Sobir's home.

Three days, five days, ten days passed. On the eleventh day an interrogator came to the cell and read the prisoner the indictment. According to the indictment, Sobir Salim belonged to a counter-revolutionary organization. The goal of that organization was to spread a mood of defeat among the population and to sow doubt about the power of the Soviet government.

When it came to his faithfulness to the Soviet government, Sobir Salim was a fanatic. If a seed of doubt about any government policies ever sprouted in his heart, he figured it was only because he was backward, a political ignoramus. He would try his best to understand the policy, and to explain and demonstrate his understanding to others. With respect to the indictment, he did the same thing. "All of these are, of course, fabricated stories, but such things are necessary at a time when our country is being purged of the fifth column." As if confirming Sobir's thoughts, the interrogator smiled and passed Sobir a pen to sign the indictment. Sobir Salim looked at the interrogator, smiled as if to say "nobody understands this policy except for us," and took the pen, but he couldn't bring himself to sign the paper. In his view, the indictment had been written only to justify keeping him in prison. The accusations were not only false, but also truly despicable. He handed the indictment back to the interrogator, laughing. "This won't do, I'll write a proper indictment myself," he said. The interrogator left silently. In the morning, he called Sobir to the interrogation room, placed a pile of paper, a large inkwell, and a pen in front of him, and left.

In fact, Sobir Salim *had* committed a crime against the Soviet government. This crime had rankled in his chest for years, and troubled his conscience from time to time. In confessing this crime with his own mouth even though no one else knew of it, Sobir Salim intended, first and foremost, to clear his conscience. Second, this crime would be a just cause, not a fabricated one, to keep him in jail. After the required jail time had passed, he would go to court, and there would be an opportunity to be pardoned because he had committed the crime so long ago.

Sobir's father Master Salim had been a knife sharpener by trade. To make his living, he spent the winter going from village to village, and the summer going from field to field. On the day the village Söfiqishloq was raided, the *bosmachis* had killed Master Salim's niece for the sake of a milk cow.³ Unable to contain his rage, Master Salim had tied a sharpened scythe onto a pole and lay hidden on the roof. When a *bosmachi* came by on the street, shooting as he went, Master Salim swiftly chopped off his head. Then he gathered his children and fled to the city. For a few days, he took his knife sharpener from neighborhood to neighborhood in the city, and then got Sobir enrolled in the boarding school there. As for himself, he signed up to join the detachment led by Little Ermat (as opposed to Big Ermat, the better-known cavalry commander). Little Ermat's detachment was occupied with armed reconnaissance against the *bosmachis*.

Every Thursday evening, the boarding school permitted students to go home for the night. The students would spend Friday at home and return to school that evening. One Thursday night, when Sobir got home, his father was not there: Sobir learned that ever since the previous Wednesday, when his father had left for the village with his detachment, there had been no word from him. On a hook in the house Sobir found two five-shot shotguns; on the shelf he found four revolvers and all kinds of ammunition, and some other odds and ends. Ignoring his mother's protestations, Sobir played with all the weapons. In the morning, in front of his mother, he put all the revolvers back in their places. But secretly, he took one of them with its six bullets. He took two of his friends from school hunting at a marsh outside the city. Sobir planned to return the revolver to its place secretly the following Thursday, when he returned home. Until then, he kept the revolver hidden: under his pillow, inside the brick oven, in the folds of his clothes. But for some reason, that Thursday the school did not release the students to go home. That Saturday evening, Sobir's mother came to the school wailing and pulling out her hair: Master Salim had perished in some village somewhere, and not alone either—six people had died with him. The entire city mourned and buried those who had died. The weapons must not have been precisely documented, because the two shotguns and the three revolvers were confiscated, but the remaining revolver and its ammunition

³ *Bosmachi*: a term used by Soviet authorities to describe any of the loosely organized groups who took up arms against them in Central Asia; bandit.

stayed with Sobir. Sobir kept that revolver, without any registration or documents, for 11 years. During that time, Sobir enrolled in the Department of Oriental Studies and got together with his now-wife, Gulandom, who at the time belonged to the same class but in a different group. That fall, all the students in the city went to the country for cotton-picking. Sobir ended up at one division of a state farm, and Gulandom at another. Practically every night after work, Sobir would go to meet Gulandom. In those days the roads were unsafe. As people say, "Trouble with your property is trouble in your soul." The *kulaks* were beside themselves; sometimes they shed blood for no reason at all.⁴ Knowing this, when Sobir went to the country for the cotton harvest, he had taken the revolver along with him. One evening he was running his finger over the trigger of the loaded revolver as he drew near to the division where Gulandom worked, and accidentally pulled the trigger. The bullet didn't hurt him, but it seemed to Sobir that the sound from the bullet shook the entire earth and sky. In his panic, Sobir lost control of himself. The times were restless, and government officials were sure to congregate wherever gunshots were heard. Sobir immediately took the gun from his pocket, threw it in a nearby rice field, and hurried on as quickly as he could. Sobir saw Gulandom, but only as if in a fog: he conveyed his distress, and then hurried back in order to avoid any needless questions from her. When he passed the rice field again, he thought for a moment about looking for the revolver there, but decided against it. He was glad he had emerged unscathed from that situation. But as he got farther from the rice field, a sense of alarm descended on him. "No matter what happened, that revolver was left to me from my father. My own father's hand touched it. Whose hands will it fall into now? What if it falls into the hands of a *kulak* or some criminal? It was a crime in itself that I kept that thing for so many years against the law. Now, on top of that, I will have armed a criminal." Nevertheless, Sobir did not go back to find the revolver. But those two crimes had remained a blot on his conscience ever since.

Instead of signing the original, false indictment, Sobir Salim wrote these episodes out in detail. Indeed, these things were reason for Sobir to be locked up, but because the crime had been committed so long ago, there was surely grounds to pardon him.

⁴ *Kulaks* is the term for the comparatively well-off peasants who were dispossessed in Soviet collectivization.

The interrogator read this new material carefully. He marked some places with his pen; at other places, he furrowed his brow, and at others he pointed his finger at the margins and thought to himself while squinting one eye. Even though the interrogator wasn't in a good mood, Sobir felt proud of what he had done and expected some words of approval. The interrogator put the materials into the drawer of the table, stood up from his seat, and, pacing back and forth, suddenly asked if Sobir knew who John Reed and Miyonbuzruq were. Sobir shrugged his shoulders. The interrogator sat down again, pulled two more pieces of paper from the drawer, and tossed them down in front of Sobir. Angrily, he said,

"We can tell you whatever you 'don't know,' and we can remind you of whatever you have 'forgotten,' but if you wait for us to do that, you will bring more suffering on yourself!"

Sobir looked at the two pieces of paper in front of him. They contained a report on him from the institute where he worked. The signatures of two instructors and the Law Department's docent, Mirvohid, were at the bottom. The report detailed a multitude of accusations: Sobir's real name was John Reed; at his elementary school he had put on a play written by an enemy of the people named Sayyoh; on Eid he had opened the mosque that had been closed by neighborhood activists so that the clergy could enter; he had plotted to demolish the wall around the cemetery that held Miyonbuzruq's grave, but had been stopped by the workers of the surrounding neighborhood; his uncle had been an old-fashioned barber and had secretly drunk the blood of workers... Sobir involuntary burst out laughing.

"John Reed! John Reed is an American writer! *Ten Days that Shook the World!* A book that Lenin recommended! My father was illiterate, so he had me read the book aloud to him. John was the author's first name, and apparently he didn't realize that Reed was a surname, so he used to call me Johnreed! The author of a book that Lenin recommended!"

The interrogator furrowed his brow and mumbled, "So you mean to suggest that Comrade Lenin only ever recommended *foreign* writers? He never recommended any other writers?"

"But Lenin used to say good things about Tolstoy too," said Sobir, "if my father had read Tolstoy, he would have called me Tolstoy instead. So what?" Sobir shouted involuntarily.

The interrogator stood up without saying anything. He walked around behind Sobir, grabbed Sobir's right arm, lifted it over Sobir's left shoulder, and placed it on the back of the chair. Grabbing Sobir's middle

and pointer fingers, he put them on top of each other and struck them with his pistol grip. Sobir was stunned. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. The interrogator coldly sat down again and took the previous day's indictment out of the drawer. As if to ease the pain that shook his body, Sobir lifted his two trembling fingers toward his mouth, but stopped before putting them in his mouth. "Crook!" he said with a trembling voice, and wailed, not from his pain, but from his emotional anguish. "Has Soviet power fallen to such as you?"

[...]

The interrogator again pounded his fist on the table and shouted. "If you refuse to take responsibility for your crimes, how will I ever prove it?" But then, suddenly realizing the illogic of his words, he added, "Alright. If a witness confirmed the accusations from before, and I brought you face-to-face with the witness, what would you say then?"

"In that case, I would sign my name ten times on each page of your indictment!"

Sobir could not imagine that anyone would be able to lie to his face. But the next morning, when he entered the interrogator's room, he saw the outline of a body sitting next to the door. Despite the pain in his eyes, he opened them slightly wider and saw Mirvohid. Sobir had worked with Mirvohid for nearly two years, but had never looked so intently at his face and body as he did now. Here sat Mirvohid, fat, puffy, his face red as a tomato, the back of his head even with his neck—rotund Mirvohid, his mouth half open, his fat thighs looking like they were about to burst out of his trouser legs, hugging his huge belly with his short little hands. When Sobir came in, Mirvohid hunched over and did not even turn and look his way; instead, he cast his glance toward the investigator. Even though Mirvohid had signed his name to a bad evaluation of Sobir issued by the institute, Sobir would never have expected him to come here and testify falsely against him. After Sobir took his seat, he looked daggers at Mirvohid. It was as if Mirvohid didn't even recognize him. Mirvohid sat looking straight ahead, his mouth half open. After the investigator gave the signal, he kept sitting that way as the words poured out of his mouth:

"I have always known your good side, Sobirjon-aka,⁵ and I never hid the fact that I respected you from anyone. Anyone you ask could tell you that. So I don't have the slightest selfish interest in this business. Right

⁵ *Aka* is an honorific used to denote respect for a man in Uzbek, literally meaning "older brother."

now I'm talking about our socialist state, our government, our socialist motherland, our beloved Communist ideal. That's how it is—perhaps our strength is waning, perhaps it's not, but our ideology is not waning! Me, I know it's not waning. If you think it's waning, that's your business... And beyond that, you have praised an enemy of the people. You know quite well that I'm talking about the vicious enemy of the people, Little Ermat!

"That's enough!" said Sobir, taking his hand from his eyes and looking at Mirvohid from behind his eyelashes. "I understand. I have just one thing to say to you: I used to think that only dogs enjoyed serving hunters, but as it turns out..."

Mirvohid cast a glance at the investigator, seeking defense. The investigator snapped at Sobir, trying to stop him, but Sobir did not stop.

"Now, as for Little Ermat. I did not know he had been buried. Had I known, I still would have praised him, I would have praised him dearly! And I will praise him now! Big, little, hundreds and thousands of Ermats like him swaddled Uzbekistan's Soviet government, they carefully brought it up from infancy, and sent it on its way. To erase them from the 1920s would be to leave only the *bosmachis*!" Sobir waved his hands. "But you don't even have the imagination for that! All of them were people who sensed the spirit of Lenin, whether consciously or unconsciously. If there had been commissars like Furmanov alongside these men, each one of them could have been another Chapaev."⁶

The investigator cackled aloud.

"Why don't you just say your father was another Chapaev?"

When the investigator desecrated Sobir's father's memory this way, Sobir felt distraught. He wanted to wail and weep, but even if his mouth had been full of blood he wouldn't have spat it out in front of these two enemies gloating before him. With a trembling voice, he simply said, "My father was an ordinary soldier. When he was killed, the entire city came out to bury him."

The investigator paid no attention to his words. He thanked Mirvohid and sent him off.

There were no more questions for Sobir.

⁶ Dmitrii Furmanov, a Red Army commissar, served in Turkestan during the Civil War under the direction of commander Vasilii Chapaev. Chapaev became arguably the most famous Red Army commander in history due to his treatment in the eponymous 1924 novel by Furmanov.

[...]

II

Gulandom returned from the party at dawn, around four in the morning. Seeing her, Qoplon barked, jumped, whimpered, pulling his chain almost hard enough to snap it, then barked again... Gulandom was surprised: Qoplon was tied up in a different place than she had left him. Gulandom went into the house, noticing with surprise that the light in her husband's office was still burning. When she passed the bedroom she poked her head in. No Sobir. The office was a disastrous mess. Gulandom's heart sank. She called over and over for her husband, but no answer came. She went into the courtyard. Qoplon was still whimpering, whimpering almost like a person moaning. Gulandom went back inside and woke her son. He too had no idea what was going on. Gulandom understood what had happened. She ran into the bedroom, tallying the blankets one by one. No, Sobir had not taken a blanket...

This was how it went: You waited for a missing person for three days, and if they didn't return in three days, you went and asked at the office of the military police. You didn't go before three days, because if someone went there and their loved one had not yet been imprisoned, the latter might look even more suspicious, and end up in jail just for that reason.

After three days, Gulandom went to get information on her husband and bring him the blanket and pillow. Bringing a blanket and pillow to that place was like lighting a pair of candles at the grave of a dead person: a last rite, because from that world, no one ever returned to this one.

To the extent it was possible, Gulandom tried to hide the fact that her husband had been imprisoned, and instructed her son to do the same. In those days, a prisoner was as good as dead. As for the prisoner's relatives, people looked at them as if they were on their deathbed with the plague. Everyone avoided them, hoping they would die and disappear as quickly as possible.

On the fourth day, Gulandom went to the wedding hall to look in on her neighbor, giving the excuse that she needed to pick up a platter she had lent for the wedding. A white-scarfed woman putting wood into the tandoor oven outside saw her and darted into the kitchen. Gulandom was left standing in the center of the courtyard, while no one came out to greet her. After a long time, a half-naked 4-year-old boy dragged the large white platter outside with great effort. He set it in front of Gulandom and scurried away as if fleeing. Gulandom took the platter and left.

Within a month, anguish shriveled, gnawed, and desiccated her. Her lovely, delicate frame buckled almost imperceptibly. Her eyes, which had always radiated a black flame that no man could endure, turned dull. Her bright red lips turned pale, and the fine blackish hairs on her upper lip, once so becoming, turned an ugly black. Her chin sharpened. Her face withered, and the two dimples on her cheeks began to vanish.

Her son Ismat suffered no less than her. The 12-year-old child began to look like an old man.

Just making ends meet became increasingly difficult. True, 2 weeks after Sobir was imprisoned, someone had thrown three hundred soum through a crack in the door. But what would that accomplish? He who does not work, does not eat. Or, as the Uzbeks say, “you can’t lie abed and keep yourself fed.” After Gulandom finished her studies at the institute, she had begun working at a publisher. But she grew tired of Sobir’s jealousy and irritability and left the job. Since then she had been at home, helping her son with his studies and her husband with his work.

Now she had to find work somewhere. But where? Who would hire her?

One day, as Gulandom was returning from the bazaar with a grocery bag, her mind wandering, someone called “Gulandom!” from the other end of the block. Who, in times like these, would dare mention her name? What kind of courageous or foolhardy person would dare say her name so formally? On the other side of the street stood Mirvohid. For a moment, Gulandom was not sure whether to cross to his side of the street or not. She was tempted to cross over, but then she thought, “What could be a greater kindness than to say my name, and not only that, but to say it so respectfully? How could I cast even greater suspicion on such a kind person?” But when she thought about staying on her side of the street, she remembered how Mirvohid was the nephew of Akram Akbarov, her husband’s coworker and the raion Party committee secretary.⁷ Perhaps he could be of some assistance to her... By the time she had finished thinking these things over, Mirvohid had reached her, and stepped behind a gate. This seemed natural to Gulandom, so she followed him. Mirvohid extended a hand of greeting.

“How are you? Are you doing alright? There’s no need to be upset. If your husband went down that road without mercy for you, you too

⁷ A *raion* is a Soviet administrative category, similar in size to a district or county.

should have no mercy on him. At the Institute everyone is suffering. Of course it's not easy: he has disgraced our entire preeminent work collective. I know your good sides; I sincerely respect you. Don't do this to yourself: you are young, you have a child... They could expel your child from school. You must cut all ties with an enemy of the people! This is my sincere advice to you! But please, keep these words between us.

Gulandom's breath trembled and caught in her throat.

"Mirvohid, I don't know my husband's crime..."

"Very good, very good!" said Mirvohid, pulling up his belt, which had sunk beneath his belly. "I thought that must be the case. If you had known your husband's crime, you too would have gone with him!"

"No, I'm saying I think he must not have committed a crime."

Mirvohid furrowed his brow and turned his ear closer toward her.

"He must not have committed a crime?" he said with a tragic voice. "Don't you think the relevant authorities must know better than you? You said it to me, but don't dare utter this to anyone else!"

Mirvohid extended a hand to say goodbye. Gulandom expressed her gratitude and said goodbye. First Gulandom, then Mirvohid went out to the street. When Mirvohid passed her, he stopped as if to tie his shoelace, and said, "Think about what I said before."

Thinking about it that night, Gulandom decided that Mirvohid's advice made sense: first, she would be spared the burden and slander of being the wife of an enemy of the people; second, her son would be able to raise his head, and his entire life would not be tainted; third, she would have the opportunity to find work, earn a living, and bring up her child. In the end, if Sobir actually got out, he would surely understand her choice.

The next day, Gulandom called the institute and told Mirvohid that she had made her decision. Mirvohid acted delighted, as if he had just resolved a problem of his own. He thanked Gulandom, and told her he would stop by in the evening if she could spare a moment. After Gulandom ended the phone call, she had an uneasy feeling. If she had decided to divorce her husband, why not simply go to the Civil Registration Office herself? What need was there for Mirvohid to trouble himself with it?

Gulandom felt embarrassed. With her son's help, she swept and cleaned the courtyard and garden, which had been left untended since her husband was put in prison. She arranged a place to sit on the veranda, which was surrounded by wild roses.

Mirvohid arrived after dark. He did not stay long: he seemed embarrassed about the neighbors after Qoplon barked loudly, ceaselessly. Gulandom shouted and swore at the dog, but could not silence him. Mirvohid spoke hurriedly about Gulandom's intelligence and her political purity, wrote a petition to the Civil Registration Office on her behalf, and left.

The next day, Gulandom went to the Civil Registration Office. The people at the office silently issued her a certificate of divorce.

After three days had passed, the city newspaper printed a four-line notice about the divorce. The notice said that the innocent Soviet woman Gulandomxon had broken her ties with Sobir Salim, a vile enemy of the people.

That day, Ismat returned from school very early. Gulandom looked at him with surprise. When she saw his demeanor and his color, she grew afraid, and could not bring herself to ask if everything was alright. Ismat shook the newspaper in his hand, tried to say something, but his mouth opened and no sound came out. His throat clenched, his lips contorted, his body trembled, and he threw himself down the stairs. Blood immediately covered his head, and he struck it on the floor, on the stairs. He convulsed and wheezed as if he were about to die. Gulandom lost all reason and screamed aloud. Neighbors gathered. Some people helped Ismat up. Ismat did not answer anyone's questions. He only bit his bloody lip harder and nodded his head. Some people stroked his head, others kissed it, others tried to calm him down with pleasant lies. Before too long the reason for the event became clear to everyone: an old man lifted the newspaper lying on the stairs between two fingers, shook it open, and burst out in tears.

The people silently dispersed. Ismat lay on the sofa convulsing and moaning. Gulandom sat two steps away from him in anguish. No one dared to go near her and say a few words.

The next day, Ismat was unable to go to school.

Beginning the next day, letters began to descend on the courtyard. Every day at least two or three arrived, and all of them were written with the same rage and suffering that flowed from Ismat's heart. Each of them quietly seared Gulandom's heart like an iron brand. On some days, as many as fifty letters arrived. Gulandom tore her hair out, suffering in silence. At the same time, in some corner of her heart there burned a flame of hope: "this must mean that there are still some people out there—many people—who have not lost their minds in terror of a blow

from this cudgel—the ‘enemy of the people’.” This small flame of hope flickered, a sign of the great conflagration that would one day burst through the night that now seemed eternal.

Gulandom became ill. Before, every time she opened her mouth to explain what she had done, Ismat had risen and left the room. Now, because of his mother’s illness, Ismat did not leave the room; but he still had no intention to respond to anything she said. But these words shot out of his chest like bullets: “Not my father going to jail, but what you have done has made me as good as dead to my friends—Not a single enemy of the people’s wife or child...” Ismat sobbed and stood up.

[...]

One evening toward the end of the week, Mirvohid knocked at Gulandom’s door. In order to avoid attracting attention at night, Gulandom locked Qoplon in the shed and opened the door. When the jovial Mirvohid came in the door, he said that he had come to tell Gulandom some good news, and that he was resolved to come in “even though he was in a devilishly good mood.” When he said this, he looked voraciously at her, like a dog looking at a bone. Ismat noticed Mirvohid’s expression, glared first at his mother and then at Mirvohid, and went back inside. Gulandom did not know what to do. She offered Mirvohid a cup of cold tea. Mirvohid took the tea, gulped it down, then cackled.

“I asked for cognac!” he said, then suddenly took on a serious look. “This is the good news—shall I tell you? Or not? Fine, I’ll tell you—we are planning to hire you at the Institute!”

“Thank you,” said Gulandom, not really believing his drunken words.

“Now will you tell me to go on my way?” said Mirvohid, expecting her to invite him to sit down.

Gulandom did not know what to say. Just then, Ismat came out of the house and stood looming over both of them. Even though Mirvohid was drunk, he noticed Ismat’s attitude and started carefully down the stairs, as if to prove he had come with a disinterested motive.

“Go meet the director first thing in the morning!” he said and left.

Despite the rage that filled Ismat, he said nothing to his mother. Gulandom also noticed this and did not say a word.

Gulandom was hired as a cafeteria lady at the institute cafeteria. In her situation, even this was significant. But within a month Gulandom wanted to die: nobody would talk to her, and everyone kept the talk necessary for buying and selling as short as possible. Everyone behaved irritably and

curtly toward her, as if they had an intent to offend. Gulandom remembered Mirvohid's words, "At the institute everyone is suffering. How could it be easy? He has disgraced our entire preeminent work collective." She believed this to be the reason for everyone's attitude. Sometimes she wanted to shout, "I divorced my husband—what else can you say?" But really, they behaved this way to her not because Sobir was an enemy of the people, but because she was the woman who had divorced Sobir and announced it in the newspapers.

One day after the break between classes, Gulandom was sitting and drinking tea by herself. Mirvohid came and, after loudly asking her one or two questions about work, he began, in a whisper, to ask how she was doing. Tears gathered in her eyes and quickly began to fall. Motioning with his eyes and eyebrows, Mirvohid conveyed, "This evening I will come to your house; here isn't the place for this." Gulandom couldn't tell him, "please don't come, my child is upset": she knew if she said that, he would ask to meet somewhere else, and Gulandom did not want that.

On the way home from work, Gulandom bought two tickets to the cinema. She cheered up Ismat by telling him when she got home. Half an hour before Mirvohid was to come, she told Ismat that she had a terrible headache and gave both tickets to him. "Take one of your friends," she said. Ismat took the tickets without saying anything; he just put on his hat and went outside.

Mirvohid came when he had said he would. He walked in hunched over, saying that the previous day there had been a big drinking party at a damned fellow's house, and now his head felt like it was about to split open. He took a bottle of wine out of his pocket. Bewildered, Gulandom invited him into the house and put whatever she could find onto the table. Mirvohid opened the bottle and filled two glasses with wine. No matter how much Gulandom resisted drinking, he wouldn't listen. He held her tightly by the chin and poured the wine straight into her mouth. Gulandom drank the other half of the glass herself. After that, she began to open up, and she started weeping with anguish, not just about the people at the Institute, but about all she had seen in her life, and about her fate in general. She had descended into such despair, and considered herself so alone, so worthless, such refuse among humanity, that when Mirvohid began to comfort her with kisses, first on her forehead, then on her face, she froze, like a corpse. After, this, Mirvohid began kissing her after every other word: on her face, on her shoulder. As flattering words

flowed from his mouth like so many soap bubbles, suddenly both sides of the French doors opened with a shudder, and Ismat appeared on the threshold, with Qoplon behind him. In his hand Ismat held a huge knife. His face was completely white, and his body trembled. From his face, it looked as if he was thinking about who to start with first: Mirvohid, his mouth half open, his body frozen; or his mother, who had lost her senses. Qoplon, meanwhile, sat alertly next to Ismat, pricking up his ears as if awaiting an order. Then, Ismat ran out, wailing. Qoplon ran after him. Gulandom came to her senses and ran after him. She was embarrassed to call him loudly, but as she was catching up to Ismat he ignored the door, climbed over the wall, and threw himself with a thump onto the street. Qoplon also jumped over the wall. When Gulandom opened the door and went out, Ismat had already vanished, but Qoplon's barking was still audible from the left. For the first time in her life, Gulandom's heart sharply clenched. She took one or two steps and fell backward onto the threshold. After a while Qoplon returned. Seeing Gulandom, he came up to her and barked; then he ran toward where Ismat had disappeared, returned, went into the courtyard and barked; went onto the veranda and barked; then looked into the house through the open door. Mirvohid, who was leaning back with his mouth half open, waiting for Gulandom to return, saw Qoplon and froze. Barking incessantly, Qoplon went toward the door to the street. Mirvohid slowly went out of the house, then grabbed his belly with both hands and suddenly started to run. Paying no attention to the dog who was barking and seemed ready to kill him, he jumped over Gulandom, who was rasping in the doorway. Unable to jump all the way over Gulandom, he stepped on her. Then he went out into the street and hurled himself in the direction that looked darkest to him. Qoplon stayed behind, still barking.

1960s, Moscow

TWO EASTS

As early as the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East (1920) and the founding of the Communist University for Toilers of the East (1921), Central Eurasian writers were regularly deployed as intermediaries in Soviet cultural diplomacy, especially among Muslims with whom they shared languages and traditional cultural institutions. Before the colonial and decolonizing world, their successes were often presented as illustrations of the liberationist potential of Soviet-style socialism. In the 1920s,

however, such efforts were limited by the scarcity of reliable Party-cadre Soviet Eastern writers and by Moscow's relatively limited strategic vision for the Muslim East. In the 1930s, Stalinist xenophobic paranoia and the dismantling of internationalist organizations destroyed most extant East-East linkages. But the late Stalin period and the Thaw saw a large-scale redeployment of Soviet Eastern writers in cultural diplomacy, first in wartime Soviet-occupied Iran (1941–1946), then in newly independent India and Pakistan beginning in the late 1940s. The particular role of literature in these efforts was formalized with the creation of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association under Soviet auspices, and in particular at its inaugural conference in Tashkent in 1958. There followed a series of international Eastern writers' congresses both in the Soviet Union and in the South and West Asian nations involved with the Non-Aligned Movement; literary jubilees in India and the Soviet East to commemorate classical Persianate poets; widespread Soviet translation of foreign Eastern writers for Soviet audiences and Soviet Eastern writers for the foreign East; literary periodicals and prizes. All of these activities generated many close personal friendships between Soviet and foreign writers, often grounded in a shared love of Persianate literary classics, even if there was much that was too sensitive to be discussed.

Central Eurasian writers took on a range of bureaucratic leadership positions in the new organizations, presses, and periodical editorial boards; the Tajik writer Mirza Tursunzada, in particular, led the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee for many years. In their literary addresses to the foreign East, they often emphasized the difference between what Tursunzada referred to in one poem as the "two Easts": one suffering the ongoing effects of Western imperialism and capitalism, the other rapidly modernizing under the tutelage of Moscow. The possibility that the Russians might be an imperial power was frequently broached by less committed foreign writers, but if Soviet Eastern writers ever thought so, depictions of such imperial dynamics were nonetheless safely confined to writings on the foreign East. This cluster opens with "In the Land of Slaves," a poem that Tursunzada wrote after a 1949 visit to Pakistan with a delegation of Central Asian and Russian writers testifying to the disastrous human consequences of Partition (1947). At Afro-Asian writers' events, Tursunzada frequently read his poetry together with the Uzbek poet Zulfiya, in displays of the Soviet model of friendship between nations. Zulfiya describes these types of events in her poem of the 1958 Tashkent Congress, "A Gathering of Poets." The poem's title in Uzbek,

“Mushoirā,” is a term for a traditional Persianate poetic symposium, a form of literary sociability shared by Central Eurasians, Turks, Iranians, and South Asians, and an important basis for Eastern communist literary internationalism.

Samuel Hodgkin

In the Land of Slaves

Mirza Tursunzada

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

I saw villages plundered, ruined
 Barren as a sucked pomegranate
 The dead: coffins row on row
 The half-dead: dark-faced slaves
 Naked people, ruined; smoke
 Rising from houses like sighs
 Endlessly boasting, the command
 Hurried to the land of Sindh
 I saw nothing above but the sun
 The earth below, nothing but ruin
 Everywhere, in every moment, hurry
 Sometimes loan sharks in carriages
 Sometimes, like British officers,
 Warriors rushing with all kinds of schemes
 Sometimes, like Truman's ambassadors,
 Commiserating with sweet words
 In those ruins, antiquarians all
 They sought relics down in the earth
 I set foot in one dark hovel
 a corpse beside it, gone, exhausted
 No cottage—a shack worse than the grave
 with a toiler standing guard
 No hole through which the light could come
 No steam rising from its pot
 Someone who felt no pleasant air
 Nor saw the faces of guests or friends
 The ground piled with dirt, the roof full of smoke
 Under his feet, over his head
 No notion of the word “bed”
 Threshold and pillow were one and the same

With his two hands on his head
 His head lying against his knees
 I entered. I saw his children and wife
 Nothing to hold their bones together
 All awaiting a crust of bread
 The father distraught, sorry, confused
 It seemed to me that death and life
 Were now engaged in a merciless war
 In Death's hand, a column of ruinations
 Calculations, schemes and plots:
 Ground rent for moneylenders
 Slavery open and concealed
 Murder, catastrophic interventions
 Calamitous drought and harvests lost
 How can this afflicted Sindhi peasant
 Clear out this infestation of death?
 No weapon, only a dark hovel
 Eyes full of tears and a place in the corner
 The ground piled with dirt, the roof full of smoke
 Under his feet, over his head
 This man drew out from his breast
 What was to him the dearest treasure:
 A photograph he showed, of Lenin
 Now his eyes filled up with hope
 As if to say, look, look
 No better shield you'll find than this
 Death is powerless before him
 With him, my being is secure
 With him, my world is full of hope
 Of a bright end to this dark night

A Gathering of Poets

Zulfiya

Translated by Claire Roosien

Evening settles on the lovely earth;
 Day takes its rest.
 But the lively gathering of poets carries on.
 Friend, come join us too!

Here, faraway friends come near.
 The festival of art and craftsmanship is here.
 Debates on rhythm, word, and couplet rage;
 The hearts of many join our circle here.

In whose heart blooms the richest flower garden? Who exhales the most
 enticing lines?
 Whose thoughts are sharpest, most profound, most fresh?
 Our conference is a tournament of poets;
 This gathering is the poetic garden of the East!

The evening settles on the Indian earth,
 And as day takes its rest,
 The lively gathering of poets carries on.
 Friends assemble as one.

Our hearts are friendly; voices sing as one.
 We have no need for a lavish hall.
 In this lovely, vibrant garden of verse,
 In their hearts, each poet bears a song.

One poet gushes forth about the strong Nile River;
 Another recites a prelude about the Ganges.
 The mango tree is our tent of wonder,
 A marvelous shelter in this lovely age.

The sky was blue, just like the Bay of Bengal.
 Around us nature seemed to take a breath.
 Countless colorful lanterns flickered;
 In the sky, stars shone back their light.

The breeze blowing in from the cool shores
 Sometimes brought the scent of flowers;
 Sometimes a girl's Hindi song, sometimes
 The songs of myriad birds.
 But inspiration ruled the night,
 And courage emboldened our pens.
 The lively gathering of poets carried on,
 Friends assembled as one.

Adorning the stage as if it were an Uzbek *supa*,⁸
 The rug shone in the lantern light, vivid as a rainbow.
 Our hearts, striving for truth and light,
 Shared love and mercy with one another.

The humble and the dignified alike set foot on the stage:
 The full-grown plane-tree and the tender sprout, both taking root in the
 garden of poetry.
 Like father and child, young and old drew near
 At this festival of friendship, side by side!

The customs of the East are unbreakable.
 We pay our dues to the traditions of India.
 We sit cross-legged together, host and guest,
 On the rug of many colors, releasing all our cares.

At the threshold, all sorts of shoes have been removed.
 To me, each pair is a world unto itself.
 In each of them, a craftsmanship and beauty all its own.
 Each pair carries the soil of its own nation.

Showcasing the skillful, masterly work
 Of wondrous India's craftsmen,
 The Indians' sandals are laid out in a row.
 (Looks like they're made of sandalwood).

How fine! If I put on a pair,
 I too would take a journey with my friends.

⁸ Wooden deck for sitting outdoors, usually equipped with a rug and cushions for sitting.

Passing the kindness of my people to every outstretched hand,
I would traverse great India on foot!

Elegant Chinese and sturdy Baghdad shoes
Stand in a row side-by-side.
I see a pair of Ceylon shoes, and another pair displays
The craft of an Iranian shoemaker.

Mongolian boots lean toward a pair of Punjabi galoshes
As if telling them a story.
My eyes rejoice at the handiwork of all humanity.
The soil, the labor, the craft bring such joy.

Then, I cast my gaze
Toward my own shoes off to the side.
Not bad, Master Ahmad,
My most modest countryman: I applaud your work.

Like me, you too have comrades in your craft
Perhaps in Mumbai, perhaps in Kashmir.
No matter where, a craftsman just like you
Lives now again in a poem our circle now reads!

Under the tent, eyes look expectantly;
A leader of our time is at the microphone.
In his silver hair, a light shines.
In his eyes glows the undying light of youth.

What haven't those eyes seen? He recalls
How tears flowed like a river in his land.
His freedom and his hope were tempered in the fire,
The old man remembers how he set injustices ablaze.

Now the sun shines over India, so
His gaze is young, brave, and full of light.
He calls us to debate on poetry,
And songs flow like a river from our hearts.

Our charming interpreter is the azure evening.
All hearts beat as one.

Our gathering of poets carries on:
 Friend, come join us as well!

Here, the nightingale of Punjab
 Joins our circle with a voice like music, gentle as love.
 Her exquisite verses are like a fire ablaze,
 Her heart—the heart of a mother—rings out bravely.

Nepali, Vietnamese, and Chinese people read poems;
 A Russian and a Tajik read their verses freely.
 Sikhs with beards like black flame;
 Bengalis and Indians with clothes as white as snow,
 Trembling with rapture, even the rippling stream listens,
 Intoxicated by passion's embrace.
 And the song?

Sometimes it speaks of struggle,
 Sometimes the love of a girl,
 Sometimes of eyes grown blind awaiting bread from heaven.
 Sometimes the laugh of an infant, sometimes the scent of a banana,
 Sometimes the caprice of eyes adorned with kohl.
 Sometimes it speaks of truth's hoarse wail and cry;
 Sometimes of happiness, bright and distant as a star.
 Sometimes the blade of rage, stabbing slavery's heart.
 Sometimes it speaks of the justice that has brought this festival of freedom.
 This song, a map of Asia and Africa
 Overflowing with the joy and verve of life,
 Spread among us, from heart to heart.
 The breeze tugged the couplets from our hearts,
 And blew by a million routes to all the peoples,
 Like a traveler true.
 Aloft on wings of flame,
 A witness to the happiness of Easterners,
 Friendship and kindness called the West into our circle.

Oh, lovely, seductive Indian evenings,
 What secrets nestled in your azure bosom?
 Audience and poet alike, our feelings
 Beat as one in one great heart.

Poets came into our circle,
 Bringing new songs and new thoughts.

Their verses bound our hearts:
They built a bridge of friendship and fraternity.

Awash with the kindness of brothers and of lovers,
Our circle grows, expanding like a beating heart.
It brings sunshine to the laborer's soul,
The brightness of his heart shines through his eyes.

The child of Africa reads a poem,
Their words of peace flow out like a stream.
The earth sinks into tranquility's embrace,
As the stars in the sky shine ever more brightly.

You are not just a diversion; you are bread; you are peace;
You are hope pristine.
You are Life! Always sing of Life,
Oh symposium of poets!

Sing out, and let the world hear your voice!
Beating as the heart of poetry,
Overflowing with the wondrous song of life,
Let workers and peasants enter our circle:
The most ordinary person is the artist of life.

Perhaps, they have never read or written poems.
The pleasurable pain of art is strange to them.
But their struggle wells up in their heart as an inspiration.
They write a book of love for freedom, of hope and faith.

Let them take their place in this illustrious line,
Let them join in the song of the poets.
They have created happiness and prosperity with their labor. Let the verses
that speak of it
Soar far and wide.

Let the burning breath that sings the poetry of life's beauty
Fill this whole world.
Let free and peaceful people now weave their song
Of humanity, rescued now from harm.

Our circle is a world of kindness,
 All our friends have come together.
 The great gathering of poets carries on.
 You too, come along!

1958

THE SOVIET EAST: A VIEW FROM SOUTH ASIA

The text translated here gives the perspective of a writer on the other side of the kinds of exchanges depicted in the previous section. In it, the pioneering Urdu modernist Faiz Ahmed Faiz recounts a visit to the Soviet autonomous republic of Dagestan. The excerpt is taken from a memoir commissioned and published by the Soviet press Progress Publishers. It reflects on Soviet forms of literary friendship and hospitality, as well as on the question of shared cultural heritage.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984) is one of the most beloved Urdu poets of the twentieth century. His poetry, known for its unique blend of lyricism and political engagement, is still recited and sung across India and Pakistan today. Faiz was born in Sialkot, in present-day Pakistan, before the Partition of India. From a young age he was fluent in Arabic and Farsi in addition to Punjabi, Urdu, and English. Along with traditional koranic training, poetry was an important component of Faiz's early education, and a letter of recommendation from the preeminent poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) for a young Faiz to attend college in Lahore perhaps sealed his literary destiny. Yet Faiz might have remained a conventional lyric poet had he not undergone a political awakening when he was nineteen years old, after his father's death led to unexpected financial hardship for the formerly well-to-do family. He was introduced to *The Communist Manifesto* as a young teacher in Amritsar in 1935 and subsequently learned more about the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union through such works as John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919) and Joshua Kunitz's *Dawn over Samarkand: the Rebirth of Central Asia* (1935). His socially minded interests naturally led him to the Progressive Writers' Association, a literary group founded in 1935 with the goal of creating a literature responsive to social ills. Faiz is still seen today as one of the movement's most prominent leaders.

At the association's second conference, which took place in 1949 in Lahore, Pakistan, Faiz met real Soviet citizens for the first time. He

recounts this first meeting with prominent Soviet political and literary figures such as Nikolai Tikhonov, Anatoly Safronov, and Mirza Tursunzade in the Urdu-language travelogue *Months and Years of Friendship: Recollections* (1979), a chapter of which is presented here. That initial meeting would eventually lead to an invitation in 1958 to participate in the Afro-Asian Writers Association conference in Tashkent (present-day Uzbekistan). Faiz had not long before been released from Pakistani prison for his alleged participation in a communist conspiracy to overthrow the government of Liaquat Ali Khan. (Faiz is believed to have been present at a number of key meetings involved in the plot, which came to be known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, but not to have been in favor of the plan.) His active role in the conference and his unjust imprisonment made Faiz a perfect target for diplomacy aimed at increasing Soviet soft power. He came to the attention of the committee of the International Lenin Peace Prize, which awarded him the laureate in 1962.

The Lenin Prize unlocked new possibilities for Faiz, who would travel to and throughout the Soviet Union several more times in his life, encountering other prominent literary and cultural figures both from the USSR and from the world over each time he did so—Nazim Hikmet, Pablo Neruda, and Jean-Paul Sartre to name a few. As the chapter presented here shows, meeting people from other parts of the Muslim world especially delighted him. The chapter paints a colorful picture of one such person, the preeminent Avar poet Rasul Gamzatov (1923–2003), and some of Gamzatov’s poetry is translated by Faiz at the end of *Months and Years*. Readers will notice Faiz underscoring their cultural affinity to his readers by emphasizing the non-Russianized form of Gamzatov’s last name, Hamza, as well as the ease with which Faiz is able to converse with locals in Farsi and Arabic. Taken all together, *Months and Years* gives the distinct impression that Faiz in fact preferred the Soviet republics to the capital, Moscow.

The chapter presented here, like the rest of *Months and Years*, is also interesting because of what it reveals about Faiz’s role as what he terms (in the preface) a “friendly observer” of the Soviet Union. His perspective offers a noteworthy counterpoint to the many Westerners who traveled behind the Iron Curtain, and even the origin of this text itself—a request by the Soviet Writers’ Union to commemorate his many travels to the USSR in writing—is revealing of the delicate balance Faiz was forced to strike between being an appreciative guest with a precarious position in his own country and maintaining independence of action and thought

with respect to his hosts. In the excerpt, readers will find a blend of Faiz's characteristic wit and lyricism as well as the journalistic style he honed during his time as editor of the *Pakistan Times* and while writing for the Urdu daily *Imroze* and the literary and political weekly *Lail-o-Nahar*.

Lusia Zaitseva

Dagestan

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Translated by Lusia Zaitseva and Umar Anjum⁹

Never mind childhood—even now, when the name “Mount Qaf” comes up, I can hardly believe that such a place really exists somewhere and that people like you and I live there rather than jinns and fairies.¹⁰ Even now I feel like it's not a geographical region but a merely imaginary land that we have surely heard of but nobody has ever seen. In childhood and adolescence I heard other names like this—far-flung and mysterious. Dagestan, too, was among them, and why wouldn't it be? It is, after all, a part of the Caucasus, although its image has to do less with jinns and fairies and more with daring swordsmen, lightning-fast horses, and fearless adventurers. For this reason, when the Union of Dagestani Writers invited me to a gathering, despite a deficit of “wanderlust,” I felt a kind of pleasure as I prepared to set out.¹¹

Our small Dakota-style aircraft touched down on an unpaved runway in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala.¹² We guests emerged from the plane, Dagestan's poet laureate (who, according to Russian pronunciation, is named Rasul Gamzatov and, with regard to etymology, Rasul Hamza) greeted us with an embrace and introduced us to the hosts.

⁹ University of Michigan Anne Arbor, Anne Arbor, MI, USA

¹⁰ Mount Qaf (or Qaf-Kuh), the region known today as the Caucasus, figures in Middle Eastern mythology. For more, see Schum (2018). Jinns are supernatural creatures in Islamic mythology.

¹¹ Faiz is referring to the year 1964.

¹² Faiz is referring to the Douglas C-47/53 Dakota, a transport aircraft used by the British Royal Air Force during World War II.

“This is the President of the Republic of Dagestan, Madam Abdulbasir.”¹³ A woman who appeared to be in her early- to mid-30s and wearing a light snuff-colored coat and skirt stepped forward. Fair, delicate features, a faint glimmer of red in her black hair, wearing gold-framed eyeglasses. If she had been wearing slightly different clothes, one could mistake her for one of our professors or doctors from Lahore or Karachi. Her personality always stood out at the gatherings in Dagestan. People here eat a lot, drink a lot, cause a lot of commotion, but Madam Abdulbasir always appeared composed and reserved. At most, a faint smile would play on her lips and that was all.

After her, I was introduced to other people: Abdul Rehman Daniyal,¹⁴ Abdullah Khan, Habib Ullah, Muhammad Yaqoob, Abdulwahab, and some other elders. One is a political leader, another, a university president, one is the head of a national planning committee, one is a doctor, one is an important engineer, and so on and so forth. And at the same time, I started thinking about what their parents must have had in mind for their future fifty or sixty years ago when these people were young. No doubt some among them must have wanted their child to enlist in the army or to join them in farming; at most, they would have dreamed of them becoming a *mullah* or teacher after enrolling them in school. The thought of the academy, medicine, or engineering wouldn’t have even crossed any of their minds.

Then we set out for the city on a small road. The road’s condition wasn’t very good; at times, with sudden jerks, the driver had to steer the car from side to side. “Hey man, please excuse the motor’s *bhangra* dance.” Laughing, Rasul Hamza said, “The problem is that sea water often washes onto this road, and despite Madam Abdulbasirova’s efforts, potholes crop up everywhere.” A short distance away from the road, the water of the Caspian Sea stood as tranquil as a lake. The blueness of evening had already spread over the mountains that encircle Makhachkala, and far away to the right, at the edge of a summit, the crimson sun was slowly setting, shrouded in lilac clouds. When someone praised the view, Rasul Hamza said, “Don’t fall for this view, my friends, you haven’t seen anything yet. This place isn’t the real Dagestan; the real Dagestan is on

¹³ Roza Abdulbasirovna Eldarova (1923–2021) was the first woman elected to the highest political office of Dagestan in 1962.

¹⁴ . Abdurrahman Daniyalov (1908–1981), a leading Dagestani politician and diplomat. Faiz removes the Russian suffix from his name.

the other side of these mountains, where my village is. I'll show you the real Dagestan from there."

Rasul Hamza is not only Dagestan's poet laureate—his works are equally popular throughout the entire Soviet Union. Aside from that he is also a member of the presidential assembly of the Soviet parliament, meaning he is also, in a way, the Vice President of the Soviet Union.¹⁵ He composes poetry in his own local language, Avar, but his poetry has already been translated into scores of local languages. The population of Dagestan is a bit over a million, but, taken altogether, thirty-six languages, big and small, are spoken: Avar, Lezgi, Dargin, Azerbaijani, Kalmyk, etc. The rest are their local dialects. These languages all descend from four families: Caucasian, Tatar, Turkish, and Farsi. Their sounds and pronunciation are similar to Arabic. Beginning several centuries ago until recently, the shared language here was Arabic and there was no way to pursue an education in the local languages. It is probably for this reason that no single dialect among them was able to develop and prevail over the rest. There is a famous joke here that when languages were being divvied up among the different nations in the court of the Almighty, the Arabs got Arabic, the Persians got Farsi and Turkish, the British got English, and when the final count of nations was concluded and some languages were left over, it was commanded that they all be thrown to one side, and they all landed in Dagestan.

Historically speaking, from the fourth to the nineteenth century Dagestani soil kept coming under attack from all sides—by the Huns, Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Iranians, Arabs, Mughals, Turks, Russians, Ukrainians, and so on. Some came as conquerors, others as refugees. For centuries, countless battles were fought in these mountains and valleys between the Huns and Iranians, Arabs and Tatars, and Russian and Turks. At the beginning of the fourth and fifth centuries, the joint sultanate of Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan constituted the marketplace of the entire Caucasus and a very important nexus for trade routes of Asia and eastern Europe. In the fifth century, the Iranians conquered the northern part of this sultanate and completed the construction of Derbent, Dagestan's most ancient and famous city. But the Iranians did

¹⁵ Gamzatov served as a deputy on behalf of Dagestan to the Soviet of the Union between 1962 and 1989, and from 1962 to 1966 he was a deputy to the vice-chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Faiz refers to him by the same title used to designate the Vice President in Pakistan.

not manage to subdue the entire area, and after the decline of the Sasanians the local tribes became independent once more.¹⁶ In the next chapter of history, the Arabs ruled here for some three hundred years, the marks of which are still manifest today in the religion (Islam), the language and way of speaking, as well as in the manners and customs of the people of Dagestan. When the flame of the Abbasid caliphate was extinguished, then this kingdom, too, was overthrown, and in the fourteenth century, Amir Timur invaded Dagestan in what was the bloodiest chapter in these mountains' history.¹⁷ They say that Timur erected towers of decapitated heads in this very place and left great piles of decapitated bodies. Many of Dagestan's folk songs, battle epics, and stories of national heroes are about this very era.

In the sixteenth century the Russians began to advance toward the Caucasus, and having conquered Kazan and Astrakhan by mid-century, they broke the back of the Tatar empire. But the Russians had not yet managed to gain a foothold when the crescent flag of the Turkish armies from the Anatolian peninsula was hoisted up in the East and the West and in 1578 these armies entered Dagestan after defeating Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Dagestani tribal chiefs were divided into two groups—some became obedient to the Turks and some stayed faithful to the Russians. It was a hotbed of fighting and killing for years until finally, in 1722, Amir Imam Quli Khan handed the keys to the capital, Derbent, to the Russian tsar Peter the Great. The strife between the Turks and the Russians had not yet ended when, in Iran, Nader Shah raised a mighty army and, attacking from the north and south, conquered most of Dagestan. For the next half century this small country became a battlefield for three major powers (Turkey, Russia, and Iran), until at the beginning of the nineteenth century, after twelve years of bloodshed, Iran and Russia signed the Treaty of Gulistan. From this, Dagestan, Georgia, and northern Azerbaijan came permanently under the aegis of the Russian tsar, although these regions retained their internal autonomy in one form or another.

Dagestan's area covers 31 thousand square miles, and at the time I'm talking about the population was 1,062,000. The northeastern Caucasus borders Georgia on one side and Azerbaijan on the other. Nature has

¹⁶ The Sassanid Empire lasted until the seventh century.

¹⁷ The Abbasid caliphate was the third caliphate to succeed the Prophet Muhammad and was in power until the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, though it continued to exist in diminished form for two more centuries.

squandered its treasures on this region's wilderness and hills, on its waters and land, and even the deserts are abundant. The mountains have coal, iron, sulfur, and gypsum deposits. The fields are bursting with fountains of oil. And underground lies a treasure trove of natural gas. The earth here spits out gold. Rice, wheat, corn, fruit, vegetables—every kind of bounty is cultivated. There are salubrious hot springs here, walnut trees, eucalyptus, chestnut forests, apricot, apple, and mulberry orchards as well as vineyards. There are ancient handicrafts like gold-smithery, pottery, carpet making, and glazery as well as modern factories for steel, mechanical tools, uncompounded chemicals, and compounded ones. Before the Revolution many of these treasures were sealed, but now the Republic of Dagestan is considered one of the Soviet Union's important industrial regions.

This preamble has become a bit long, but as I said earlier, we know so little about this area that I felt it necessary to mention these fundamental facts. I was talking about Rasul Hamza, who had received the Lenin Prize in recognition of his literary services around that very time. This honor has been bestowed upon only a handful of individuals, among whom are two or three writers, one architect, and one sculptor. During the time period I'm talking about, Rasul Hamza was only 42 years old, but even then the hair on his head was whiter than mine. Corpulent, commanding stature, with very small eyes and a very long nose, ruddy, very loquacious, very merry, and quick-witted. He guffaws at everything. If you didn't know to begin with, you would absolutely never be able to guess that this carefree person could also be a poet of utmost seriousness and, moreover, the Vice President of this great empire, the Soviet Union.¹⁸

The day after our arrival in Makhachkala, a very big gathering took place at the parliament of the Republic of Dagestan during which Rasul Hamza was presented the gold medal for the Lenin Prize, with Abdul Rehman Daniyal presiding. Once the director of the Moscow Art Theater had presented Rasul with the certificate and medal on behalf of Lenin, then Russian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz authors paid homage to the honoree. After that, a student, a soldier, a farmer woman, and a laborer gave speeches and presented Rasul with gifts on behalf of their respective organizations. The soldier gave an engraved dagger, the

¹⁸ Faiz somewhat exaggerates the authority of this position. Those in leadership positions in the Soviet government, of which the Supreme Soviet was the legislative branch, had considerably less power than Party leadership.

farmer woman a silver sickle, and the laborer a wooden statuette. (I have also participated in this type of event once or twice more; for example, during this same period, we celebrated the 60th birthday of the world-famous author Sholokhov.¹⁹ The participation of representative students, soldiers, farmers, and laborers is *de rigueur* in all of these.) A troupe of musicians sat on the balcony of the hall that played celebratory tunes during interludes in the speeches.²⁰ When everything was done, a reception with beverages took place in a couple of adjoining rooms. After that, a *mehfil* of poetry and music was held in the hall.²¹ Rasul's poems were recited and his songs sung, and folk dances and musical accompaniments based on them were presented. Once we took our leave, we rested for a while at our official-residence-style guesthouse and then made our way to a vast and atmospheric garden on a mountaintop some distance from Makhachkala. A feast had been arranged there in a green clearing. Here speeches were made again and toasts proposed for world peace, truce, and reconciliation, for literature and poetry, and for the writers and people of Russia, Georgia, Dagestan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan. And at the end, Madam Abdulbasir said, "I raise a toast to all mothers; to the mothers who give birth to poets and artists, warriors and martyrs. Those mothers whose faces shine so bright with pride for the achievements of their accomplished sons that even the sun is envious, and those whose hearts are stained with the grief of their martyred ones."

Makhachkala is the capital of the Republic of Dagestan and this region's intellectual, cultural, and industrial center. Here there are factories, government offices, a university, a science academy, and the centers for historical, sociological, and archeological research. There is all of this, but in this brand-new city, Dagestan's own local color is not very prominent. The new cities of the Soviet Union bring to mind our own newly settled cities in the canal regions. For instance, Sargodha, Sahiwal, Khanewal, and the like, which all seem like carbon copies of each other. Straight, grid-like streets, equally spaced roundabouts, identical houses, a central meeting place, and an open field and some suitably located gardens

¹⁹ Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–1984), a world-renowned Soviet author best known for his novel *And Quiet Flows the Dawn*, which he published serially from 1928 to 1940.

²⁰ Faiz uses the word *shadiyana*, a traditional tune played on the occasion of a celebration such as a marriage or military victory.

²¹ A Hindustani gathering of poetry recitation and/or music and dance, originating with India's Muslim community.

or orchards, though the Caspian Sea and surrounding mountains make the sight of Makhachkala comparatively more beautiful.

Rasul Hamza was right to say that "This place isn't the real Dagestan; the real Dagestan is on the other side of these mountains, where my village is." So the next day, we went to that village to see for ourselves.

Divided in two groups, some twenty of us sat in two small, old, beige-colored planes which should instead be called flying cots. After a while, the sea and plain of Makhachkala disappeared from sight. Now the real Dagestan lay before us, the endless series of green and pink mountain ranges, some bare, some verdant. There were frightful passes there and beautiful, verdant valleys; ruins of old ramparts and the red rooftops of new government buildings. Time and again I had the feeling that in bygone eras the people who penetrated the heart of these mountains and settled new towns, who planted gardens and grew crops here, must have been the equals and kin of Farhad.²² After a flight of roughly an hour, we landed on top of a mountain in a small meadow which is the capital of the "Khunzakh" region, from where these two "cots" fly to Makhachkala daily. There was a throng of children, elderly, men, and women gathered in the meadow for the reception of Rasul Hamza and his guests. First the eldest and most senior people of the region, none of whom could have been younger than a hundred years old, stepped forward to welcome their famous progeny. Often, I found myself pleased and somewhat surprised to see that in every part of communist Russia generally, and in Muslim areas particularly, the Eastern custom of respecting and honoring the elderly is still present. Although as I have written elsewhere, this respect and regard does not hinder friendship between elders and youngsters. In Western countries, well, not even a trace of this tradition remains. There, being old is considered an extremely unfashionable thing and the elderly are all like old goats taking pains to fit into kids' clothing. The sad part is that our purely Eastern societies are also being affected by this Western attitude. It is possible that this remorse is due to the fact that in old age we no longer enjoy those privileges that our elders did when they were young. Anyhow, first these elders kissed Rasul Hamza on the face and head and then the remaining crowd swooped in on Rasul and we, too, were enveloped. Children's colorful caps, women's black or floral shawls

²² A reference to the famous twelfth-century story of Khosrow and Shirin by the Persian poet Nizami in which a man named Farhad, Khosrow's rival, moves a mountain for his beloved.

and snoods, and men's wide-brimmed brown or black woolen hats, were all jumbled up.

Leaving the young dandies aside, almost all men wear roughly the same clothes regardless of their station. That is, knee-high boots, black or blue breech-like pants, a closed-neck leather coat or waistcoat, and a very large round woolen cap. Women usually wear a long, loose *kurta* that reaches their ankles and resembles the Kashmiri *phiran*, black shoes on the feet and a shawl or a square handkerchief on the head.²³ The cloaks and stoles of old women are usually black, while young women's are colorful and floral. Their faces are visible and their heads covered. Walking around with a bare head is considered improper for both men and women. There is no divide between men's and women's quarters in Dagestani houses, but women rarely participate in male gatherings. In fact, if there are male guests in the house, the women won't even sit with them at the dinner table. But in national welfare and civic activities men and women participate equally, and for this reason, in many national and state institutions of the republic women hold high offices, and the head of Rasul Hamza's village was also a woman.

After some hubbub, the welcoming crowd lined up again. All the respected people gathered in the middle, and a series of customary speeches began. The regional party leader gave a speech, the female representative of Rasul's village gave a speech, a young female student and old farmer from the village gave a speech, the eminent Russian poet Tvardovsky (who has since passed away) gave a speech on behalf of the guests, and then our procession of jeeps and cars set out for Rasul Hamza's village.²⁴ The style and appearance of Dagestan's mountainous villages somewhat resemble some of the villages in our Hazara district. Single-story wooden or stone houses, rocky winding streets, a clear stream running right through, and small orchards of apple, apricot, and peach trees alongside the houses. Every house is like a fortified castle—high stone walls on all four sides with neither a peephole nor a window, only one main door which should more accurately be called a back door, because usually it opens to the side or rear of the house instead of to the street or bazaar. Upon entering the house, there is first a porch, then a

²³ A *phiran* is a long gown traditionally worn by both men and women.

²⁴ Alexander Tvardovsky (1910–1971), a Soviet poet and editor of the influential literary journal *Novyi Mir*. The original renders his name incorrectly.

courtyard or garden, and then a single row of residential rooms. In front of Rasul's home stands the statue and memorial of his father, Hamza Tsada (he was also a famous local revolutionary poet).²⁵ "The house of Hamza Tsada" and the name of the carpenter are engraved on the door's wooden arch in elegant Arabic lettering. When we reached the door, a few old ladies dressed in black and holding flowers greeted us in pure Arabic accent, shook everyone's hands, and blessed us in their language.²⁶ Speaking of handshakes, take note that when they shake hands, men here don't just touch fingers like the Europeans—they arm wrestle, and if you hold your hand and arm dear, you would do well to be cautious. Passing through the porch, we entered a spacious hall. A roof made of very large, unfinished beams and reeds, rugs, and carpets on the floor, wooden benches by the walls and long tables in front of them. I said to someone that if these benches and tables were not here, this could be the layout of a courtyard in one of our village houses. Upon hearing this, that gentleman gave a hearty laugh and said, "This is a drawing room, sir. Although we sit at chairs and tables in our homes, our *mehfils* are best held on the floor."

Meanwhile food was being served: large slices of boiled meat, yogurt mixed with garlic, corn, and cottage-cheese paratha, pickle, onion and mint chutney, and loads of uncooked vegetables. The food here is very simple and unpretentious but tasty and healthy. Along with the food, a series of speeches and toasts began once again—for Rasul Hamza, for the hosts, for the guests. I was the only stranger and foreigner among the guests; all the others were renowned writers from various republics whom most people already knew. Hence, when a toast was proposed for Pakistan, it caused a sensation in the crowd—there was a burst of appreciative applause, a lot of hubbub. They stopped short of proclaiming *takbir*.²⁷ A Georgian poet was sitting next to me; he even recited an extempore stanza rhyming Pakistan and Dagestan. The gathering continued for two or two and a half hours, and when people had eaten their fill, chief Maqsud Hamza, the head of the local militia (police), rose from a corner and said in a loud voice, "Gentlemen, how long you

²⁵ Rasul Gamzatov's father was Gamzat Tsadasa (1877–1951).

²⁶ Faiz uses "*Akhan wa sahlān*," which in Arabic is used for both "hello" and "welcome." It designates the addressee as a member of one's group.

²⁷ Faiz is being humorous here. In Muslim custom, someone may call for *takbir*, and others respond by saying "Allāhu Akbar" ("God is great").

are going to sit at the breakfast table? It's almost time for lunch, please come and have food at my place."

"Lord have mercy!" I said to my neighbor. "So this was only breakfast?"

"Man, what have you even eaten yet?" that person said.

Then we reached Maqsd *sahib's* house, which was comparatively more ornate.²⁸ At this meal, besides the traditional Dagestani food, there were some Russian and Georgian dishes included as well. Again speeches were made, again toasts were proposed. I somehow managed to stuff more food down my gullet and started feeling the tug of sleep. Meanwhile, a voice sounded from somewhere: "Friends, how much longer will you be confined to these four walls? Just look outside, how pretty the sunshine is! Let's sit in the meadow atop the mountain, where flowers have blossomed everywhere and fragrant breezes blow, where that silver stream is flowing in which the Khan's daughter used to bathe."²⁹ The remainder of our eating and drinking program will take place there."

Now, if the Khan's daughter chose to bathe in the very place where we pitched our tents, then her taste must be admired. This place is a wide, undulating meadow blanketed with blue and yellow wildflowers. Mountains that touch the sky stand to the north and south; Tsada,³⁰ Khunzakh, and other inhabited places are situated to the east in the direction we came from, and to the west there is a chasm thousands of feet deep. Here multiple thin, milky streams flow down from different directions like waterfalls and form a river.

There were carpets laid out here and there, two tents were set up to one side. In one, meat was being cut; in the other, large cauldrons were simmering. I was already worn out from eating all morning. Everybody lay down on the carpets. A Dagestani gentleman came and sat down next to me.

"Muslim? *Alhamdulillah?*"

I said, "*Alhamdulillah.*"

²⁸ *Sahib* is a common honorific in India and Pakistan.

²⁹ This is most likely a reference to the daughter of Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan), the founder of the Mongol Empire.

³⁰ Here and elsewhere Faiz mistakenly refers to it as "Sara."

*“Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim.”*³¹

I replied in kind.

Striking his hand on his chest, he introduced himself. “Muhammad Ali!”

I said, “Pleased to meet you.”

Now he said to the woman who was my interpreter, “You can go. We will talk directly.” Then in mixed Arabic and Persian as well as gestures, he first expressed friendship and love, and requested that I write something for his daughter Saadat, whose birthday was the next day. Coincidentally, I too have a long-lost memory associated with this name. I wrote out a couplet of Ghalib,³² “May you live”:

May you live for a thousand years
Each year lasting fifty thousand days

When the translation was recited, everyone around was enthralled. They demanded more of Ghalib’s works and his life story. I recited, and a Georgian poet, Claude Close, versified many of Ghalib’s couplets in his own language on the spot.³³

Then girls lined up and sang old and new Dagestani songs as well as the *dastan* of Pomokh and Azai, which you can think of as the local Mirzan Sahiban.³⁴ War stories about Huzbur and Batir Hujur, songs about streams and mountains, songs about Lenin and the Revolution.³⁵ The tall, gallant chief of the local militia, Maqsood Hamza, approached and sat down beside me. He said, “Look, we are assiduous and swift-flying like the hawks of these mountains. We are very open-hearted and we never betray a friend, we never break a promise. Make friends with us and when there is trouble, call us; we can hear a friend’s voice from thousands of miles away.”

³¹ In Muslim culture, *bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim* is often used at the commencement of a meal or other event as well as to express excitement. This gentleman appears to be using it in both senses.

³² Mirza Beg Asadullah Khan, popularly known as Mirza Ghalib, was an eighteenth-nineteenth-century poet of the Urdu and Persian languages.

³³ The translators have been unable to identify Claude Close.

³⁴ Mirzan Sahiban is a reference to a popular Punjabi tragic romance.

³⁵ We have been unable to identify Batir Hujur conclusively. “Batir” is a common honorific of Turkic origin, similar to the Russian *bogatyr*. Batir Hujur may be Batir Hochbar.

By now the shadows had darkened and according to the schedule, we should have headed back to the plane at five. I said to Rasul Hamza, "It's already quarter past five and you're all still sitting here. We'll miss the plane." He said "Come on. Do you think we're in Moscow? Here all the planes are ours; they will fly when we want."

Anyhow, when we reached the runway around six, there was no sign of a plane anywhere. Rasul visited the control tower once or twice and said, "My friend, a big blunder has happened. We didn't invite the pilot to our morning banquet and he got mad. He sent word to go away and that he won't bring the plane."

Somebody whispered to me "This is all a lie, the planes have long since returned. This mischief has all been a ploy to have you stay the night here."

We were compelled to get back into the cars and return to the village. No single house had the capacity to host twenty people overnight, so we were divided among different houses in ones and twos. My host, Muhammad Khateeb *sahib*, was the leader of Rasul's village, Tsada, and its suburban kolkhoz, or collective farm. He was a very cultured, polite, and well informed person, over six feet tall, with an athletic body and scarlet complexion, shaved head, a long, hawkish nose, typical of Dagestanis, and sharp, hawk-like eyes.

His house was of a relatively modern style. In the outer courtyard there are pomegranate, pear, and apple saplings as well as a bed for vegetables. Across that and climbing four to five steps, you enter a house with a raised plinth. It has a latticed balcony stretching from one end to the other in which a few easy chairs are arranged to one side and in the middle, a small bathroom and basin for hand washing. To the other side is the dining table and a few stairs that descend into the toilet, and four vast rooms that open onto this balcony. Of course, every house has electricity and running water, but Khateeb sahib also has two radio sets and a refrigerator.

Khateeb sahib told me that seven villages are part of his kolkhoz, totaling some four thousand people. Under the kolkhoz's management, wheat, corn, and different fruits are cultivated, and herds of sheep are bred and sold to the government, which accounts for most of the kolkhoz's income. If there is more wheat and fruit than its members need, the excess is sold in the local markets. The kolkhoz owns almost 40,000 sheep. Aside from this, every person can keep one cow and ten sheep as personal property. Every family is allowed to have around one acre of land for personal gardening or farming. Every village has its own school. Up to

eighth grade, education is provided in the local language Avar, however, from fifth grade onwards the Russian language is also compulsory.

The kolkhoz has its own hospital that can accommodate up to one hundred and twenty patients. There are two maternity wards. X-ray machines and a full suite of medical and surgery equipment are also available. There is daily air service for Makhachkala and a paved road for busses and cars.

Khateeb *sahib* vacated his room for me so I could spend the night, and seeing that room, one definitely would not imagine it to be the room of an ordinary farmer in a remote village of a remote area of Dagestan. It looked exactly like the drawing room of an urban professor, with maps on the wall and pictures of different cities, bookshelves on all four sides, magazines and newspapers on the study table, a radio set, a big clock, a study lamp, papers, pencils, and cigarettes.

In the morning, after a breakfast of yogurt, cheese, preserved fruit, and corn parathas, Rasul Hamza appeared and apologized at length: "You must be thinking, 'what a strange, rude man—he dropped the guest off at someone's house and then disappeared God knows where,' but the thing is, I'm so busy that I seldom have a chance to visit the village. In the time I've been gone, one house has gone into mourning, in another a marriage took place, in one a child was born, in another someone's boy has graduated university, and I'm obliged to visit all those houses to offer condolences or congratulations. Now, with difficulty, I have been able to finish with all of them. Now let's go have breakfast."

"But we already had breakfast," I said.

"What difference does that make? Before you leave, you are to have breakfast at two more places in addition to mine."

After having breakfast at three or four places, we reached the airfield to find people standing in front of the aircrafts with the very same boiled meat and beverages.

"Oh come on! Have some mercy! What's going on here?"

"You'll have to eat," Muhammad Ali said. "It's local custom."

REVOLUTIONARY ROMANTICISM BEYOND THE COMMUNIST BLOC: AN AFGHAN RADICAL POET

The Soviet Thaw coincided with a period of Soviet rapprochement in the neighboring Kingdom of Afghanistan. From 1953 to 1963, under the prime ministership of Da 'ud Khan, Afghan national modernization proceeded along lines partly inspired by the Soviet model, and a significant proportion of Afghan officers trained in the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, a broad-based communist movement developed among the professional classes and university-educated youth. Sulaiman Layeq (1930–2020) was from a prominent Sufi lineage in a leading Pashtun clan and became a communist at university. He went on to play a leading role in the national cultural bureaucracy (as an editor for a state newspaper and radio station), in the Afghan communist movement, and in modern Pashto and Dari Persian poetry. His sentimental, romantic-revolutionary verses from this period include many of the same tropes as contemporaneous Soviet poetry: the battle against nature, conquest of the cosmos, and emotional overflow. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Layeq occupied top positions in the Soviet-backed government, and his poetry gained a still wider reception in Afghanistan and beyond.

Samuel Hodgkin.

Sad Flame

Sulaiman Layeq

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Ah, this sad flame
This fiery love
This final pain
This passion for you will lead either to tears of madness
Or to poetry that I'll consign to burn forever

No more I'll catch her scent
Nor seek her by night
Nor tell her my secret
But wander, wrenched away, weeping, aching
Slowly along the silent path of the departed.

The life that goes on
Is lightning, leaping
That carries off
Our thousand tales, our sorrows and exploits.

Among the mountains
Below the waterfall
Over the meadows
The resurrection day of kisses and caresses is over
The reins of our lives torn from our hands.

Perhaps in years to come
The twinkling stars
The moonbeams
Will shine above the clouds in a clear sky
Over the city. No trace of us will remain.

1959, Kabul

Eternal Loves

Sulaiman Layeq

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Clouds on peaks
 like waves on rocks
 winds in valleys
 like love in hearts
 raving, howling.
 The blizzards assault
 the mountains, the corpses
 but love's melodies
 overflow the heart
 volcanic, drunken.
 You loves and sorrows
 you memories of darlings
 I fear lifetimes have passed
 stealing the warmth from pleasures
 drawing back, pulling away.
 The years have passed me by
 but these flames still
 like winds among the snows
 or waves in the deeps
 scream and cry.

Gulbahar, 1959

Two Sentinels in Battle

Sulaiman Layeq

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

Come, come, let's turn cosmonaut and rove through space
 Since our desires are too vast for this narrow world
 It's shameful for this unleavened, lifeless life
 To circumscribe the men of the new age
 The cosmos over Afghan lands and my rebellious soul
 Are two sentinels in battle, two martial barricades
 My head won't be bowed beneath the quotidian fist
 A fighter's head is no head, but a solid rock
 The people's fervor rises from my heartstrings
 How good it is when art's in concord with the artist
 Don't think that I've grown weary from the fray:
 The bell owes its nature to the tumult of ringing.

Pul-i Khumri, 1965

INTIMATE PUBLICS

The Thaw under Nikita Khrushchev in the mid-twentieth century dramatically transformed literature in the Central Asian periphery much as it did in the Moscow and Leningrad centers. A critical element of that transformation was a new interest in private lives as something of value to be shared with readers. Under Stalin, private life had always been regarded with suspicion; in the Stalinist novels of the Soviet canon villains were always those whose private life entirely contradicted their public self. The task of the novel's heroes, and of good Soviet citizens following their example, was to unmask these wreckers who did not walk stride for stride with the Soviet collective.

We see this new interest in private life and public intimacy in Uzbek poet Ghafur Ghulom's (1903–1966) "Pay Our House a Visit, Friends." Ghulom, a prolific poet and short story writer since the 1920s, by the Khrushchev years had risen to become one of the principal faces of Uzbek literature. As such, he was often at the forefront of Khrushchev's new internationalism, which sought to propagandize socialism by presenting Soviet developmental achievements in Central Asia to anti-colonial states of the third world. Ghulom's poem is written in precisely that context. Addressing the poem to the many foreign litterateurs who came to Tashkent, the Soviet capital of Central Asia, Ghulom invites them to visit his home. Through this invitation, Ghulom figures himself as both a Soviet and an Uzbek representative, naming the various illustrative sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of Uzbekistan.

The structure of the poem also evinces another Thaw-era development in Uzbek poetry. Uzbek poets of the twenties and thirties had discarded the traditional Persianate *'aruz* meters, which relied on the interchange of long and short vowels, for the syllabic meters of Turkic epic (called *barmoq* or "finger") and free verse. The 1950s and 1960s, however, saw poets like Ghulom return *'aruz* meters and other Persianate poetic forms to the Uzbek poetic canon. The poem is a *mukhammas*, the Arabic word for a cinquain or a poem with five-lined stanzas, and the meter is *ramal mahzuf musaddas*, an 11-syllable line separated into three intervals of 4–4–3 syllables in which the second syllable of each interval is short.

Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov's (1928–2008) novel *Jamila* likewise explores places of intimacy previously off limits to Soviet readers. Aitmatov is perhaps the best-known writer of this volume, achieving under the Soviet Union an all-union and international fame matched by

no other non-Russian in the Soviet Union. *Jamila*, which French socialist writer Louis Aragon both praised and translated, was the first text in Soviet letters to question the Soviet World War II mythology of brave men at the front and patient wives waiting for them in the rear. The novel is narrated by an artist, Seit, who recalls the affair and eventual elopement of Daniyar, a cripple in his village, and his sister-in-law Jamila, whose husband Sadik is off soldiering in Eastern Europe. The Thaw influence is conspicuous not only in the content of the novel but also in Aitmatov's prose. In the excerpt below, Aitmatov focuses on the emotions and inner lives of the characters in a way that Stalinist authors never explored. The excerpt concludes on a note entirely anathema to Stalinist objectivism and materialism: "Words were not necessary; besides, words can never quite express a person's feelings."

The third text included in this module, an excerpt from Turkmen writer Nariman Jumayev's (1925-) short story "The Quiet Daughter-in-Law," similarly evinces the effects of the Thaw on Central Asian literature, though in a more circumspect manner than Aitmatov's *Jamila*. Aitmatov stands out as a boundary-pushing writer because the literary politics of the time allowed Russian-language writers from the republics to publish in the relatively liberal context of Moscow, circumventing their often more conservative republican writers' unions. Those writing in their local languages, like Jumayev, had to limit how they challenged socialist realist orthodoxy even if they sided with Moscow's more radical writers. "The Quiet Daughter-in-Law" follows the progressive protagonist Selbi as she marries into a conservative family who confine her to the home and force her to wear the Turkmen veil, the *ýaşmak*. Jumayev looks beyond Stalinist tropes, however, in that he makes the "vestiges of the past," Selbi's in-laws, reconcilable to the Soviet order. Whereas in a Stalinist story Selbi might divorce her husband and find a new Bolshevik husband, here her husband, Jemshit decides to abandon his family for her. But Jumaev's story also retains Central Asian Stalinist tropes in both its criticism of traditional Central Asian patriarchy and its support of a new Soviet patriarchy. In Central Asian novels under Stalin, authors consistently displayed Bolshevik heroes as hypermasculine and the dominant partners in monogamous nuclear families, while their villainous counterparts are simultaneously polygamous but also emasculated and sterile. Jumayev plays with and ultimately undermines such simplistic dualities by creating strong feminine characters who are capable of engaging their masculine counterparts with vital—even if subtly deployed—agency. Similarly, the

agonized inner dialogue of the male characters demonstrates a nuanced appreciation for how normatively heroic male action may instead be a cover for fear, shame, and a sense of loss in a rapidly changing and Soviet-modernizing world. As Jumayev's characters imperfectly navigate and narrate their newly Soviet lives, their familiar and familial negotiations, disputes, and compromises humanize the everyday struggles involved in building the new Soviet person.

Chris Fort³⁶

Pay Our House a Visit, Friends

Ghafur Ghulom

Translated by Samuel Hodgkin

When you come to Uzbekistan, my home,
With pride, the arms of brotherhood will open,
And the heart's hearth of welcome will burn hot
As you traverse the tarmac on your Volga steed,
Along the way, stop first at our place, friends!

You know full well who Ghafur Ghulom is
And my address, of course: Uzbekistan.
Don't put me off: you must come to our place.
Do me the honor—it would make me glad—
Come stay the night in our glad house, my friends!

To all our friends, the gate is open wide,
The rose petals will fall upon your head.
Here's perfumed soap, fresh water, and a towel,
Such lovely days: how fitting you should come,
You must of course stop at our place, my friends!

For you, I planted savory and basil
And picked a handful for whoever came.
The saffron isn't ready, but I saved a bit,
I've spent my sixty springs in brotherhood,

³⁶ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

Then, let's set up a place among the roses,
A downy pillow and a silken quilt,
I'll help unburden your headful of woes.
Singing along in fifteen languages,
So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

Thanks to my lucky star, my kids are numerous,
They teem around my head like wreaths of tulips.
Uncles and aunts, daughters- and sons-in-law...
But cups enough of green tea for them all,
Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

With kids around, the heart's a packed bazaar,
Tom Sawyer's kingdom, mischief everywhere.
Laying their hands on cameras and flashlights,
But if they don't disturb you, no harm done,
So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

Between us all, the tablecloth is spread,
Before you, an immense world of largesse,
And at the table's head, there's bread and salt,
While you, my guests, surround this world like stars,
So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

The table bears so many kinds of fruit,
All so pristine, as fresh as dew, so dear.
The grapes, the figs and peaches whisper "kiss me,"
We'll carve and eat a muskmelon, then rest,
Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

Try this pheasant, this bustard and quail,
This flatbread dotted with nigella seeds,
This sausage is called qazi, these are somsas,
Some hasip, norin...you're not foreign here,
So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

Here's shakarob, some cherries, sour and sweet,
And this juice here is made from charos grapes,

This wine makes those who drink it extra sober,
 And drink this kumis, watch your vigor grow,
 Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

Here comes my love, Muharram, with the pilaf,
 Each grain of rice a pomegranate seed,
 Hand on heart, head bowed, and that solar platter,
 Aglow, to eat with dear friends, young and old,
 So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

Then let's recite some verses: Lutfi, Nava'i,
 Bedil, Furqat, some Pushkin and Jami.
 Then, lit up by the verse of bygone days
 May we, too, be inspired to compose,
 Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

For my household, each book is like a sun,
 The shelves of our library creak and groan,
 And if an honored guest asks whose they are,
 It's that old fool, Ghafur Ghulom, who owns them,
 Along the way, stop at our house, my friends!

Hear our voice, in the tongue of an old poet:
 May every spring and summer pass like this.
 May you come and see us frequently,
 We live for friends, they're all that we desire,
 So on your way, stop at our house, my friends!

Moscow, February 15, 1959

Jamila

Chingiz Aitmatov

Translated by James Riordan

It was late as we returned from the station. Daniyar was riding ahead of us. It was a wonderful August night: the glittering stars were so clearly visible, they seemed closer than they really were. One star sparkled with icy rays as if rimmed in hoar-frost, and looked down from the sky at us, blinking in innocent bewilderment. I followed it for a long time as

we rode through the ravine. Eager to reach home, the horses trotted briskly, the stones scraping beneath their feet. The cool wind from the steppe brought with it the bitter pollen of flowering wormwood, and the faint aroma of ripening wheat. Mingling with the smell of tar and horse sweat, it all made us fairly dizzy. Dark rocks overhung with briar towered over the road, while far below the irresponsible Kurkureu gushed out from behind a thicket of rose-willow and wild poplar. Now and then a train chattered over a distant bridge behind us, the tapping of its wheels echoing long after it had passed.

It felt good to ride along in the coolness of night, to watch the jogging backs of the horses, to listen to the sounds of the August night and inhale its odors. Jamilia was riding ahead of me; she had let the reins drop and was humming softly as she looked about her. I understood: our silence hung heavily upon her. It was a night for singing.

So she sang. Perhaps she sang because somehow to recall the former easy spirit of our relationship with Daniyar or she wished to assuage her feeling of guilt. Her voice was clear and impassioned as she sang the usual village songs: "I'll wave my silken scarf to you" and "My loved one is far away." She knew a lot of songs and sang simply, with feeling. It was a pleasure to listen to her.

All at once she broke off and called to Daniyar, "Hey you, Daniyar, how about a song? Are you a *jigit* or not?"

"You sing, Jamilia, you sing," he called back, embarrassed, reining in his horses. "I'm listening, I'm all ears."

"Don't you think we have ears too?" she shouted. "Nobody's forcing you, you know."

And she struck up a song again. Who knows why she asked him to sing. Perhaps just for the fun of it or maybe she wanted to draw him into conversation? Probably she wanted to talk to him.

A few minutes later she yelled again, "Tell me, have you ever been in love?"

Then she burst out laughing. He said nothing. Jamilia fell silent too.

She's picked the right one for a song, I sniggered to myself.

The horses slowed as forded a stream that crossed the road; their hoofs clattered on the wet silvery stones. When we had passed through, Daniyar urged his horses on and unexpectedly began to sing in a strained voice that jumped at every bump in the road.

"Mountains mine, bluey-white mountains,
Land of my fathers and my kin."

He suddenly faltered, coughed, but sang for the next two lines in a deep, slightly hoarse voice,

"Mountains mine, bluey-white mountains,
Cradle of mine..."

Here he broke off again as though afraid, and fell silent.

I could well imagine how confused he must have been. Yet even in that halting, timid singing there was something singularly moving. He certainly had a fine voice, it was hard to believe it really was him.

"Well I never," I exclaimed.

Jamilia cried out, "Where have you been all this time? Go on, sing, sing properly."

Ahead, at the ravine's exit, the light of day was creeping in and a breeze came from the valley. Daniyar began to sing again. He started off as timidly and uncertainly as before, yet steadily his voice gained volume, filling the ravine and echoing in the distant rocks.

I was astounded at the passion and fire of the melody itself. I could not describe it then, nor can I now. Was it just his voice or something more tangible emerging from his very soul that could arouse such emotion in another person, and bring one's innermost thoughts to life?

If only I could recreate his song. It contained few words, yet even without words it revealed a great human soul. I have never heard such singing before or since. The tune was like neither Kirgiz nor Kazakh, yet in it was something of both. His music combined the very best melodies of the two related peoples and had woven them into a single, unrepeatable song. It was a song of the mountains and the steppe, first soaring up into the sky like the Kirgiz mountains, then rolling freely like the Kazakh steppe.

I listened in amazement. So that's what he's like, I thought. Who would have thought it?

As we crossed the steppe along the soft, beaten track, Daniyar's singing took wing; songs followed one another with astonishing facility. Was he really so gifted? What had happened to him? It was as if he had been saving himself for this very day. His hour had come at last.

And all of a sudden I began to understand his strangeness that made people shrug and mock; his dreaminess, his love of solitude, his silent manner. Now I understood why he spent a night by himself on the river-bank, why he constantly hearkened to sounds others could not hear, and why his eyes would suddenly gleam and his drawn eyebrows twitch. He was a man deeply in love. I felt it was not simply a love for another person,

it was somehow an uncommon, expansive love for life and earth. He had kept this love within himself, in his music, in his very being. A person with no feeling, no matter how good his voice, could never have sung like that.

When you thought the last note had died away, out burst a fresh, haunting song that seemed to rouse and caress the sleeping steppe with tunes it held dear and, in return, gratefully invigorated the singer. The ripened dove-gray wheat awaiting harvest rippled like a lake surface and the first shadows of dawn flitted across the field. At the mill a mighty throng of old willows rustled their leaves; on the other side of the river the campfires of fieldworkers were fading, and a shadowy rider galloped noiselessly toward the village along the top of the bank, dipping and bobbing among the orchards. The wind was heady with the fragrance of apples, the aroma of honeyed, flowering corn, and the warm smell of drying dung bricks.

Daniyar sang on oblivious to all about him. The enraptured August night listened to him in silence. Even the horses had long since switched to a measured walk, as if afraid to break the spell.

Abruptly, on the highest, ringing note, he broke off and, with a whoop, urged his horses into a gallop. I thought Jamilia would race after him and I half prepared to follow, but she did not stir. She was sitting with her head inclined, and remained in that position as if still catching the last tremulous notes drifting on the air. Daniyar had ridden off, yet neither of us said a word until we had reached the village. Words were not necessary; besides, words can never quite express a person's feelings.

1958

The Quiet Daughter-in-Law

Nariman Jumayev

Translated by Selbi Jumayeva et al.

Hi Guljan,

You wrote me a letter asking what happened to me. You must have remembered the words I said when Genguli was getting married. Of course, you have every right to send me such a letter. When we were kids, we ate salt

together.³⁷ *I consider you a sister. We shouldn't keep things from each other. You reminded me of Genguli's story, but you forgot one thing: She was married to a man she doesn't love. But I married the man I love. You're correct that I couldn't keep my promise to not perform *baş saldy*³⁸ and to not wear the *şaşmak*.³⁹ But I have to confess to you and only you: I was afraid to lose Jemshit. Maybe my worries were unjustified, maybe I was jealous, but what happened, happened. Even though I can't write about my current situation, you must understand what I've been going through. It won't last though. The *şaşmak* will go! I will be able to greet everyone with an open face! Nobody will look down on me. You'll see what I've said will come to pass. I too will live freely and be happy.*

Keep writing, Guljan.

Selbi

Five days had passed in the lonely house in dead silence. Jemshit had left to plow the desert land for crop cultivation along the new irrigation channel, and it would soon be a week since Janmyrat had gone to pioneer camp.⁴⁰

For the first time, just the two of them were left in the household: Maral-eje and her daughter-in-law, Selbi. With Janmyrat around, Maral-eje easily issued orders to her daughter-in-law. But now, Selbi had to understand these tasks without a word spoken between the two. In reality though, there was not much work to do. Selbi was weaving two carpets at once: one big rug for the carpet maker cooperative and a small one for herself. Apart from her weaving, she helped with chores around the house.

³⁷ *Duz iýişmek*, eating salt, means sharing salt and bread together as a symbol of true trust and of a deep bond.

³⁸ *Baş saldy* is a ritual performed after a wedding in which the new daughter-in-law is dressed as an unmarried young woman, and women from the groom's kin ceremonially fight with each to be the first to correctly identify the daughter-in-law among other unmarried women in the room.

³⁹ *Şaşmak* is a cloth (typically a loose corner of the headscarf) held in the mouth so as to cover the face. It is worn by married women as tradition prohibits them from direct conversation with their in-laws.

⁴⁰ A young wife would customarily not speak directly to her parents-in-law but rather communicate through an intermediary, who might be either the husband or the husband's younger brother.

No fair-minded person could complain about her work. Even Maral-eje⁴¹ found herself admiring the dexterous skill and effortless mastery of her daughter-in-law. Maral-eje's suspicions remained. *She just wants to please Jemshit and look good in my eyes.* But she was aware that her feelings were unjustified. *Selbi works with eagerness, her face lights up as she weaves carpets. Such enthusiasm for work cannot come from coercion.* Even with her self-defeating cynicism, Selbi's radiant face did not bring Maral-eje joy. On the contrary, the brighter Selbi's face, the gloomier the mother-in-law became. When Maral-eje saw Selbi pulling her *ýaşmak* down, throwing her *kürte*⁴² to the side, and swinging her carpet comb with a wide smile, she would pull up her own *ýaşmak* and intentionally bang a pail loudly on the ground.

Though Selbi was not aware of Maral-eje's display, the sparkle in her eyes dimmed as she swung her carpet comb.

Maral-eje herself was oblivious to the subtle effect that her intentional banging produced on Selbi. She thought with irritation: *Look at her shamelessness! She doesn't even notice people around her!*

* * *

The days of total silence passed without incident. Occupied with her carpets, Selbi's loneliness was not overwhelming. Even when she had a heavy heart, the burden remained bearable. Selbi's tiresome loneliness encroached on her only at night when thoughts and doubts unfolded in her mind. The howl of wolves comforted her in those moments. The fading light of the oil lamp lurched on the walls, and the ceiling beams covered in soot glistened. The whole world seemed to stop, and Selbi felt as if the heavy air turned viscous and enveloped her. To forget her loneliness, Selbi read until her eyes ached.

One night when Selbi had just made her bed, the lamp light flickered and went out. Selbi felt as though she was sitting inside a black trunk. *The oil in the lighter is finished, should I fill it up?* She quickly abandoned this

⁴¹ Eje means mother (in general use among Turkmen) or paternal grandmother (among the tribes of the Caspian region, e.g., the *Tomut* and *Tgdyr*). When used as a suffix, it is a respectful way to address a woman who has children, an older woman, or a husband's mother.

⁴² A *Kürte* is a robe designed to fully cover the head and body. If worn by a new daughter-in-law, it is often embroidered and adorned with jewelry and thus very heavy and thick; women in south central Turkmenistan may also wear a lighter everyday version.

idea, remembering that the kerosene for the lamp was in a separate felt yurt where her mother-in-law slept. *I should fall asleep quickly, without delay*, she thought and started counting. Despite her efforts, she could not fall asleep.

A sound came from the ceiling. Fear welled up inside her and overtook her whole being. "There is nothing to be afraid of. What can it be? They said there might be snakes. Even if it is a snake, it won't touch a person," she said out loud to comfort herself.

Selbi was not a coward. She understood that there was nothing to panic about. But suddenly another sound came from the ceiling. The shivering she felt a moment ago rushed back through her from her chest to the roots of her hair. Selbi felt her legs, arms, and her whole body cover in sweat.

"Coward! You are afraid of a small noise!" she said to herself angrily.

Something fell off the ceiling at her feet and Selbi jumped from her place, grabbed matches from a drawer, and lit one, illuminating the room. She searched her bed, the top of the felt rug, and the floor.

There was nothing there, but she no longer wanted to sleep.

She went out of the room to sit on the veranda where in the vast black sky the stars were shining. An airplane rumbled in the distance. A few falling stars cut across the sky and stretched toward the Pleiades. Selbi thought: *People who know astronomy, who can make sense of the stars, and who have mastered the science of spending nights in this way must be happy people!*

Or maybe they are the unhappiest people on earth. The sky has no boundaries. It's eternal. A human being is insignificant, a total nothingness compared with the limitless sky. A human dies, but the sky is immortal. If these thoughts always occupy your mind, if the limitless, mysterious, deep black sky always hangs above you and reminds you of your nothingness, then perhaps it's better not to be able to read the sky...

It would get hot toward noon—as if the world were inside a well-heated tandoor oven. But right now the weather was pleasant. Stars blinking in the sky. Far above, and beyond the river, the moon was lazily rising and greeting the land.

Oh, no, the person who can befriend the sky, who can share their secrets with the sky, is a happy person. Look, the sky is exhilarating. Am I malicious or cowardly to fear the immortality and limitlessness of the sky? My previous thought was a coward's thought, the thought of one who is afraid of dying. But you die a hundred times a day from a thought like that.

The falling stars disappeared. *I wish I could fly in an airplane again! I would look down through the clouds. I would circle over Ashgabat, over Moscow!*

Selbi didn't notice herself falling asleep with these thoughts on the stairs of the veranda. She dreamt of flying in a plane, the blue desert spreading across the ground under the wing. Suddenly, the plane's motor broke down, and it fell from the sky. Selbi's eyes opened, and she saw her mother-in-law pass by her, banging pails in her hands.

The same evening someone knocked on their gate. When Maral-eje went to attend to the sound, Selbi heard a familiar voice ring out. *Guljan has come!* Selbi dropped her carpet comb. *What if she sees me this way, in a *yaşmak-börük*?*⁴³

She got up and dashed inside.

From the veranda, she could hear the clicking of shoes. Selbi tore off her *yaşmak-börük*, bunched it up, and stuffed it between the mats.

There was a knock on the door. Selbi opened the door and embraced her girlfriend as if she had been lost and only just been found again. Not having exchanged a word or even a salam with anyone except her husband Jemshit and his little brother Janmyrat for the past four months, Selbi was overwhelmed with joy greeting her girlfriend. Together, Selbi and Guljan had a long heart-to-heart conversation. Guljan presented Selbi with a jeweled clasp for her collar, a gift from Ashgabat.

From that day on, Guljan visited on a bike nearly every day. Is it possible to say "leave" to a guest that keeps returning? Maral-eje found herself without recourse. The sound of bicycle gears clicking made the blood vessels in the back of her head throb. Seeing a tall and beautiful girl wearing a wide straw hat, smiling, and walking freely made Maral-eje forget to even spit out *toba-toba*.⁴⁴ Overwhelmed, she felt the tendons in her ankles tremble. To make matters worse, Janmyrat had just returned from summer camp, and Maral-eje now had to listen to him praise "Doctor Guljan," and tell her that "people respect Guljan," rendering her mind dumb and paralyzing her hands and feet.

⁴³ A *Börük* is a married woman's head wrap, often styled in a cylindrical shape extending from the back of the head through the use of multiple scarves; sometimes new daughters-in-law and older women wear a large shawl or *kürte* on top of the *börük*.

⁴⁴ An Arabic phrase meaning "repentance," used to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. In everyday life, *toba-toba* expresses dislike, contempt, or judgment. Saying it while spitting is a way to keep one's distance from evil or to avoid sin.

Despite her hatred for the young woman, she would not dare to mention Guljan's name in anything other than a positive light. Guljan's father, Dovlet the Hunter, had been well respected in the village since the civil war. The villagers felt pride at having such a brave young man call their village home. Dovlet the Hunter was even honored with the title "Hero of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War" before he died gloriously in World War II. All the villagers were obliged to revere the hero's family too. Giving even the slightest offense to his family would be considered an absolute disgrace.

Two or three days after her first visit, Guljan told Selbi straightforwardly:

"You can't just accept your fate and walk around like *that*. Start with the *yaşmak*. Get rid of it. Don't be afraid."

"Let me see if Jemshit agrees."

Selbi didn't have the heart to remove her cover of her own accord

The next day Guljan brought out two large illustrated magazines, sat on the veranda and began telling Janmyrat and Selbi about the moon-landing preparations.

Seeing this scene, Maral-eje spat a *toba-toba* into her collar and disappeared into the felt yurt. However, Guljan knew that she was still listening to the conversation carefully from inside the yurt. Guljan intentionally continued to speak loudly.

One day she would talk about rockets. Another day atoms. One day about new medicines, another day about new cars. Yet regardless of the topics she touched on, Guljan always ended the conversation talking about humanity.

She spoke in support of respecting and loving people. She contended that some old customs were inhumane, but carefully avoided the word "religion."

The day Jemshit returned from his desert labor, Guljan came in the evening. When she said, "Salam, Jemshit," while passing her husband, who was drinking tea on the veranda, he almost choked on his tea.

"Is everything alright?"

As a young man who wasn't accustomed to speaking with women, he didn't know what to say. His mother had already told him about the "shameless doctor." Guljan sat down on a carpet and Jemshit's panic grew. He hesitated, thinking to himself and staring, while holding a

teacup in one hand and a teapot in the other: *Should I invite her to eat? Should I offer her some tea? Is it correct to be having tea with someone's grown daughter?*

Eventually he asked in a rude tone, "Do you want some tea?"

Guljan was surprised and delighted by his naivete.

"They say, 'It's better to smack someone than to ask whether they're thirsty.'⁴⁵ Who would refuse tea in this hot weather?"

Jemshit handed her the tea, then immediately stood up and left.

It took about a week for Jemshit to finally get used to Guljan. Since he was accustomed to having conversations with Selbi about world affairs and innovations, he soon became interested in Guljan's illustrated magazines.

One day Guljan brought an illustrated book about the Arabs in "Arabistan." Jemshit pointed to a picture of a woman with a European outfit.

"Is this woman Arab? Is she a Muslim?"

"This woman is a professor, a great scientist."

"Waaa, you two are such liars!"

Jemshit laughed loudly.

"Shouldn't an Arab woman wear a *yaşmak-börük*? And these men... they're wearing women's clothes. A true Muslim wears a burgundy robe and a *telpek*."⁴⁶

Guljan smiled.

"Religion doesn't dictate clothing; each nation has its own clothing. A *yaşmak* and *börük* would confuse Arabs; just as we find their clothing odd. And now Arabs are even wearing different clothes than they did then. What do you think, should humans serve clothes or should clothes serve humans?"

Jemshit's face contorted with thought.

"So you're saying Arabs do not have *yaşmak-börük*?"

"They have a different piece of clothing to cover a woman's face. In places where women are not viewed as humans, they cover women's faces and confine them inside their houses ..."

"Our ancestors' traditional practices can't be bad! Wearing a *yaşmak* is how you show respect to elders."

⁴⁵ A common saying that reflects Turkmen cultural norms for how a host must serve their guests.

⁴⁶ A *telpek* is a large woolen cap made of white or black sheepskin, worn by men.

“How fortunate that you were born a man. Would you say the same thing if you had to wear *yazmak* yourself? Would you put a lock on a woman’s mouth if you considered her to be your equal? If one person respects the other, should they walk around without greeting each other and speak to each other curtly, as if they had an argument? A long time ago someone invented some nonsensical practices in order to turn a woman into a servant and even now there are people who pretend not to see that times have changed.”

“Jemshit!” Maral-eje’s voice rang out from the felt yurt. Looking for an opportunity to escape, Jemshit fled to his mother. Although Maral-eje was interested in Guljan’s conversation, she found it unsettling. *These incredible inventions are the devil’s work*, she thought, convincing herself that she disagreed with Guljan. *Past prophets in their time also demonstrated plenty of miracles. The prophet Suleiman, who commanded the wind and water, would also fly through the air on his throne.* But the things Guljan said about a woman being a man’s equal, giving the same respect to men and women, those shook her the most.

Being honest with herself Maral-eje thought: *Life would be much better if that actually was the case*, and in thinking this, she disturbed something deep inside herself and repented immediately. *The devil is seducing you, girl! It is written on our foreheads to obey men, it is a matter of Sharia!* Having proven to herself the truth of her convictions, she now hated Guljan even more than before.

Intuiting this, Selbi one day said to Guljan: “Guljan, let’s not bother my mother-in-law. She will not change anyway. Really, she’ll just get worse.”

Guljan bared her shining white teeth.

“If you want to get rid of an inflammation with pus quickly, then you need to apply an ichthammol ointment. The pain will keep bothering you until the swelling bursts, remember that.”

Did Our Ancestors Really Wield Their Swords Like That?

A drought wind had been blasting for two days. Garagum dust that cannot be seen with the naked eye mixed together with the burning air, scorching leaves, chasing animals and other living things from shadow to shadow. Serious-faced dogs parched by heat eked out survival in irrigation ditches. Even the normally flitting sparrows limped around lifelessly in the shadows with their beaks hanging open loosely.

The fiery ball of the sun smoldered in the sky, hazy as a dirty mirror. People rested during the day and worked only at dawn and in the evening. At night the sun's blistering rays faded and the torrid temperature would cool to 30 degrees Celsius. Only if wrapped in wet bed sheets could your soul at last rest.

"We're complaining here. But what about people who spend their whole lives in the desert like my father?" thought Jemshit, when suddenly a knocking sound came from the gate. "Who comes before dawn?" He went to open the gate, and—speak of the wolf!⁴⁷—it was Shamyrat-aga.⁴⁸ He was in a good mood despite the exhaustion on his face.

"Getting along with the heat?"

Shamyrat-aga tossed his robe to Janmyrat. He continued talking, not waiting for an answer.

"It was good that the river came. Otherwise, this heat would have taken us too."

By "river," he meant the Garagum canal. Shamyrat-aga lay down, putting three pillows under his armpit. Taking off his *telpek*, he rotated it in his hand and put it on again. Shamyrat-aga stared at Jemshit's face for a while.

"Don't you see my new *telpek*?"

"Congratulations on your new *telpek*, father." Jemshit moved to take a teapot from his mother's hand and put it in front of his father.

"Seems like you've lost your head because of this heat."

Shamyrat-aga caressed his *telpek* again.

"Look at it, have you ever seen this kind of *telpek* in your entire life? Look at its curves and waves—it makes me feel good. Light as a bird when you wear it."

Shamyrat-aga carefully put his *telpek* on a visible spot. He reclined again and gazed at the hat. Then he launched into a monologue.

"Why do people need clothes?"

Shamyrat-aga was known as a tongue-tied man among people, although he liked to playfully speculate when he was in a good mood.

"Firstly, clothes are for beauty, then, they serve as protection against heat and cold. Our veterinary technician, by the way, wears pants which

⁴⁷ Used in the meaning of "speak of the devil."

⁴⁸ *Aga* literally means older brother or uncle, but it is also, as here, a respectful form of address to an older man when used as a suffix.

are tight up at the top and wide like a woman's dress down at the bottom, and a 'basket' which looks like a toadstool. On his shoulders, he wears a silk uniform jacket—it protects from neither heat nor cold. Making a uniform jacket from silk! Why? Who does that? It has to be sewn from dense fine wool. Still, the uniform jacket is the most purposeful garment among all the newly available kinds of clothes. It bestows handsomeness on a young man. Although, his flat belt is not bad, it's good, sure.... Oh, you people think you've seen the world, do you? An adolescent cannot become a man without getting on a stallion and crossing the desert. You simply cannot grasp what we're even talking about."

Shamyrat-aga waved his hand in dismissal and took a piece of bread from the table. At that moment, Jemshit prepared a brave question.

"If clothes are supposed to grant beauty and to protect from heat and cold, then why is the *yaşmak-börük* needed?"

Shamyrat-aga gave a sideways look at Jemshit and calmly swallowed a piece of *çörek*. "Where have you seen a man wear *yaşmak-börük*? Have you lost it? This is what women wear! A man's beauty is his horse, his weapon, his *telpek*. A woman's beauty is this!" Shamyrat-aga thrust the bread at Jemshit.

"A good woman makes bread from whole barley without a single complaint, while a bad wife will ruin store-bought flour. And by the way, today's bread is delicious; it very pleasingly melts in the mouth."

"Today's bread was made by our daughter-in-law."

Maral-eje had just come inside. As she uttered this, Maral-eje's voice trembled with offense. Her husband never had such praise for her bread. Jemshit wanted to seize the moment.

"Do you want to see her new carpet, father?"

"Let's see it." As Janmyrat stood up to bring new carpet, Shamyrat-aga sprang to his feet. "Let's see it in its place. No need to take off the wall."

"He knows that the carpet is nailed to the wall without even seeing it. I never even considered such a detail," thought Jemshit, appreciating his father's intellect. Yet Shamyrat-aga wasn't being clever; rather, he thought that the first carpet of his daughter-in-law should naturally be nailed to the wall. In his 60 years of life, Shamyrat-aga had seen many carpets. Carpets were not something that easily impressed him. When Shamyrat-aga entered the room, he stared at the carpet for some time.

The dull light that entered the room reflected on the carpet, seemingly setting it in motion. The carpet shimmered with a multitude of tiny

rainbows. Uncountable glimmering colors danced on the surface of the carpet, giving life to its mysterious *göller*.⁴⁹

The *göller* were like nothing Shamyrat-aga had seen before. It didn't resemble any of the *Teke*, *Yomut*, *Pendi*, or *Ersari*⁵⁰ carpets of his experience. Something appeared at the edge of Shamyrat-aga's mind as he looked at the carpet, and he suddenly frowned. Soon a full toothy smile broke out across his face. During the springtime when the desert blooms and a rainbow appears at dusk, if during the next morning's sunrise, you look at the newly sprouting grass and flowers from where you lay, you can see shifting colors in the dew and tiny rainbows shining in each drop. He realized what the carpet looked like.

Shamyrat-aga noticed that he had blocked the entrance and moved aside. The morning light now came through the doorway and fell fully on the carpet, dissipating the tiny rainbows. Now, it resembled a pure bubbling spring flowing among the flowers. On the surface of the peacefully flowing water the multicolored repeated motif was gently shimmering.

"Not bad," Shamyrat-aga said and played with his *telpek*.

Janmyrat began muttering: "L-o-o ... Love conquers."

Everyone looked at Janmyrat as if he had ruined something.

"Not bad," Shamyrat-aga stared at Janmyrat.

"Don't you see 'love conquers' written there?" Janmyrat asked simply, seemingly without concern.

Shamyrat-aga looked at him in disbelief.

"Does everyone here have brain damage? You're saying 'love,' you're saying 'conquers,' you're saying 'written.' Do you even understand the words coming out of your mouth?"

Janmyrat traced out the words on the carpet with a stick.

"Love... Conquers..." "They wove words on a carpet?"

Jemshit began to worry. Shamyrat-aga spoke again: "Who wrote!? Where?"

⁴⁹ *Göller* (plural), or *göl* (singular), are medallion-like central motifs in the main field of a rug, repeated to form an overarching pattern. They can have many meanings and come in a range of design styles and variations. Specific tribes, including non-Turkmen tribes, have associated motifs.

⁵⁰ *Teke*, *Yomut*, and *Ersari* are the names of Turkmen tribes, while the *Pendi göller* were introduced by the *Salor* and *Saryk* tribes and are now commonly used in rugs from the Mary region and the southeast of Turkmenistan.

Janmyrat once more traced the writing with his stick along the *göller*: “Here, the *nagys* form letters. It’s written so that it’s hard to make out.”

It was definitely difficult to distinguish text in the repeated motif. Janmyrat’s eyes were used to the carpet because he had watched each stage of its weaving. The similarity of the motif to the letter “o” had caught his eyes before, but he didn’t pay much attention to it at the time. Now, with the morning light he caught the “l” preceding the “o.”

Shamyrat-aga finally understood. “Is such scribbling allowed on a carpet,” he almost whispered without looking at anyone.

Silence. The blood drained from Janmyrat’s face as he stood there regretting that he had managed to read the hidden message.

“Over the course of many generations, our ancestors never heard of a secret text concealed in carpet. How is such shamefulness coming from inside my home?! What will people say if they hear of it?! Our descendants will curse us for this disgrace!”

Shamyrat-aga’s voice started low and sharply rose to full volume at the end of his speech.

“If there’s going to be a message, at least it could have been something reputable... ‘Love Conquers!’ Has anyone ever heard such an absurd saying before? Love—is it a wrestler or a grand orator? Love—is it a word used by modest people? Womanizers use the word, prostitutes, the mad!”

Selbi, standing in the corner shrouded in her *bürençek*,⁵¹ felt her vision blur. The colors of the carpet bled together as she tried to make them out. Glimmers of light reflecting from the carpet pierced her eyes like red, blue, green, and yellow needles.

Shamyrat-aga ripped the carpet from the wall; the nails fell noisily. He rolled it up, dropped it in the middle of the room, and rushed outside. After a minute, he came back with his saber.

“Is he going to destroy the carpet?” The thought shook Selbi.

The saber sliced the air with a whoosh as Shamyrat-aga tripped on the rolled carpet and fell on his face. His saber and *telpek* careened away.

For a moment, in Selbi’s imagination, her defiant, mysterious, hawkeyed father-in-law with frowning eyebrows looked like a mischievous little boy playing with a wooden sword. For a moment, the saber, the

⁵¹ *Bürençek* is a large white silk shawl with a long thick fringe, used as a curtain to cover the face of a new daughter-in-law when she is wearing *kürte*, or as a throw wrap to cover a new daughter-in-law’s head, face, or even on rare occasions used instead of a *kürte* to cover the whole upper body.

telpek, the desert courtyard, and the *yasmak* all suddenly lost their magic power over her. A feeling welled up deep inside Selbi, forcing her to speak:

"Did our ancestors really wield their swords like that?"

She immediately regretted her words. Shamytrat-aga's raised saber froze in the air as if it had hit an invisible barrier. He looked behind him, seemingly remembering something. Something very important. His eyes met with his wife's. Maral-eje looked as if she was staring into the far distance, lost in a deep recollection.

In those few seconds Shamytrat-aga traveled back to his distant past when he was battling with a basmachi. When the horse of the basmachi stumbled in battle, dismounting him, Shamytrat-aga raised his saber to strike.

"Oh, coward. Did your ancestors really wield their swords like that?"

The basmachi's words rang in Shamytrat-aga's ears as if he had just heard the same man utter them in his presence. *Had Maral-eje seen what happened? Had she heard these words?* Such thoughts had not left him since that battle. At that exact second Shamytrat-aga learned the answer to his decades-old question. *She had seen it, she had heard it! Cowardice! Swinging a saber at a fallen man? Chopping a carpet with the very saber with which their ancestors had defended their homeland? Hearing a reproach from your daughter-in-law, who is a pitiful woman who should not even venture to speak a word to you directly?* The whites of Shamytrat-aga's eyes filled with blood. His mustache stood on end. He looked around and leaned his saber against the wall; took a dagger from his belt and approached the carpet.

A firm hand caught Shamytrat-aga's wrist from behind when he lunged to stab the carpet.

"Father, what you're doing is wrong!"

Speechless, Shamytrat-aga froze, quivering with anger. He wanted to scream a curse, but his throat choked up.

"Back off!" he managed.

Jemshit, gripping his father's hand, pleaded with him. "Father, please calm down!"

Shamytrat-aga suddenly shoved Jemshit. He grabbed his saber again and now moved to attack his son who was already retreating.

"You should die rather than live as that girl's wife!"

Selbi threw herself between father and son and felt a strong pain in her shoulder as if she had been seared by a hot iron. Trembling where she

stood, she fell on the carpet. Hands grasping at her grabbed only the air. Jemshit fell to his knees.

“Selbi! Selbi!”

Selbi endured the pain without a word. Jemshit felt wet cloth in his hands as he lifted her. As she fell unconscious, Selbi released an exhausted “vakh” between gritted teeth.

The Gate Squeaked

Shamytrat-aga screamed at his wife: “They don’t leave people to starve where I’m going. Take half of the bread out and put shirts in instead!”

Maral-eje began to pull all the things out from the hurriedly over-stuffed sack and, with trembling fingers, managed to untie the big bundle of bread, taking out a dozen or so small round loaves of sweet bread before carefully putting it back into the sack. Her eyes were swollen and the tips of her *yaşmak* were flying like a sailcloth on a windless day.

“Don’t underestimate Janmyrat based on his youth, we established a household when we were his age.” Maral-eje burst into tears.

“Wipe your tears!” snapped Shamytrat-aga, as he tossed aside the pillows he was leaning on and crossed his legs. “Don’t cry over a living person! They don’t hold people there for long. Five years at most...”

Maral-eje leaned onto the sack and wept.

“Tuf!” Shamytrat-aga spat and left the house. In the barn, he took his saber, wrapped it in a felt rug, put the bundle under his arm, and left the yard. When he returned in half an hour, Maral-eje was tying the sack up.

“If they ask about the saber, don’t say anything except ‘I don’t know.’ If we lose that ancestral saber, we’ll be disgraced.”

Maral-eje started sobbing again. Shamytrat-aga sat on the terrace out of sight of the weeping woman. He confessed to himself: *If they’re going to take anyone away, I wish they’d get it over with... Otherwise, they’re only making our hearts race.* The gate squeaked. Shamytrat-aga stroked his mustache, tipped his *telpek* onto his forehead, and tried to look at peace with himself.

Janmyrat arrived breathing heavily and covered in sweat.

“So...” asked Shamytrat-aga and put his *telpek* next to him as his son dipped a mug in the water bucket for a drink.

“Leave the mug! Who drinks water right after running?”

Janmyrat set the mug down on the terrace and smiled.

“They’re at Guljan’s...”

“Aah!”

"They're at Guljan's... at the girl doctor's place..."

Shamytrat-aga grabbed his *telpek* and started fiddling with it:

"And...?"

"Guljan said that she should recover in a little under 2 weeks. She said she is going to treat Selbi by herself."

After saying that he lifted the mug to his mouth, the vapor coming from his undershirt.

Shamytrat-aga put his *telpek* under his knees in thought.

Seeing that, Janmyrat marveled: "Before he would act as though his life was ending if even a fly landed on his *telpek*."

"So... what was her name... who else was there at that girl doctor's place?"

"Father, there was nobody at the doctor girl's place... her mother wasn't even there."

Shamytrat-aga looked up at him.

"Have you seen the *militsiya*?⁵²

Janmyrat didn't understand the question.

"Is there *militsiya* in the village? The *militsiya*'s in the district center."

"Go make some tea."

As he stood up, Shamytrat-aga noticed his flattened *telpek* and shook it in his hand.

"No wait, come here!"

Turning around, Janmyrat came back to his father.

"If they ask you where the saber is, don't tell them anything but 'I don't know.'"

Janmyrat was surprised.

"Why?"

"You don't get it!? Why do you think they're going to ask: to take it, of course! You're not even worried! Not only did you not even offer to hide it, you don't even have enough brains to say 'I didn't see the saber!'"

Janmyrat suddenly realized where his father was steering the conversation.

"Father, Selbi asked the doctor girl to not mention the incident to anybody. And the doctor girl agreed saying 'Fine, nobody will know.'"

Shamytrat-aga's eyes suddenly felt as if he had walked into a fog bank. He turned his head to the side.

⁵² Police. Shamytrat-aga here uses a Russian word to refer to Soviet authorities.

“Go, quickly, make some tea.”

Janmyrat felt his father’s voice suddenly change.

Guljan’s family lived in a two-room apartment.

“One room is enough for me and my mother, you can live in the second one.” When Guljan made this offer to Selbi and Jemshit, the wounded Selbi had to agree to the arrangement, because Jemshit refused to “live with the in-laws.” When Selbi tried to convince Jemshit to live at her mother’s, the only argument she heard was, *have you ever seen a husband living in his wife’s home?*

1962

TIME TRAVEL

On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin piloted the first manned spacecraft into outer space, where he completed one orbit around the Earth. The moment was a joyous occasion in the Soviet Union, written about in newspapers and announced on radio megaphones in the most remote areas of the country. For many Central Asians and, indeed, Soviet citizens across the empire, the feat marked the culmination of Soviet goals of human progress and advancement held under Lenin and Stalin as well as a rejection of Stalinist policies in favor of a reinvigoration of the idealist principles pursued in the 1920s.

Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleimenov’s (1936–) free verse epic poem “Earth, Hail Man” well captures the excitement of the era, the continuities and ruptures with the past, and the utopian imaginations of the future. In this poem, Suleimenov celebrates Gagarin’s successful orbit around the Earth as the completion of an age-old goal of man’s triumph over nature. But that goal had been a specifically socialist one as well. Under Stalin, socialist realist writers continuously wrote about socialism’s ability to turn deserts into oases, tundra into farmland, and steppe into factories. With Gagarin’s 1961 flight, humanity, Suleimenov declares, has finally “conquered implacable gravity.” While technology’s victory over the Earth signals the achievement of a Stalinist ambition, Suleimenov also suggests that it portends a new future that breaks with Stalinist visions. Suleimenov is clearly influenced by Khrushchev’s renewed internationalism. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union abandoned the ideas of world revolution for “socialism in one country,” but Khrushchev restarted international outreach, particularly to the Third World in an attempt to provide aid to anti-colonial socialist movements around the world. These

anti-colonial sentiments inspired Suleimenov's forswearing of war as he writes: "There are no Batu Khans,/ no Napoleons,/ only Einsteins/ and Tsiolkovskys" (a founder of modern rocketry).

Khrushchev's time at the helm ended after Brezhnev and other conservatives' successful coup in 1964. Under Brezhnev, the Soviet Union repudiated the reform dreams of Khrushchev's supporters and instead declared that "mature socialism" had been achieved. There would be no socialist future other than the present. Intellectuals across the country thus became disillusioned in socialism's utopian promises and turned to the histories of their ethnic groups, looking in the past for new futures. Central Asian authors in particular turned to the historical novel in an attempt to rehabilitate great figures of the ethnic past and place their nation's history, not just imperial Russia's, at the center of their historical development. Kazakh writers represent a special subset of these novelists and prose writers because they wrote not only history but also described the dizzying and disjunctive process of writing history. Mukhtar Magauin's (1940–) *Blue Haze* follows the main character Edige, a vain graduate student who aspires to academic greatness, as his life falls apart. He finds order and certainty in his life only in the library and the archive. The excerpt here shows, however, that Edige's perception of order among all these documents is simply a lie he tells himself. As he ventures into the archive intent on making a major discovery in a newfound text for his dissertation, he finds the archive overwhelming. The text suggests that the problem of narrativization itself—an activity that all humans engage in as they try to use past experiences to understand their present and future—ultimately cannot encompass all the facts. This excess of information, excess of unassimilable reality outside narrative, makes any narrative unstable, liable to break down quicker than it can be built up, ensuring that Edige's search is doomed.

Chris Fort

Earth, Hail Man!

Olzhas Suleimenov

Translated by Sergey Levchin and Ilya Bernstein

Rivers nourish the fields.
And cities rise up on riverbanks.
And the Earth like a heart bursts forth,

gripped by its watery veins.
 No, it isn't easy,
 but you must find
 all the answers to that one question:
 the terrestrial path,
 the extension of the trail
 to the stars so close on this day—
 what is that path?
 That difficult, winding road,
 that life,
 yours and mine, everyone's.
 The First Age—
 the age of seeking.
 Remember how frightening
 seeking can be.
 The cinders of quests for Truth,
 the stems of flowers—
 are behind you.
 On roadways, traced by the stars,
 man fashions his gods
 and his foes,
 and finally arrives at mankind.
 What is that path?
 That long and unstoppable path,
 that life, young and fierce, and ours!
 I am asking you, man,
 not to forget
 that on this day
 you are one age older.
 World,
 Earth,
 the terrestrial sphere,
 the conjunction of words.
 nations, swords,
 and destinies—
 how many steely hooves
 flew over you!
 Your deserts are judging us,
 who were pitiless.
 We, the iron rulers, trampled you,
 we, the Khan's horde,
 marching to Mesopotamia,
 we, mighty warriors,

trod through the steppes,
conversing with you in a fearsome dialect [...]
Standards of ancient cultures
 collapsing,
waves—from the east,
waves—from the west,
a deluge to rival Noah's.
The tanks of the West
have crushed the wheat of the East.
Those who cut up the earth
do not go into battle.
Your mystical body
stands for another
at the end of an icy barrel.
Brother,
you've given your father
for another man's troubles.
The white steed and the black
cast the same shadow—
flecked with the same snow-white foam.
The same snows
cover the South Pole
and the North.
How will you cut a flame in half?
 How will you paint the shadow?
I was born in the land
where all parts of the world
live together in peace:
we have the West,
the East and the North.
In this poets' land, where I live,
there are regions unacquainted
with the Siberian winter,
regions that never saw
the sweltering summers of Aral.
Where borders
are of a different sort!
The oceans are staying put for the moment,
they will not leave the earth.
They believe:
the sun
is a heart that beats in the earth.
They believe:

we are made for living.
 We too believe
 that there is no East,
 no West,
 there is no boundary to the sky.
 There is no East,
 no West,
 but two sons, born of one father.
 There is no East,
 no West,
 there is sunrise and sunset,
 and the magnificent word
 EARTH!
 Magnificent in every tongue.
 There are no Batu Khans,
 no Napoleons,
 only Einsteins
 and Tsiolkovskys.
 No divisions—
 only millions,
 only victories,
 and no draws.
 Because:
 there are places
 where dying is an honor,
 dying free,
 dying for freedom;
 there are places
 where living is misery;
 there are places
 called sorrow.
 Meaning, new stars
 are still born,
 meaning, sparks still fly.
 Meaning, wherever eyes.
 turn embrasures—
 we take to the skies;
 meaning, the song
 must be sung to the end—
 will and destiny reconciled;
 so many conflagrations postponed—
 meaning, the final battle is raging
 somewhere.

Meaning, somewhere men
 have declared war
 on the iron grip of old gravity.
 Somewhere, the easy title "slave"
 is handed back—with a thunderclap.
 Life is flowing!
 O restless life!
 Trails splintering underfoot.
 And I love you,
 O proud life,
 because you are—
 revolution!
 People!
 Citizens of the universe!
 Guests of the galaxies!
 Rulers of the terrestrial sphere!
 You do not want to vanish
 without a trace!
 Live then,
 live,
 live,
 with all your might!
 Live, my people!
 Live, my good kind.
 You have made the first leap—
 conquered implacable gravity.
 Now defeat the woes of this world,
 that your children may remember you!
 Rivers—nourish the fields!
 Cities—rise up on riverbanks!
 Let the Earth like a heart burst forth,
 gripped by its watery veins!
 We will find—
 we must find!—
 all the answers to that one question:
 the terrestrial path,
 the extension of the trail
 to the stars,
 conquered
 this day.

Blue Haze

Mukhtar Magauin

Translated by Christopher Aaron Baker⁵³

However much Edige despised Baken's hypocrisy and falseness and no matter how ignorant and incompetent he considered him to be, Baken's words made him think. It was not that Edige had made no discoveries or had no contributions he could offer to knowledge. It was that he lacked the desire to try and spent much of his free time on futile endeavors. That indolence was the only reason he had done nothing significant in his 23 years of life. There had been enough of this idle wandering. It was time to start in earnest.

The archive terrified him the first day. There were folders of all sorts, thick ones and thin, plainly bound ones, and ones covered in cardboard, cloth, or leatherine. There were facts, reports, poems, *zhyyrs*,⁵⁴ fairy tales, and legends in the handwriting of tens and hundreds of people on paper that was variously thin, thick, glossy, or smooth, and yellow, blue, or white in color. There was paper with writing in Chagatai, in the Russian language, and in Kazakh—rectangular, elongated, oval, wide and narrow paper—and hands that had written in the Arabic script, in Cyrillic, and in the Latin alphabet with chemical pencils, or ordinary pencils, and with black, blue, and brown ink. Edige felt like some poor traveler who wanders lost and weaponless within a thick, impenetrable forest inhabited by wild animals and fantastic creatures, where there is no path or trail. The archive was endless, a boundless treasure without corner or edge, with neither beginning nor end. Everything was in disarray, and seemingly no attempt had been made to put it in any kind of order. After several days of sitting and immersing himself in it, Edige realized that this institution—what they call an archive—was not a coffin in which the skeletal remains of the past are interred. It was not, as the wider public might imagine it, a cage for old men worn down and bent at the waist, with white hair and glasses, who sit surrounded by old, yellowed papers covered in dust. The seeds of the future are scattered within its sacred walls. It is inhabited by an extraordinary and enigmatic poetic spirit. It is not the archive whose name reeks of age and infirmity. He felt as though he were a character in

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⁵⁴ An epic tale or folktale sung in verse form.

a fantasy novel who traveled by time machine every time he picked up a folder and sat at his desk in the narrow, warm hall where only a few others ever studied and in which a radiant light—completely incompatible with the winter cold—spilled out from the glass of a large double window. Most of the things he chanced on at first were the originals of things already published and well known to everyone. He gave these little time and less attention, but even a simple glance showed differences with the official versions. He noticed that the first publishers of this inheritance did not always honor the original or copy it exactly, that they pruned some documents, or expanded, edited, and corrected them so as to intensify ideology and class outlook. He noticed that everyone who had read and looked through these works agreed they were harmful in terms of their retrograde, antiquated views. There was an understanding that some of the material instilled alien opinion and was in truth ideologically unsound. There were obscene songs and rude stories that had never been printed but, having been thought up by someone somewhere, had gone about from mouth to mouth until some other person had become convinced they must have some value and decided to consign them to the archives. Edige smiled at the weakness of people.

Something shook him to his core the very next week, however, and made him forget his anger and amusement. It kept him on his feet for 2 or 3 months and led him to untie at least forty or fifty folders. He had been rummaging through a thick bundle of folios when he came across a small epic *zhyyr* not known to anyone and with a name not mentioned before. It was written in black ink with a feather pen on a formal document of one of the Tsar's state administrative institutions in some past century. The language and structure of the poem indicated it was the work of an ancient epoch. Nothing from a subsequent era had contaminated it. He stood motionless at first. He took a much closer look. He was frozen in place and held his breath. He quickly covered the manuscript page in front of him with a white piece of paper. As if almighty Allah himself had scattered sapphires in his path. As if he were ashamed of the radiance of the precious stones. He looked nervously around him, as if he were an inexperienced thief frightened of a homeowner catching him. He started reading only when he realized no one shared his interest. It was clear well before he finished that this was a *zhyyr* of great beauty, one that held

profound significance to literary history. There was no doubt about its importance. He began copying without delay.

1973

NOTES ON SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

1. Introduction
2. Abdulla Qahhor's unfinished novella "The Earthquake" first appeared in Uzbekistan's premier literary journal *Sharq Yulduzi* (*Star of the East*) (Qahhor 1987). The translator consulted the latest edition with textological notes comparing the first publication with the manuscript edition (Qahhor 2015). The translator wishes to express her thanks to Nodira Jalolova, who kindly provided permission to translate an excerpt of the novella.
3. For Mirza Tursunzada, "In the Land of Slaves," the translator worked from the version of the poem published in Tursunzoda (1981). For Zulfiya, "A Gathering of Poets," the translator used the version of the poem found in Zulfiya (1958). The translators express their gratitude to Atabek Alimdjanov and his family for their permission to translate Zulfiya, thank the daughter of Mirza Tursunzada for granting permission to translate Tursunzada's poem, and thank the Tajik Academy of Sciences for their assistance.
4. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's travelogue *Months and Years of Friendship: Recollections* was originally published in Faiz (1979), and the translators worked from this edition. The translators would like to thank the Faiz Foundation Trust for permission to publish this translation. For scholarship on cultural diplomacy and travel to the Soviet Union, see Cauter (1988) and David-Fox (2011). For a study of Faiz, see Dryland (1993) and Hamid (2013). Other notable examples of memoirs of travel to the Soviet Union by South Asian writers and political figures include Nehru (1949) and Tagore (1960). Additional translations from Faiz's memoir can be found in Anjum and Zaitseva (2021).
5. For Sulaiman Layeq's poems, the translator relied on the versions published in his collected works (Lāyiq 1360 [1981]). The translator would like to thank Gharzai Layeq for permission to publish these translations of his father's poems.

6. Ghafur Ghulom, “Pay Our House a Visit, Friends,” was first published in the February 25, 1959, issue of the newspaper *Özbekiston madaniyati* (Ghulom 1959). The translator worked from the version of the poem published in Ghulom (1984). The translator expresses his thanks to Shahrizad Gulyamova and her family for their support and help in providing the rights to publish this translation. Chingiz Aitmatov’s novella *Jamila* was first published in A. Dmitriev’s Russian-language translation (Aitmatov 1958). James Riordan’s English language translation was subsequently published by Telegram Books (Aitmatov 2008). Eldar Aitmatov kindly provided permission to publish an excerpt from Riordan’s translation of his father’s novella.
7. Nariman Jumayev, “The Quiet Daughter-in-Law.” The translator is the author’s granddaughter and provided permission to translate on behalf of her family. The editors would like to thank her and her family for their permission to publish her translation here. She worked with a 1962 publication of the text in a volume of selected works (Jumaev 1962). For more on Soviet Turkmen nation-building and the veil, see Edgar (2004).
8. Olzhas Suleimenov’s poem “Earth, Hail Man” was first read over the radio and printed in excerpts in several newspapers before being published in book form (Suleimenov 1961). Thank you to Rafis Abazov, Sergey Levchin, Ilya Bernstein, and Cognella publishers for providing the rights to republish this excerpt of the poem. The original translation in full can be found in Suleimenov (2013). Mukhtar Magauin’s novel *Blue Haze* first appeared as a book (Maghauin 1972). The translator worked from the copy of the novel found in the author’s collected works (Maghauin 2002). The translator would like to thank Mukhtar Magauin for granting permission for this translation.

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Post-socialist Literature

Naomi Caffee

INTRODUCTION: NEW NATIONS, NEW HORIZONS

In 1991 the Soviet Union suddenly, and unexpectedly, fell apart. The newly independent republics of Central Asia, for the first time, had to pioneer a way forward beyond the politicized literature that the Soviet system had demanded. The Zulfiya poem in this section stands in marked contrast to her work in previous sections. Celebrating the newfound freedom from Marxism-Leninism, Zulfiya discards the typical tropes of Stalinism and replaces them with the Persianate tropes of old. She declares herself ready to represent the suffering of her nation under Soviet socialism. However, many newly independent Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan, quickly adopted intellectuals' championing of the nation as a new ideology to replace Marxism-Leninism. Other authors in this anthology have resisted this nationalist ideology in both subtle

With contributions from Chris Fort, Claire Roosien, Donohon Abdugafurova, Alex Cigale, Hamid Ismailov, Richard McKane, Sarah McEleney, Darren Byler, and Joshua L. Freeman

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and not-so-subtle ways. Isajon Sulton speaks of the Uzbek nation in his short story, but more important to him is a local spirituality that the ideologies of both the Soviet state and the contemporary Uzbek state have dismissed. The Tashkent and Ferghana school poets, writing in Russian from varying positions of geographical and cultural marginalization, mixed Central Asian folk literary motifs with literary forms like modernism and magical realism as they surveyed the tangled material and natural landscapes of modern Uzbekistan, reworking tropes of Central Asianness in order to depict new, hybridized post-Soviet realities. Yuriy Serebriansky similarly challenges both Soviet and contemporary Kazakh ethnopolitics with his bilingual “Kazakhstani” fairy tales. The tales discard the monolingual, biological understanding of the nation inherited from the Soviet Union by inventing a multicultural heritage for post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

Unlike the Soviet Union, Communist China did not fall apart in the 1990s, but it did, for a time, relinquish some political control over Uyghur literature. Two years after the death of Mao in 1976, the Chinese Communist Party initiated a series of reforms that permitted Uyghur literature’s departure from the heavily ideological and realist modes previously necessitated under the first leader of the People’s Republic. The two Uyghur stories we see here are products of this moment. Both show the influence of literary modernism in their exploration of ideas of separate realities and madness. They are also both shaped by the new political constraints that China has placed on Uyghur literature since the 2009 Ürümqi Riots. After 2009, the Chinese state placed increasing pressure on Uyghurs, surveilling everyday life, policing public speech and writing for hints of “separatist” sentiments, and preventing Uyghurs from leaving the country. For this reason, Tursun and Israel’s short stories in this section, both written in the 2010s, take care not to touch on anything overtly political. The poems of Ghojimuhemmed Muhemmed, Perhat Tursun, and Merdan Ehet’éli also similarly experiment with modernist concepts outside the Maoist socialist realist canon, referencing everything from ancient mythology to contemporary psychology. Finally, the poem by Tahir Hamut Izgil is similarly modernist, but is at the same time also an example of the literature of exile in China. Izgil was imprisoned in a

labor camp for 3 years, and in this poem he speaks of his return to his hometown of Kashgar as a stranger.

Chris Fort¹

UZBEK VISIONS OF PAST AND PRESENT

The fall of the Soviet Union necessitated both individual and collective soul-searching. The opening of archives in 1990s Central Asia prompted serious reflection about the sins of the Soviet past and, most importantly for writers, their complicity in those crimes. Zulfiya, the pen name of Zulfiya Isroilova (1915–1996), has already appeared elsewhere in this anthology. Her third translated poem here, “Shards of Memory,” represents a marked contrast to her earlier works in both style and theme. Stylistically, it is a great deal more complex than much of her earlier work. The poem relies on an extended metaphor about memory as a broken vessel whose shards both pierce her heart’s flesh and sink beneath the waves of the ocean of her heart. In its complexity, it recalls the baroque metaphors of “Indian-style” Persianate poetry of the early modern period. At the same time, other portions of the poem are striking in their simplicity: the “basil and summer savory” that grow in the speaker’s childhood garden; the “fist-sized bundle” her mother carries while seeking her missing brother.

While the poem retains the deep humanistic sensibility of Zulfiya’s earlier work, it articulates traumas and internal conflicts that were unpublishable, and perhaps even unthinkable, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The lyric speaker is clearly autobiographical. While in the Soviet period, Zulfiya had often spoken of her mother’s love for classical Persian poetry and her father’s hardworking spirit, here she fills the long silences about her brother who perished during the Terror. Before, she had written poems about happy cotton-farmers; here, she questions how much agency Uzbekistan’s leaders had in the institution of the cotton monoculture and mourns the environmental degradation it caused. Zulfiya suggests that amidst these traumas, poetry was the gateway to a “world of love,” a mode of survival. At the same time, she expresses a muted sense of guilt for all she left out of her poems: “the pain unuttered, the poem unwritten,/ the revenge untaken.” Perhaps,

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she wonders without resolution, “we really were just puppets mastered by the age.” Published the year before her death, the poem thus articulates all the pathos of Zulfiya’s long life: a talented poet who articulated the best in Soviet humanism, she also witnessed the Soviet system at its very worst and, under duress, remained silent for many punishing years. Her response, in the conclusion of the poem, is to express hope in Uzbekistan’s newfound independence and “freedom”—a freedom that, for all too many of Central Asia’s post-Soviet writers, proved evanescent.

The short story that follows, Isajon Sulton’s “Destination,” shows indirectly how fleeting that freedom has been. Written in 1995, “Destination,” like much of Sulton’s other work, takes place in a magical universe far from everyday life in twenty-first-century Uzbekistan. Sulton demonstrates little interest in developing the inner life of his characters; instead, their journey in the story serves as religious allegory and the empty characters are stand-ins for human understandings of the purpose of life. Such allegorical storytelling is common in independent Uzbekistan. Settings that relate to the contemporary only via allegory offer a covert means by which authors may continue to speak on important themes despite living in a country that closely polices depictions of everyday life.

The allegory in “Destination” is a religious and spiritual one connected to Sulton’s Sufi beliefs about the relationship between humanity and God. Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism that, from early Islamic history on, has been practiced in ascetic orders with masters and pupils, both of whom sought to bring themselves closer to God. Sulton is not a Sufi himself—to publicly present one’s self as Sufi in Uzbekistan is problematic in any event because the state associates Sufism with religious extremism. But one doesn’t have to be Sufi to adhere to Sufi beliefs, given that Sufism has for centuries been closely intertwined with Islamic faith, exegesis, and practice in Central Asia.

Proceeding from those Sufi beliefs, Sulton characterizes human existence as a form of wandering in search of a final “destination.” Sufis believe that human life is transitory, beginning with a separation from God and ending with a reunion with God. This transition is a movement from a finite life to an eternal one. However, Sulton’s characters’ initial understanding of that destination is misguided. The characters of “Destination” traverse the earth in search of eternal bliss for themselves without God. Their “destination” is a talisman that will grant them the God-like power to speak words that are not representations of objects but are the object themselves: “The owner of those talismans will need

only speak a desire, and it will be fulfilled as soon as the word leaves their mouth.” For Muslims this is specifically one of God’s powers, for the Qur’an cites as evidence of God’s might the ability to create with words: “He only says to it: ‘Be,’ and it becomes.”² But when the seekers finally reach this talisman, they discover that eternity without God is no eternity at all, merely a prolonged misery. When the unnamed narrator gazes at his reflection in the talisman, he sees a vision of himself possessed of a godless eternity. He has become a decrepit and unspeaking old man. With every desire now granted, there is no longer any reason to speak, and he is forever silent, awaiting an end to his wretchedness.

While this might seem, at first, an anti-humanist story, Sulton grants it a humanist ending. With this vision of their Godless eternal selves, the unnamed narrator and his companions turn back to warn others away from their fate. The narrator declares that the group’s one hope is in the young Abdullah, who the narrator believes is the only one who may reach civilization. In this, the narrator expresses a desire for what Sulton views as an acceptable and human form of immortality. The narrator will not live on, unchanging and immutable; instead, his experience will live on as a message carried by Abdullah, yet one that Abdullah and his interlocutors change as they interpret it. This is the fundamental difference between God’s eternal speech—“‘Be’ and it becomes”—and human speech, which is separated from its object and therefore subject to changes in context and meaning. It is this mutability, the inability to remain the same that makes freedom inevitable to human life. While for Sulton reunion with God is everyone’s eventual destination, our time on earth is meant for pursuing the freedom that God has granted us as humans.

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² See 2:117, 3:47, 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82, and 40:68.

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Shards of Memory

Zulfiya

Translated by Claire Roosien and Donohon Abdugafurova⁴

Freedom, have you come, truly, have you come?
 Secretly I missed you, secretly awaited.
 Like a desert waiting for the rain,
 My heart stood awaiting your winds to blow.

Here is my heart—this ocean, full of joy and pain.
 Its waves—my fame, my grief, all my regret.
 The vultures of fear have pierced and broken them,
 And the shards of my memory have sunk beneath.

Shards of memory, stir! Let me give voice.
 They stir. My heart, stand firm, be patient.
 Look at their trembling—they are all alive.
 Look at all their faces red with blood.

Here is my mother—in God's appointed time
 He created her with special dedication.
 In her eyes burned the flame of compassion –
 A learned woman⁵ dressed in white she was, like an apricot tree in bloom.

When day had passed, and the sun sank to the horizon,
 When the festival of singing birds grew calm,
 She would invite our hearts to sing,
 And one by one, the verses of the classics she'd lay before us.

Whether to her lips and hands she raised

⁴ Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC, USA

⁵ The word is *otin*, a literate female in-home instructor in pre- and early-Soviet Central Asia. Such female instructors were usually dressed in white veils. Section II of the anthology includes translations from one of the most famous Uzbek *otins* of pre-revolutionary Central Asia, Anbar Otin.

The tomes of Sufi Olloyor or devona Mashrab⁶
 We cast down all our work and play,
 And entered into an enchanted world.

When these melodies came into my soul,
 All of creation blazed up with light.
 As I felt the mystery possess my heart,
 The song spread out its fiery wings within.

From my sister-in-law I learned to embroider my tapestry⁷
 Rather than confiding my secrets to the page,
 I made my dearest wishes bloom in my embroidery.
 It drank the light of youth in from my eyes.

Basil and summer savory adorned our courtyard;
 My father used to say I was a violet.
 Amid that black winter we did not yet feel,
 The flower of love was budding.

But before we knew it, we felt the dead of winter.
 It started nipping at us with its razor tongue.
 When its steps drew near every home,
 Joy shriveled up, wilted away...

Oh brother, a fire burned in your eyes.
 Oh brother, a sun shone in your soul.
 You had the talent and bearing of a sultan;
 You had the perseverance of a general.

Did they take you from us too on that dark night?

⁶ Sufi Olloyor and Boborahim Mashrab are Central Asian poets of the seventeenth century. The title *devona* indicates an individual who rejects respectable society and religious institutions in favor of the life of a holy fool. See section I of the anthology for translations of Mashrab's poetry and for further details of his place in Central Asian Sufi poetry.

⁷ The *palak* was a tapestry that young women or their female relatives embroidered for inclusion in their wedding trousseau.

Did they put their chains around your wrists?
 Did they burn up in their monstrous wrath
 When they saw you standing proud instead of begging and pleading?

Oh brother, dear brother—oh my darling brother,
 Let me retrace my path of 60 years and weep.
 My sighs will melt the eulogy I've carried like a stone within my throat.
 Let me give voice to it and weep.

They say a younger sister is created of compassion.
 But my compassion was great enough only for tears.
 Dear one, it did not turn into a spear of revenge and loathing
 To kill your slayer, oh innocent one.

From steel, or flame, or iron was my father's soul?
 From whence came his endurance?⁸
 The fire from which a blacksmith ekes his living
 Can make him strong to endure great woe as well.

My mother, a fist-sized bundle in her hands,
 Traversed the city of Tashkent in search of my brother's cell,
 So many cells there were, so many distraught mothers;
 So many lived in those days, abasing themselves before the cruel age.

I gazed bewildered at the many, many tears
 That gathered in her old eyes and never fell.
 What secret gnawed at her calm frame?
 Why was she always brokenhearted?

After wandering all day long, bent, and tired,
 She would surrender her old body to the ground.
 Paralyzed, we watched her, helpless.
 Weighed down, we would sink beneath a sea of silence.

⁸ Zulfiya's father was a blacksmith.

Oh mother, you used to say, "the water is muddy at the source,"
 We didn't grasp the truth within those words.
 But secretly, stealthily, in a grand building,
 The graves of fine young men were being dug each day.

Though trapped in the grip of suffering,
 Oh father, in your eyes we never saw tears.
 You lived in pure prostration to hope,
 Never casting stones, not even at your enemy.

You simply always said, "I give it up to God."
 "It's the godless who have caused this massacre."
 My people are made of patience and contentment,
 And even the blind must find a way to walk!

Your hearty sons vanished like birds
 In the sunless forests of Siberia.
 But you lived as if in a dream,
 Stumbling in the fog of oblivion.

Me? I was still so young.
 Youth and grief are strange to one another.
 To free myself from the swamps of woe,
 I clinged to the happiness of love.

Me? Through poetry, I remained in a world of love
 Listening to poems, writing poems.
 Poetry's heavenly ringing was balm to my soul.
 I lost myself in my own happiness.

But grief came and found me in my palace of happiness.
 The war, and then a death that came like snow falling in the summer.
 I was not yet thirty when snow tipped my hair,
 When the flower of my youth vanished in a river of tears.

Oh mother, the one and only wise one,

You gave no lessons in revolution.
 When mountains fell on me one after another,
 I was like a hatchling struck by lightning.

That's enough! As after battle a weary commander
 Arranges his still-living soldiers rank on rank,
 So I gathered my remaining senses
 And resolved to live in strength.

I traversed the country end to end, like a blizzard;
 I went through cemeteries, from grave to grave, like a whirlwind.
 Although I could tell even the smallest seedling was alive,
 I saw that my people remained insensible.

In my dreams, I found my brother's body.
 I buried him next to my father.
 I thought "If I am ablaze with pain, their souls also burn with pain,"
 I splashed cool water on his dusty remains, and wished him patience.

It's fate, it's fate, I said, and I lived long;
 People say that fate is an inscription on the forehead.
 I pounded that inscription against the wall, but then
 I broke, and the bricks were fired in my hot blood.

Torment. It's a torment if your eyes are blind;
 But blindness of the soul is still more terrible than that.
 To the hand stretched out to steal the people's treasure,
 We always returned a colorful bouquet of flowers.

"New life," we called those days,⁹
 Many years we lived with no demand and no complaint.
 We never stopped to think of why our country's leader
 Seemed to smile, but had pale and sickly skin.

⁹ "New life" was a frequently used phrase to describe the early Soviet experience. It was also the name of a women's journal to which Zulfia contributed in the 1930s and 1940s.

Did he feel like a king without a crown,
 Did any ray of light shine in his broken heart?
 He had no choice or control in his hands.
 Didn't he know his people's pride was ebbing?

"Patriots," we called ourselves,
 Seas dried up, and fish putrefied¹⁰;
 Did you forsake us, O Creator?
 You never said, "You are a human being: lift up your head!"

You gave us purity and honesty,
 Faith and trust—whole, without defect.
 The devil couldn't meddle with us:
 Our nation was a lover of knowledge and wisdom.

Oh heavens, was I left in ignorance,
 Did my trust and my belief come to naught?!
 Did we truly lean on and expect salvation
 From the dark forces that dug our graves?!

Who knows, perhaps when we strove in the name of virtue,
 We really were just puppets mastered by the age.
 They say: the scales of the one great Judge, our Creator,
 Never measure wrong.

Which outweighs the other: virtue or sin?
 I lived far from hypocrisy and vice.
 I have burned with grief. What in my already incinerated body
 Could feed the flames of hell?

Will the suffering and tears I have witnessed in this world
 Just barely tip the scales toward the side of virtue?
 Or if stones fill the side of error,

¹⁰ Here Zulfiya is speaking of the Aral Sea which massively decreased in area and volume under the Soviet Union. Even now, Uzbek authorities have not conducted commensurate restoration efforts.

Will I be hung to the highest gallows?

As I have grown old, I have been wound tightly like a string.
If the mere shadow of a butterfly touched me, I would snap.
Enduring everything, I have become a threadbare cloth.
Even if the heart is made of iron, its lock can still be broken.

But still I live. It seems my father and mother
Wove me from a sturdy twine.
The pain unuttered, the poem unwritten,
The revenge untaken—these things make my heart quake.

My head is like a jar full of gunpowder;
I expect it to explode at every second.
My patience is running out like sand through fingers.
I have the bloody traces of it on my face.

I do not know if it is virtue or the source of sin,
But please do not mistake this wish for unbelief.
Throw my corpse into the river; my soul is pure;
May my body grow cold in its blessed water.

My old memories fester:
Buried in them is this pain, these jagged shards...
And yet, my field and my abode are bathed in light
And yet, in my garden a nightingale sings...

Freedom, have you come, truly, have you come?
Waiting on your road, secretly I have grown weary.
In the fate of my father and mother and of my nation
You will remain eternally in my Homeland.

Ah, you have come, Independence! You have become our future.
Your winds found a way to my heart.
You gave free rein to this lofty verse,
And I have rained down tears like a heavy cloud.

Freedom, ah, you have come, finally, you have come,
 My heart, my eyes, my words embrace you.
 When the time comes, my words will remain for this people.
 When the time comes, my pain will remain here in this world.

There, in the other world, my spirit will fly like a bird...

1995

Destination

Isajon Sulton

Translated by Chris Fort

The end of our journey disappears beyond the horizon. Our little caravan sometimes runs into strips of mountains, and sometimes enters into garden oases where spring waters flow clear like tears. And sometimes in front of us all we see is desert, spread over the surface of the earth like an endless blanket. Our animals are weary, we've grown gaunt wandering. But in spite of it all, by night we camp in the safety of tents, and at dawn each morning we mount our horses and set out. Though sometimes, in harsh conditions, we rest with the sun in the sky, and move under cover of night.

Our constant companion is the untamed wind, and our guide—the stars above.

As always, our chieftain leads us. His chest, earlier broad like folktale heroes, has sunken inward, his body sapped of strength. His eyes never break from the horizon.

Just behind him, Muslim, lost in thought, rocks back and forth on his horse. His beloved, a moon-faced 15-year-old like he was at that time, remains in our homeland.

Our youngest companion, Abdulla, dozes as his horse trots along. He was just a young boy when we set out on our journey. Over the course of the trek his childish countenance was replaced with a serious pensiveness. His face became elongated, and wrinkles layered his forehead.

We started toward this destination many years ago. At that time, we had many fellow travelers. In the second year of our journey, when we came upon the people of a flowering oasis and we told them of our destination, they quickly went before their prince. The prince descended from

his throne to greet us. “Many in search of that place have passed through here,” he started. “But we have never heard word of their arrival there nor have we seen their return. It would be better for you to stay here, to partake of our wealth and plenty,” he pressed. Several of our companions were convinced by his entreaties and elected to stay.

But we pressed forward.

In the fifth year of our journey, we entered into a vast desert. The nomads who wandered there told us the desert’s name was Hazramavt, “the desert of death” in their tongue. It did not receive that name in vain. The sands of the desert were the blackest of black, and during nighttime sandstorms, the sky and earth so mixed that the eyes viewing them could not distinguish between waking and dreaming. The terrible sight of that swirling sand turned several more of our companions back. The rest of us continued on. Other than hunger and thirst, the desert presented us no more misfortunes than other places. And so we trekked on, safe as before.

Several years later we descended into a valley enveloped by mountains. The valley lakes were clear as glass, the inhabitants—beautiful. They called this place Ko’hi Qof, “the end of the world,” and it was populated not by humans, but by fairies. The women enchanted as no others on earth could. And when they heard of our goal, the valley people too tried to dissuade us with promises of their best concubines and a life without want. Many of our companions left us to become lovers to these beauties.

And we trekked on as before.

We haven’t seen such valleys and oases again. Ever since, the land has been a monotonous stretch of barren fields, covered in camel thorns and thistles. Night and day, our horses’ legs fight through the scrapes and scratches.

As our foreheads creased with wrinkles, our hearts became hard as stone. The sights on our journey, which would have earlier made us swoon, were now unable to move us. We used to long for the loved ones we left behind, but now, that yearning had weakened, nearly forgotten. Muslim too, who used to lose himself in thought, remembering his beloved, was now forever present in our world; his gaze had hardened, a cleft appeared in his chin. We move endlessly by day, and at night, when we dismount, it feels as if the earth endlessly quakes and moves forward beneath us. We hurriedly eat, lie out on the hard earth, and sleep as if stones.

The youngest of us, Abdulla, is the exception. Still a youth, as the sun sets, he sometimes mounts a desert hill and stares irresolutely until the

last light disappears, as if the remaining rays and the mixing of the colors across the sky bring to his mind some dear memories. Long ago, that sight had earlier brought tears to his eyes. But no longer. Now his eyes are dry with thought.

Forward, only forward! All feelings are fleeting. Wealth is fleeting, beauty is unfaithful. But at our destination unseen miracles await us! There...

There in each of our names will be talismans. If we hold the handle on those safes and say our names, the magic will work. The owner of those talismans will need only speak a desire, and it will be fulfilled as soon as the word leaves their mouth. There is not much distance now between us and our destination. The heart senses it. Not much distance...

* * *

But finally, where the end of that strange, near-endless desert meets the sea, we found the enchanted mountain toward which we had long journeyed. This grandiose, towering rock was beyond beautiful. Made of crystal, the mountain's black surface shone in the radiance of the night stars. Various colors played in the heart of the mountain, as if split through a prism, while the blackness at its edges reflected everything like a mirror.

We had been searching for what seemed like a lifetime for this: this enchanted valley and mountain. The handles on the mountain's safes, which were inscribed with each of our names, shone with a near blinding light. With all our might, we willed our legs, which now howled from exhaustion, forward toward the mountain. Kicking stones up as he flew in front of us, little Abdulla reached his safe first and yelled something back at us. We couldn't understand what he said; we weren't in a condition to understand.

There were many safes in the heart of the mountain. They had blackened with age; their ancient inscriptions and the seal of the prophet Suleiman had begun to fade. The handles too had aged, but they were still firmly attached. The names were there, though, to my surprise, I didn't see the names of our companions who we had left behind. A revelation suddenly flashed in my mind: had they stayed behind because their names were not written here?

All of us spread out in search of our names. I found where mine was inscribed and stood across from it, motionlessly, silently. The stars far

above me shone in the clear sky. The strength left my body, my heart's fire was extinguished, and my energy dissipated... While the massive edges of the enchanted mountain reflected the entirety of the universe.

My heart began pounding. I held the handle and repeated my name. Thunder rolled above, and lightning struck. The chains disintegrated, the safe door opened, and a path appeared. On a shelf in front of me was a lamp, covered over the years by dust. I had long repeated to myself that I need only take it in my hand and all my wishes would come to fruition.

And the inscription on the safe confirmed that:

"This talisman has been enchanted in a chosen one's name by God's servants. It was sworn on the Creator's powers that the enchanted, that is me—Palbos, the mounted jinn, will, from the moment I am awakened until the time I close my eyes, carry my master to where they command. I will pour the riches of the world at their feet. I will make them the ruler of whatever land they desire. I will give them the power to speak with insects and animals. I will submit all of life's beauties to them. I am slave only to God and to their orders."

A flame flickered before me, and its light played on the surrounding rock. I saw my reflection in the handle. A man whose face had become lined with wrinkles, his back crooked, his eyes dim, his spirit weak, stared silently at me.

A biting wind silently blew as the stars glimmered unfeelingly above. I slowly began to apprehend the meaning of the safe's inscriptions as the words burrowed into my mind. And then I yelled:

"Why?! Why this?! Is this all there is to this legendary enchantment?!"

A powerful storm had begun to lift my long since petrified heart.

But were these gifts not those for which we had abandoned our homes so many years ago?

Was the fulfillment of our every desire not the reason we had expended all this energy?

Did we not reject all those beauties of Ko'hi Qof, who were ready to surrender themselves to our wills, to rush here for something greater?

And the language the talisman offered—to know the tongue of the insects and animals—was that language not known to me in my youth? Had I not conversed for hours with the golden dragonflies that made their homes on mint leaves?

But tears didn't come to my eyes. Instead, with all my soul, I clenched the handle and screamed:

“What else? What else will you gift me, hey, you prisoner of the seal of Prophet Suleiman? My life that I’ve spent in search of you, the turquoise skies, yellow sun, silver waters, ruby birds of my joyful youth, can you return those? Everything that I’ve lose, that has atrophied from my wholeness, those feelings that have been lost to eternity, can you form them anew? What can you discuss worthy of the name of your enchanter, you ruler of the kingdom of silence?”

The crystal mountain towered over me, muffling the words as they left my mouth, drowning them in its overwhelming silence.

My soul had howled, and now it was empty.

We had expected from this enchantment some reward greater, larger, more fantastic than anything we had sacrificed in gaining it. But now... everything that it promised somehow seemed meaningless, unnecessary, even excessive. Such things had charmed us in the height of our youth. But now... nothing.

Now...

I slowly released the handle. The light played on the mountain face one last time, as my reflection sunk away into its smooth surface, staring at me hopelessly.

I involuntarily took a step back. It no longer mattered where I was going. Because we had ceaselessly kept moving in spite of all obstacles for so many years, I mechanically walked in the direction of our horses. The gravel crunched under my feet. My companions too, their heads hanging, slowly moved in the same direction. They too could not bring themselves to receive the gift for which they had surrendered everything.

Could those who stayed behind, who didn’t reach the destination with us, be happy?

Who could even answer that question? The mountain was silent... It awaited other guests. Its silent countenance stretched toward the sky...

Now where would we go? Our path here was long. Even if we headed back, before we returned home that swift horseman of death would surely chase us down.

There was nowhere to go forward either. This destination had been written on our foreheads as our fate. There was no other.

Under the moonless sky of this strange valley, we silently stared at one another mounted.

One brother turned his horse’s head back.

* * *

Now entirely without hope, we move only so as not to stop. We do not know where we will graze our horses or where we will finally have a restful sleep.

But...

But little Abdulla sits straight as a tree in his saddle, his wrist still gripping the reins strongly, his gaze still piercing, his thoughts still racing home.

Our one hope is with you, Abdulla. All of us will one after another remain on this path for eternity. Our only hope is in your return. You must make it back. Whatever happens to us, don't dawdle, spur your horse on. If we should fall from our horses, don't waste time on our comfort. There are many like us who search for this enchantment. Only you can deliver those future travelers the terrible truth.

Spur your horse on, brother. Continue on without us. Don't remove your eyes from the horizon. When exhausted, we tumble from our mounts, we will look on from behind you. Until you disappear from sight, we will imagine you laying your head on the soil of those lands with turquoise skies, silver waters, golden soils, and happy people. We will envision how you warn others from our path. And then we will look one more time behind us, in the direction of that enchanted talisman, and sink into its unconversant, eternal sleep.

1995

RUSSOPHONE POETRY AND PROSE: THE FERGANA SCHOOL, THE TASHKENT SCHOOL, AND THE "YOUNG LITERATURE" OF KAZAKHSTAN

The political, economic, and cultural upheavals of the post-Soviet era set the stage for the emergence of new forms of cultural expression and increasingly decentralized means for their distribution and consumption. The literary landscape was altered by waves of domestic and international migration and new sources of collaboration and capital, as well as the rise of new national ideologies and attendant state programs for cultural development. As a result, late Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asian literature was the site of unprecedented experimentation in genre, form, and language, as authors sought to grapple with the Soviet past while re-envisioning their identities for an uncertain present and future.

The first two authors featured in this section, Shamshad Abdullaev and Hamid Ismailov, were founders of the influential Fergana School. A poetics of geographical and cultural estrangement is visible in their 1994 manifesto. “We do not have our own publications, our own journals, or our own readers,” they proclaimed, “and we are obligated to come to terms with being diffused (by publications in Russia, in emigration) and existing for others, for other cultures” (Abdullaev 1998). The result is a “hybrid stylistics,” and a “cosmopolitan mixture” of “specific landscape features of the southern, sultry world” along with a signature free-verse style that came to be known as “Fergana *vers libre*.” Fergana poetry not only stresses distance from Russia, but also distance from the Central Asian context in which it is written. This is then extended to the principle of distance from the poetic object itself: “the farther away the object, the more perfect a tool it becomes.”

Forming a corollary to the Fergana School’s poetics of distance and alienation, the writers of the Tashkent School espouse a kind of radical embeddedness, in which the mobile poetic subject is triangulated with elements of the Central Asian landscape and its cultures in a way that elicits complex layers of meaning in the poetic text. The Tashkent poets’ geographical move to the Russian metropole, or in some cases, beyond it, has created a shared poetic vision of Tashkent—a “Tashkent of the mind”—that exists only in the poet’s nostalgic gaze back toward home. In fact, the very possibility of treating Tashkent as a poetic object in this way hinges on the poet’s movement *out* of Central Asia. For the mobile writers affiliated with the Tashkent and Fergana Schools, Central Asia ceases to be the vantage point from which the poet looks out; instead it becomes a state of mind, a reflection of the poetic subject, and in many ways an ideal poetic object.

Yuriy Serebriansky’s work explores problems of subjectivity and identity at the margins—yet from within the institutional structures—of the Russian-speaking world. Born in Soviet Kazakhstan in 1975 to an ethnic Polish family of geologists, Serebriansky’s life spans a diverse configuration of languages, identities, and regimes, which is reflected in the transnational, translingual situations of the characters that populate his literary works. Like many representatives of the contemporary generation of Russophone Kazakhstani writers, he got his start in literature through the Almaty-based cultural organization Musaget, which emerged in the late 1990s under the direction of the influential Kazakhstani poet and journalist Ol’ga Markova. His 2015 poetry collection was entitled *The*

Broken Russian, which, in the words of fellow Kazakhstani poet Pavel Bannikov, refers not only to the “broken” Russian language but also to the “broken” post-Soviet subject, “a person both linguistically and culturally out of their element.” Yet at the same time, this existence in between cultures is “the norm of life and the foundation of the world” (2015). Serebriansky himself echoes this idea in a 2014 interview, describing the subject position of the “broken Russian” as having the unique potential to create new forms of expression and connection. He explains that the phrase originated in a writers’ workshop in Moscow, when his fellow participants used it to describe the linguistic mistakes that became a foundational component of his writing style (Serebriansky 2014). Like the text itself, the “broken Russian” subject contains multitudes: “But I’m not only Russian. Isn’t it alright that there’s so many I’s?” (“А я не только русский. Я разный. Ничего, что так много я?”).

Serebriansky draws on his experience growing up in Almaty during the Soviet era as well as on folkloric motifs when writing the distinctive tales found in *Kazakhstani Fairy Tales*. The following three stories are selections from that 2017 collection, which features contemporary fables relating to modern-day Kazakhstan intended for both children and adults. Originally written in Russian and published in an illustrated Kazakh-Russian dual-language edition, his fairy tales function as allegories. The stories and literary sketches in the collection were written for a present-day audience in a modern, post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The three stories included in this anthology incorporate themes relating to Kazakhstan and storytelling motifs in different ways. The geographical features of Kazakhstan play an important role in *Kazakhstani Fairy Tales*, and this is evident in the presentation of the anthropomorphized landscape in the first tale included here, “Where did the Aral Sea Go?” In this story, the Caspian and Aral Seas are imagined as brothers, while the Aral Sea, because it has disappeared, has gone on a journey. The next tale, “The Golden Eagle,” presents an imagined origin story for the flag of independent Kazakhstan. In the story, a talking eagle implores an artist to paint him, only for the eagle to fly too close to the sun. Finally, “Apples” presents an imagined distant past, evocative of motifs often found in traditional fairy tales and children’s literature, while also hinting at the importance of apples as a symbol of Kazakhstan. The wild ancestor of modern domestic apples is native to Kazakhstan, and the name of Almaty, the central city of Kazakhstan, is derived from “*alma*,” the Kazakh word for apple.

As a whole, Serebriansky's work draws from themes such as inter-cultural contact and the changing role of geography in a globalized world, reflecting on the role of the individual in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Naomi Caffee and Sarah McEleney¹¹

Family

Shamshad Abdullaev

Translated by Alex Cigale

The song of a mockingbird seeps into the taste of black cherry
 especially here in father's and mother's
 yard where for the first time the question
 and answer are heard in unison—
 the freshness of the vanishing provinces at
 the end of a century when
 the final stage of any microcosm resembles a prolonged dawning.
 The terse terminus of the south
 which will now frame the impending tide...
 a Greek-Bactrian dress, a pergola, and a hill,
 a swarthy stranger with the profile of a Saxon sable.
 Dust in the former rays settles steamlike between the
 quinine-gray shoulder blades
 of this guest who had fallen asleep in one of the rooms of my
 parents' house
 as though it were only coolness warming up to the unfamiliar
 voices.
 A commonplace time in the begetting provinces,
 a dim departure on your film strip,
 but the sunny circumstances impinge upon the crashing
 brightnesses
 in the clay lamp crusting up in the shade—
 an other tranquility of other grownups.
 In the roots' fibers fidget yellow beetles
 like gobs of spit of mischief-makers come to life—he
 is immobile growing no smaller,
 the familiar impersonality of average dimensions still alive in him.

2017

¹¹ American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages

Doubled Midday

Shamshad Abdullaev

Translated by Alex Cigale

Innumerable, that which doesn't exist.
 It paralyzes, and something changes as though
 black metal has penetrated all the way into the worn leather scabbard,
 when a man sits in a blue armchair in a summer hallway
 and calls over to himself the muscular German shepherd across the deserted
 rug.
 Shift your shoulders—the sun crackles:
 the stamped out forms of one-story houses stand guard, like elephant ivory,
 over the spent kingdom
 between the Mazar wall and the shimmer of distant locust.
 Daylight, magnolia, copper
 have settled on the banks of silent rivers.
 Why is it so and not otherwise?
 (For, better the dust, thickly suckling on your forehead,
 then the voices of the classics.) All this has been said before
 in conversation with others, in another stomping vat, another country.

2015

Lovers in Samarkand

Hamid Ismailov

Translated by Hamid Ismailov and Richard McKane
(*An old song that wells up in this poem*)

Before midday, round about eleven
in the bazaar by the Boltabay post with its attached
loudspeaker, the sun is just heating up.
Like a wheel not hurrying to go out on the road of Ibodullah the gypsy,
the tambourine, and after it the cymbals,
flutes and the violin,
the horses, saddles and reins, then a beauty in a palanquin
and a voice looking out from under a veil...

You breathe in the burning air,
your lungs fill with the air of the flute,
the train squeaks off into motion, your nose
starts getting irritated by the dust—following you is the clank
of the wheels
or the tambourine, or your heart in the airlessness before it stops
gives out its thud bak and

‘Come to me with your curls like snakes and your kohled eyes’

Okhun the meat-pie maker fires up his clay oven for the midday meat-pies.

Temur the blacksmith beats his chopper on the anvil with his hammer. The sun draws in the air and climbs to the zenith, shortening the shadow from the post, so that it can hide not knowing where to find a place in the craziness.

Blind Sotim sharpening his knife
fountains out sparks from his palms at the shadow...

As I search for the world leaf after leaf.

The melody ripened. The melody got through.

It hit the zenith and with a sound, tak, collided with the orphaned,
needed-by-no one sun, and seemed to understand
all this unnecessariness.

If a cloud goes it doesn't return.

The melody momentarily descends from the heights where
the mad sun, already yellowed from its beating down by the sky,
and the moon, go around the vault of the sky.

The melody is like a woman baker, remaining at midday
with the teahouse man, red Katam, having dropped her husband,
Sobir the guide, who has gone off on a journey,
and gathering up her skirts hurries off to the neighbors.

There is no one to sprinkle the hot earth streets with water
to give the town a breather.

2012

Tashkent as a Mirror

Sandzhar Yanyshv

Translated by Naomi Caffee

Tashkent as a mirror of unfaithful me
takes the form of a human tuber.
Its tree stumps, flowerbeds, gardens, graveyards,
names baked into burial mounds

Now amount to a figurine on Grandpa's table
next to Gagarin's photo post-flight, pasted there some
forty years ago, and this voodoo doll
is a montage of me ...
But I'm sailing away on a ship.

Tashkent as a mirror of un-Russian me
takes the form of an arch and a cupola.
But I'm sailing away, and on deck soothsayers and parrots

tell me lies: that all form is, in essence, the same,

And all language the same among lizards and fish—
then how in the hell do you choose a word
to croak on?—and that the human form
now spawns itself from fish roe!

Tashkent as a mirror ... And yet, it's all bullshit.
There is no space, no rower in the trireme.
There is no East, no West, and Time
is the only place for me.

It's here that my city moves without wheels
or propellers, to the turquoise din of a flute.
And to make sure the scent of sarsaparilla
won't cease streaming out of its glands—I'm on my way, too.

2001

The Return of Nasreddin

Sukhbat Aflatuni

Translated by Naomi Caffee

He's back: intact, bent, but unbroken.
Just as before—he's Khoja, Nasreddin,
Servant of God, morning passer-by,
Beard bristling out from under skin,
Just like a cleaning brush for jugs of wine.

His donkey's old and wingless back
Is greying in the soggy damp of dawn.
Bukhara's high and mighty as before.
And it's something like a summer—that's the season,
But cold today, the same as yesterday;
And there's no wine
to drink for no good reason.

Yes, everything's in place—it's as if he never left.
 The news is all the same, in all the papers.
 The mule's not dead, the shah has yet to croak;
 They're all just fine. The canal's a little muddy, though,
 And a stork atop the minaret
 Calls me over to his nest:
 "*Kelin, kelin.*"¹²
 Thanks, maybe some other time...
 Another summer ...

2006

The Kitchen, Before Plov

Sukhbat Aflatuni

Translated by Naomi Caffee

Carrot and onion, well-washed rice.
 Fire, impotent for now,
 Burns grains of cumin-scented air;
 a greasy heat.
 Great-grandfather's four chairs
 Drawn up, a basin on a bowl.
 Lamb's blood beckons all the wasps
 And flies and furtive spirits.
 Gas flows up from underground
 To die in a sultry ring-around-the-rose,
 Beneath the big black belly of the pot.

2003

Homeland

Vadim Muratkhonov

¹² "Come here, come here."

Translated by Naomi Caffee

When all is still, it blinds you
with smiles, gazing out from posters.
It lends itself to scrutiny,
rendered onto maps.

But when the soul is not yet ready
to pass into the blazing night,
a black bird shrieks
from atop a native poplar.

2002

Borsok

Vadim Muratkhanov

Translated by Naomi Caffee

Golden *chak-chak*, raisins' blueness
thickening to black,
ashy yellow of *borsok*,
whose sweetness crunches
on the teeth and only after that
pervades the mind.

Dastarkhan strewn with delights,
but no guests yet.
Ada and *Aya* loom relentlessly
from a varnished frame on high,
while tightly crowded plates of food,
too tasty to be eaten,
transfigure bit by bit from forbidden fruit
to a museum display after closing time.

Sun melting portrait glass.
A date circled in red pencil
on a calendar from 1976.

The day *borsok* rained down from the sky.¹³

2013

The Golden Eagle

Yuriy Serebriansky

Translated by Sarah McEleney

People living on the great expanse of the open steppe always had a simple flag—the blue sky and the golden sun. For the sun was always above their heads. People considered it to be their benefactor. It helped them with everything.

But one day a gigantic eagle came rolling into the steppe. For sustenance it began to steal sheep. It could grab one in each of its talons at once.

People tolerated it because there was nothing they could do. Nobody could contend with the eagle.

But this was not enough for the eagle. One day he saw the flag, and became livid. He demanded that his image be put on the flag. Instead of the sun.

People began to get even more despondent—they had already tolerated so many losses from the eagle. Some were even ready to grab a spear and go to battle with it, even while knowing that they hadn't the strength to defeat this enormous bird.

But there was nothing to do. One artist was called to paint the eagle. The eagle perched upon an enormous boulder and spread its terrifying wings in such a way that the artist found himself in its shadow.

"I can't paint anything this way," said the brave artist, "I need you to fly up into the sky. I'm not talented enough to paint what I don't see with my own eyes. But I'm the most talented artist that you'll find."

"Fine," answered the eagle, and he flew upwards.

2016

¹³ *Borsok* is a snack made from fried dough. *Chak-chak* is dough fried in strips then drenched in honey. A *dastarkhan* is a table or table cloth covered with food for a celebration. *Ada* and *Aya* are words for father and mother.

Where did the Aral Sea go?

Yuriy Serebriansky

Translated by Sarah McEleney

All the seas on Earth are brothers. They hold each other's hands (or more precisely, rivers), or they hug their father, the ocean. They firmly squeeze Earth into a ball, not allowing it to fall to pieces, like a dried up sandcastle on the beach.

They talk among themselves a lot, they share fish, secrets, and laugh in waves when ships tickle their backs, as they move about their business. When their grandfather, the old Tethys ocean, placed them on the earth, he took everything into consideration. Almost everything.

Two brother seas wandered so far onto dry land that they got lost. They not only lost connection with the ocean, but also with their other brothers. They began to live in the middle of an enormous expanse of dry land. Rivers nourished them, and they drank underground water. But it was sad for them being just the two, and they remembered how nice it was to hold hands with their other brothers, to hear of news from the side of the world where it is night, and to share secrets with the ocean. Only dry land surrounded the two brothers. They thought and thought about their fate, and finally the older brother, Caspi, told the younger one, Aral, "Brother, you should go find our father, the ocean, and I will stay here, waiting for you to return, or, for you to reach out your hand to me."

2017

Apples

Yuriy Serebriansky

Translated by Sarah McEleney

In our foothills to this day you can see the apple orchards, growing on the slopes. But the trees in them are already stunted and crooked, twisted over long years by the winds and human greed. The apples which grow on them today have to be picked using a ladder, and if any of them fall onto the ground, it's only because worms have eaten them up from the inside.

I'll let you know a secret—once the trunks of the trees were much thicker, because they had to hold apples that were a meter in size, and

even bigger ones. In summer the fruits matured, and nobody ever got the idea to go under them in the orchard. It was simply dangerous. At any time, the wind could come and tear down an apple, but only a strong wind could do this.

In August the ripened apples began to fall from the trees by themselves. With great noise they fell by their own weight onto the grass, and, gradually gathering momentum, they rolled down the mountain. When this happened, nobody ever crossed their path, everyone avoided the foothills, but every now and then an apple would hit the gates of the town with a bang, and then the guards would haul the apple into the town, and having rolled it to the market square, would leave it to the city dwellers. With special curved knives the people would cut off pieces of the apple the size of watermelons for themselves and bring them home or eat them right on the stone benches in good weather. But almost all the apples rolled, gathering momentum, into the steppe, and there the people of the steppe caught them.

2016

CONTEMPORARY UYGHUR PROSE

Perhat Tursun and Halide Israel both came onto the Uyghur literary scene in the mid-1980s. Israel made herself known early on as a prolific writer of short stories, and she later moved onto novels. Tursun began his career as a poet and short story author and quickly gained notoriety for his interest in subjects transgressive both for the Chinese Communist Party and socially conservative Uyghur culture. His first novella collection, *Messiah Desert*, crossed lines in its use of explicit sexual imagery, while his 1999 novel *The Art of Suicide* naturally touched nerves for its aestheticization of the act. Local Uyghurs held book burnings for his works, and the state, which runs all the publishing houses in China, placed a tacit ban on his works until 2015. With the mass internment of Uyghurs beginning in 2017, both writers have tragically fallen victim to the Chinese state. Israel's status is currently unclear: she either continues to be under a house arrest that began in 2017 or has been moved to a camp. Tursun was arrested in 2018 and reportedly sentenced to 16 years imprisonment, supposedly for having signed a petition asking China to respect Uyghurs' language rights, but any real reasoning is unclear.

Tursun's 2011 story, "Plato's Shovel," demonstrates the author's interest in dualism and in the fantastic. Considerably tamer than some

of his previous work, the story follows the narrator, Urayim-bey, as he unwittingly loses his cousin Sadiq-aka's shovel. The situation results in maddening frustration for the narrator because the shovel has an inef-fable value to his cousin, and, by the end of the story, the protagonist comes to question whether the shovel ever existed in the first place. The narrative is dominated by the thoughts of Urayim-bey as he contemplates riddle of the missing shovel and considers ever more fantastic explanations: that the missing shovel is a delusion common to his cousin and him; that he is living out a fairy-tale where he is one of three brothers sent on a quest; that the parallel, never-meeting planes of reality and fantasy have somehow crossed. The invocation of Plato's notion of ideals which give things in our world their essence shows Tursun's engagement with dualism, a modernist understanding of reality that suggests another world beyond our own that endows ours with meaning.

Israel's 2015 story, "There Are No Cows in the City," begins with a dream that anticipates the meeting of the protagonist, Tursun, with the fantastic. Tzvetan Todorov (1973) famously argues that the fantastic walks astride the border of the realistic, that which can be explained by reason, and the marvelous, that which can be explained only by magic or the supernatural. The fantastic, a genre written by authors such as E. T. A. Hoffman or Nikolai Gogol, never explains unbelievable events as either purely realistic or marvelous, but instead leaves the question unresolved. Israel does exactly that when her narrator Tursun witnesses a cow enter the apartment of the head of the local neighborhood committee where-upon this leader, like a Spanish matador, baits the animal into running out with a tablecloth. After some joining discussion of the event with neighbors, the neighbors follow the leader in denying that it ever happened, leading Tursun and others to question his sanity. Tursun's situation is likely an allegorical representation of conditions in the Uyghur homeland, where inhabitants are not permitted to speak of the reality before their eyes but instead must pay homage to the way the Chinese Communist Party represents that reality. Here though, Israel's story turns that everyday gaslighting into a fantastic experience that nevertheless effects on Tursun the very same isolation and alienation intellectuals experience in the CCP state.

Chris Fort

Plato's Shovel

Perhat Tursun

Translated by Darren Byler¹⁴ and Anonymous

1.

I lost my cousin's shovel. Maybe I didn't lose it, but he said I lost it. And since he couldn't describe what the original shovel was actually like, perhaps I really have to say it is lost.

At noon, on the day on which we may assume the shovel was lost, I was walking by the front gate of my cousin's house. Just as I opened the two halves of the big iron gate of his courtyard, I called out to him. Actually I didn't have to call him, because anyone could hear the sound that gate makes—it is louder than any sound a person can make even if he yells at the top of his lungs.

"Sadiq-aka, hey, Sadiq-aka!"¹⁵

My cousin's big, stocky foot appeared under the curtain just on the inside of the door to the house. He was looking for his old slippers which were faded by the sun and cracked here and there in the soles.

"Hey, is it Urayim-bey-uka? Come... come into the house."

"I'll see you later, I have some things to do." I said returning the shovel, leaning it against a mulberry tree. "I have to go."

Just then the shovel I had leaned against the mulberry tree began to teeter and suddenly fell over. I felt there was something strange about this and glanced at it again. But I didn't go over to set it up-right again because it really didn't seem that important. My cousin's intention at that time was to show me the intimacy of our kinship.

"Won't you come in and sit down for a bit? Lately we've been so busy with our work, it's been a long time since we've had a really good heart-to-heart chat."

"I need to go, aka, I have something to do at the bazaar."

Since he assumed that my wife and my two children were at the gate as well, he put on his slippers and walked over to the gate, one of his slippers flapping because of its broken strap. He stood very close to the

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¹⁵ The narrator, Urayim, is a cousin of Sadiq, but, as is traditional in the region, they address each other as older brother (aka) and younger brother (uka). We have indicated with a hyphen where the address is fixed to the name as in Sadiq-aka and Urayim-uka, and where the address is used without the name, we have written aka or uka.

outer mud wall and invited my wife, who was standing in the shadow of the wall which was shortened by the rising sun, to come in.

"Hey, Khanqiz, you're here too? Are you doing well, sister? Don't just stand there at the gate. This lady is so grudging of her time. The way she doesn't want to come in, it's as if she's worried she owes us money."

"I have to go, aka, the livestock I'm watching need my attention," my wife said, looking at the weeds she held under her arm. Her face, which made her look like a cruel ruthless woman, did not match her five organs. This is why our relatives call her "icy." Actually, out of all of our wives, she's not the one with the stoniest heart.

Seeing the way my sons' heads were drooping from exhaustion, not even looking up at my cousin as they walked by, my cousin clicked his tongue.

"Hey, did you bring these two soldiers to the fields too? These kids are miserable. They're too little. Did you think you could finish all the work in the world by putting those two to work? What good is that? You won't finish the work of the universe even if you bring out a hundred people. Our great grandfather Metqun-Akhun, who was in charge of our whole town, didn't finish everything. Our grandfather Tud-Akhun couldn't finish everything either. My father, who was awarded Model Worker status, went to the Dazhai exhibition, and became known as Dazhai Mamut, and he didn't finish everything either! This work can only be finished after we die. Don't be so hard on those kids!..."

I watched my kids as they walked by barefoot. They moved lazily even as their feet burned in the searing sand of the dusty road. Finally they couldn't stand the heat, so they jumped into the shadows along the western side of the wall, turned, and looked at us. One of them was eight and the other was eleven years old. I really didn't want to put them to work, but since I'd been sick and feeling a bit weak, I brought them to the fields anyway. It hurt me to see their small hands grabbing the shovel, but I had no choice. If I was healthy, I would never ask them to work. I'd want them to play at the edge of the field while I finished all the fieldwork myself. Then when I was worn out and saw their filthy hands and clothes, the smudges of dirt on their noses, I would feel relieved and re-energized.

"If they get used to working hard when they're young, it will be easy for them when they grow up," my wife said, before I could trot out this old line to my cousin.

As we were saying goodbye, my cousin, who at first hadn't paid any attention to it, suddenly looked at the shovel and said:

"Hey, uka, this isn't my shovel."

I looked at the shovel beside the mulberry tree. The shovel's wide blade looked exactly like my cousin's face. I remembered very clearly that I had borrowed it from my cousin. My wife grabbed the weeds under her arm with one hand and with her other hand held up another shovel whose handle was made of a willow branch. I put down the shovel I had on my shoulder and looked at both of them. We had been using both of these shovels for a long time. My wife's shovel was very easy to use. From overuse its blade had been worn down into a crescent shape, and the places where she grasped the tool were worn into two deep notches. If she used it a little longer these handholds would become worn to the point at where the whole handle would break. I bought the shovel I was holding now because my marriage to my wife meant we added another worker. My dad was angry with me, at the time, for buying such a rough and cumbersome shovel. After using it for a long time, though, we became accustomed to it and the shovel itself was worn into a more comfortable shape. I showed the shovel I was holding and the shovel in my wife's hand to my cousin.

"It's not one of these?"

"No." My cousin didn't even glance at the shovels in our hands.

I had to call my worn-out, foot-dragging children back.

"Hey soldiers! Come over here and let your father Sadiq have a look at the shovels you're carrying." The shovels they were holding were not remotely close to being the right one because they were so old. They were from my father and much older than my shovel or the shovel which my wife was holding.

My kids just stood there—arguing with each other about who should carry them over.

"Neither of those are mine. They don't have to bring them over. I can tell," said my cousin, his face twisting a bit.

With that, my cousin's shovel disappeared from this world without a trace.

I had no choice but to see my wife and children off and then grab the shovel and go back to the fields behind my cousin's house. The fields were steaming in the blinding glare of the sun. I shaded my eyes, staring into the distance. If you're facing the sun when it lords it over the whole

world, you must filter out the direct light and the boiling sky in order to search out minutia in the far distance.

In the row of fields there was no one except a lone woman wearing a white scarf. A donkey, bound by a short grazing rope, felt lonely and gave a long bray. The worn-out, hungry woman stopped working, lifted the hem of her jacket, and wiped her face. She bent down, and picked up a wailing baby which kicked and screamed, kissed its crotch, and walked toward me. I waited to look up until she was close by. Her dark, cracked heels left a shapeless trace in the soil where they stopped in front of me.

"Buwihejer-khan, it looked like you were having a conversation with Khanqiz earlier. Did you somehow switch shovels with her while you were walking together?"

Buwihejer-khan very carefully, in order not to hit her baby, lifted the hoe from her shoulder and showed it to us.

"I didn't bring a shovel, I just worked with the hoe today."

She very carefully put the hoe back on her shoulder and walked away. As she passed us, I noticed that the baby was very fat and had his dirty hand in his mouth. He was sucking on it.

When we went to the field we very clearly had five shovels, so it was impossible that we could have left the shovel in the field. Where did this other shovel come from, the one that turned out not to be my cousin's? Whose shovel could my cousin's shovel really have been exchanged with? No one else had come to our field with a shovel. And it was impossible for my cousin's shovel to have been left in the field. But my cousin said:

"You must have forgotten it in the field—go look for it."

It was of no use for me to search the field, but my cousin insisted so I had to try.

The sunlight bore down on my shoulders and brain as I looked over the field. It was rapidly bleaching the clumps of mud scattered here and there between the wheat stalks. Maybe the sunlight had also melted the lost shovel so that I couldn't see it and therefore couldn't pick it up. Maybe the shovel only existed in my imagination. In the fields I just saw rows of clumps of mud.

"Sadiq-aka, have another look. I think the shovel I showed you earlier is yours."

"No, uka, do you really think I wouldn't recognize my own shovel? I use it all the time!"

2.

I searched everywhere for my cousin's shovel. At first I told everyone that it had somehow been exchanged with another shovel, and I suspected everyone who might have had the opportunity to take it. I searched every house in the neighborhood. All of the shovels resembled each other since they were all mass produced in the same factory at the same time. Maybe this is why my cousin lost the shovel, but I discovered by searching every house that, just as no two human faces are the same, so you can't find two shovels that are exactly the same. The most surprising thing is that when you look at a shovel carefully you find that a shovel resembles its owner. One of our neighbors on the right had long, thin hands; his shovel's handle was also very long and thin. The one on the left had short and stubby hands; his shovel's handle was also short and stubby. The shovel's blade was large and circular just like the shape of his large wrists. One of my neighbors who had a hare-lip had a shovel whose blade was worn down in the middle like a lip that is split in two. When I saw that, I just laughed. The neighbor looked at me in a surprised and embarrassed manner. The worn-out place in the shovel looked exactly like his upper lip.

If you asked for my carefree cousin's ear, it really wouldn't be a big deal for him. But when it came to his shovel, it was as if he had nothing else, and he would never stop searching for it.

"Cousin, if a farmer lacks a shovel during planting season, it is like he is disabled. Don't cripple me like this, find my shovel!"

The first thing I did was to bring all of the shovels in my house to my cousin's house and let him take a look at them all.

"Aka, I didn't find your shovel. Choose one of these if you like."

My cousin arched his eyebrows and gave me a long evil-eyed stare.

"Look at me, uka. I don't want to split my inheritance with you right now. The things that were left to you from your father you should use yourself. I just want my shovel."

He might not have liked the quality of our older shovels. I came to think that maybe he wanted a new one from me.

"I will find your shovel. Just use one of these for now."

I told him this, thinking to myself that I would buy him a better one from the bazaar. But my cousin immediately rejected this plan by refusing to use any of the shovels I brought from my house. From his appearance it seemed as though he'd rather give up his relationship with me than lose his shovel. But he still unfailingly spoke in terms of fond kinship despite his angry demeanor. I really needed to take this opportunity to

placate him. I was worried that he might renounce our kinship. Up until this point I had never had any disputes with him. In our neighborhood other people fought all the time on the roads and in the fields. We would run out and watch those families yell at each other while they stood in opposing rows with sickles and shovels in their hands. But a few days later those same people who had almost eaten each other alive would sit on the same donkey cart while going to the bazaar, laughing and joking with each other. If someone from one of those families brought food out to the fields, they would eat together. But our family was not the same as others. We didn't yell at each other; we didn't pick up sickles and hammers and line up to fight each other; we didn't give others a chance to laugh at us. Yet our resentments and grudges were stronger than other families. If our close relatives had a small argument, they wouldn't talk to each other for years. During sacred festivals the respected white beards always said that Muslims shouldn't hold grudges, but this advice had no effect on us. Now one worthless shovel might make both my cousin and me avoid each other's glances for many years to come.

After that I immediately went to the bazaar and bought the most expensive wide shovel blade, one with strong joints and made with heavy iron, and brought it home. I picked the driest and firmest length of wood from our ceiling and peeled away the bark. I fastened the wood to the blade to make a handle for the shovel. I thought the handle was steady and firm, just like my cousin. Yet something didn't quite match him, but as much as I tried I just couldn't quite place what that was. Maybe if my cousin could use the shovel for a while, their faces might converge with one another.

Under the courtyard roof my wife was doing the ritual washing of her cracked-heeled feet before prayer. She put aside the washing pitcher and looked at the shovel for a while.

"This should be good enough for Sadiq-aka now," she said.

I always got worried whenever she mentioned my relatives, so I immediately picked up the shovel and left for my cousin's house.

My cousin's hair looked stiff as a bristle because the band of his brown farmer's cap, from under which his hair bunched out of the side, was so tight and he wore his cap so firmly. His appearance seemed to be that of a man who had been suffering for a long time.

"Oh, Urayim-uka, why did you waste money on this shovel? What were you thinking?"

“Sadiq-aka, this is nothing. I couldn’t find your shovel, so you should use this one.”

“But this is not my shovel, uka.”

“Even though it’s not yours, why not use it anyway?”

“Uka, you’re an intellectual, but you, I mean, you also know about farming.” You yourself, I mean, also grew up in this village. After you graduated you became a farmer here in this village. Why can’t you understand a farmer! That time you lost your pen, what did you say? “If you lost your favorite pen, you wouldn’t want to write until you got used to the new pen!” Farmers are just the same: if a farmer loses his shovel, his work will lose be clumsy. So you, I mean, uka, please don’t be upset, please just search for my shovel some more.”

My cousin acted like it was all a stupid joke. It made me feel very uncomfortable.

“Aka, there’s nowhere I haven’t searched.”

“Go look in your house one more time.”

The thing that made me the most uncomfortable was that my cousin still thought that I was keeping the shovel in my house.

“I myself know how to buy a shovel blade at the bazaar and fasten the handle. Look, there are so many handles growing out of the tree trunks in front of the house that the trees are falling over.”

As he was talking he kept adding, “My dear uka, my sweet uka,” like he was imploring me to understand him, which had perhaps the opposite effect, making me, shockingly, feel like he wasn’t going to listen to me. His horse-eyed wife was sucking on pieces of jujube or dried red pepper she held in her teeth, and she interrupted:

“Urayim-bey, among your relatives, Sadiq is closest to you. This isn’t an extortion. You mustn’t think that his urging you to find the shovel is a terrible thing.”

Again, her words only convinced me the opposite was true, for her encouraging me to think of his badgering as “not a terrible” thing was not a good sign.

“If a person forgets his feet while he’s walking and imagines instead that he’s on a donkey cart and falls asleep and falls down into a ditch, could that sort of gentle person be doing something terrible to others?” I don’t know if I actually said this, or if these words just appeared in my mind.

His desperate desire to find the shovel was mysterious to me. He acted like he couldn’t live without finding that shovel and talked about

it constantly. At first I thought this shovel had some intangible value for him.

"When did you buy this shovel at the bazaar?" I had asked.

"More than 4 years ago," he said.

You can see from this that my cousin didn't inherit the shovel from my uncle, for his mother passed away when he was very young and his father died 7 or 8 years ago.

I thought perhaps the shovel was given to him by his wife on some special day, but that turned out not to be the case. When I tried to imagine that there were some unforgettable, unique early memories or hidden values to that shovel, they were impossible to visualize because my cousin only knew how to work the fields with the habitualized rhythm of a cow. He walked the path between his house and fields over and over as if his reason for living was to walk in the same footsteps over and over again. He lived within the tracks of his own footprints. The trail he left today was not any different from the one he left the day before. So it was entirely unimaginable that he had any unique memories from his life.

"Don't make a fuss about this Sadiq-aka," I finally said to him impatiently, "Why do you care so much about this shovel?"

My anger caused my cousin to reply as if he had a stutter:

"You yourself, I mean, younger brother Urayim-bey, I mean, where exactly did you, I mean, put that shovel, I mean? Think it over carefully again yourself, I mean. If you're too lazy to really search, tell me what you remember, and I'll find it myself."

The reasons I couldn't find the shovel were infinite. Those causes were all the more infinite because of all I didn't know about my cousin's relationship with the shovel. The more infinite those causes became the less real they seemed; they no longer belonged to this world and instead became something constituted by a being beyond nature.

Somewhere I heard my wife yelling for one of my play-obsessed sons in a long drawn-out way:

"Qunaxuuuuuuun! Qunaxuuuuuuun! Qunaxuuuuuuun! Eat your own head, you little jerk! Why don't you make any noise, Qunaxuuuuuuun! Qunaxuuuuuuun!"

In our village it is impolite for a woman to mention her husband's name directly, so my wife never calls me by my own name "Ibrahim."¹⁶

¹⁶ Urayim is the local pronunciation of the name Ibrahim.

If she wants to call me, she usually uses my eldest son's name.¹⁷ Because of this, I assumed my wife was calling me, so I put the new shovel on my shoulder and left my cousin's house. My cousin walked me to the front gate. I wondered how long my cousin watched me as I walked away, but I didn't look back.

3.

As I sat in a restaurant eating *laghman*, I watched as a bunch of people kicked a bald man with small, mean eyes in front of the wood bazaar with its smell of sawdust. I noticed my cousin among the people watching the fight. As I ate, I struggled to get a hold of a piece of onion that, like a counterrevolutionary, refused to go down. My cousin's eyes suddenly met mine, and at that very moment I spit out the onion that had been lodged between my tongue and lips. Immediately the thought crossed my mind that if he saw me spit it out while looking at me, he might think that I was spitting it at him. I started to invite my cousin over by waving to him, hoping once again to resolve this misunderstanding, but he looked away and refused to turn his gaze back to me. I ran out and called him, but he refused to come into the restaurant, saying he had just eaten. I didn't know if he was lying or was just being obstinate. I went back into the restaurant to finish my food, but the waitress had thought I was done and already cleared the table even though I had only eaten half my *laghman*. It was unclear, but all of these issues with the *laghman* seemed a sign of something unfortunate. Despite all this, encountering my cousin at the bazaar was a great opportunity to resolve the shovel situation. So I walked out of the restaurant and pulled at my cousin's forearm.

"Come, Sadiq-aka! Let's walk around the bazaar."

The fight wasn't very entertaining: there were many doing the kicking and only one being kicked.

"Uka, where are you headed?"

Since I was worried about him refusing, I didn't mention the shovel.

"Come on, we'll walk around and talk."

We went through a clothes store that smelled like Chinese herbal medicine and into a "five metals" shop in the back.¹⁸ This shop was

¹⁷ This practice is quite widespread in Central Asia.

¹⁸ A "five metals" store is a hardware store, the name of which is translated into Uyghur from a Chinese word.

the biggest such shop in our district. The shopkeeper, whose face was so beautiful it hurt, lined up all kinds of shovels for us to look at.

"Sadiq-aka, choose the best of these."

My cousin Sadiq-aka's face looked both stupid and angry before it became expressionless. It was as if he had been spun around. His mouth dropped open. He stared at me dizzily for a moment and said: "'The handle of a lost ax becomes golden!' Do you yourself think that this is what I'm trying to do? All I want is my shovel. Dear Urayim-uka, my shovel itself is very ordinary. It's worse than the shovels you want to buy me. I never said I wanted to exchange it for a better one! Why do you think I have such bad intentions? I just want you to give me my shovel."

After I lost his shovel I started to imagine what that shovel looked like. At first I imagined that it resembled my cousin's face: small at the top and a big oval in the middle. Later, because my cousin was looking for it so desperately, I imagined that it looked like his wife. I visualized it having her horse-eyed, elongated face and jutting chin. But, now I can no longer imagine it as a physical thing because it had become a holy name, written, never depicted, as if it had taken on a sacred form that couldn't be described in concrete terms.

The shovel was important to my cousin, but perhaps he might forget it if I didn't bring it up. He didn't ask to come to my house to look for it even once, so I assumed that perhaps it wasn't so all-consuming for him after all, but still, every time the word "shovel" came up, he very firmly insisted on finding that particular one—as if he couldn't live without it.

"You, Urayim-uka, why do you keep acting like this! Is it worth it to lose our kinship over this tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny thing?"

"Why are you spearing my heart over this tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny thing, Sadiq-aka!"

"You won't give me the shovel yourself, you yourself used it to dig your father's grave, uka!"

"Sadiq-aka, don't say such unkind things to me, what's my father to you?"

I saw my cousin off at the front gate, but he didn't turn and look at me as he left. My wife, who had watched us for a while as she hung the wash on a string between the columns on the porch, mumbled under her breath: "Eat your own head!"

This common phrase always made me imagine weird things. Sometimes I frightened myself with my imagination. What if a person cut off

his head with an ax and ate it? I imagined this happening rather vaguely, but at the same time it felt like a truly horrific thing.

The shovel dispute seemed to have become a big quarrel between us. So, I begged the village elder, Turdi-beg, to resolve the matter.

"Hey, if you're acting this way over a shovel, then the two of you are an embarrassment to the whole neighborhood!"

It seemed impossible to make the village's leader understand what was happening here. Even I couldn't believe it, so how could he believe it?

"Well, whatever! I think this is becoming a big deal between us, but I don't want him to know that I brought this to you." I replied hopelessly.

"Urayim-uka, why don't you buy him one of the best shovels?"

"Turdi-beg, perhaps because Sadiq-aka used that shovel for such a long time, he feels as though it has become part of his body. Anyone can understand this kind of feeling. If I buy him another shovel, it will be like cutting out one of his organs and replacing it with an artificial one."

As I was saying these words to him, the drawn-out sound of my wife's calling interrupted my line of thought and made me forget the words I had prepared.

"Qunakhuuuun, Qunakhuuuun! See, he's not even mooing!"

I thought about writing a formal petition in order to make the village leader take the issue seriously. If you use the international phonetic transcription system to write the words you speak, and if you don't miss any phonemes, there is no difference between spoken and written words. Yet I knew that once words are written on paper, they immediately become another thing. Based on Plato's theory, once the idea of a thing becomes symbolized as a word it becomes false; when words are transformed by a script there is another falsification. Since Socrates insisted on only speaking, he was regarded as the purest of thinkers. I recalled these arguments. But in our time, to the contrary, the origins of thoughts are considered unreliable, while the most artificial thoughts, once put to paper, are regarded as the most reliable.

Once Plato entered my thoughts it was as if my heart skipped a beat.

The village elder announced that everyone should bring their shovels to the village square. No one was told why they should do this, so when they arrived, they stood in the village courtyard looking at the elder with their shovels on their shoulders.

"All of you, put your shovels in the courtyard and go to the meeting hall!"

Because the village elder's voice carried very well, he usually didn't use a bullhorn. The people put down their shovels in an orderly way and went into the meeting hall. The elder took this opportunity to speak to my cousin.

"Sadiq-Akhun, here are all of the shovels from the village. Find yours from among them. Don't tell anyone that I gathered all of the farmers here in order for you to find your shovel. Look cousin, here are all the shovels!"

"Turdi-beg Dadujang, if you pull me out of this trouble, I'll host a banquet for everyone," said my cousin as he was examining the shovels.

Out of nearly one thousand shovels, my cousin's was nowhere to be seen, as though that shovel didn't exist in this world. I myself slowly came to believe that I had never really borrowed this shovel from my cousin. Maybe this was just a fantasy of my cousin's and mine, who knows?

Like a senile old man who dreamed of a mythical talking nightingale and brought chaos to his family by sending his children everywhere to find and bring it to him, my cousin was sending us to find a nonexistent shovel.

I thought about the legend: the three brothers looking for a nonexistent bird met horrible monsters and dragons in demonic places. What exactly did all of that mean? All of this seemed a product of imagination, an allegory of the consequences of looking for nonexistent things. If it turned out that I had been forced to look for a nonexistent thing, perhaps I would soon face the same fantastic scenes as those three brothers. Who knows, maybe it would only be then that I would have a chance to see that shovel. When you are fully conscious, you can't see something that doesn't exist in reality.

One thousand times I regretted that I had brought those little seedlings, my children, to work in the field. Was this punishment for torturing them? If I hadn't brought them along I wouldn't have had to borrow a shovel from my cousin.

It's like the way two parallel lines can never intersect: we, our reality, would never intersect with that shovel since it exists only in the world of illusions. A straight object's shape is transformed if it is placed in water. If a thing is refracted over and over by water, or if the water is in the convex shape of a glass bowl, the actual line it crosses is not real, but rather exists only in our imagination. If you want to transform how you see everything, you should surround yourself with water; you should flood all around you with water. The way you understand what exists and doesn't

exist in reality resembles how the shape of things is changed by water. You have to change the thing or the shape of the thing or the shape of yourself. That transformation changes perception, changes how the mind imagines and conceives of reality. Like two parallel lines, the reality of the three brothers and the reality of the imaginary bird never crossed until the brothers arrived at those places haunted by demons. Those demonic places, those monsters that eat humans, those magicians... Those are the conditions under which the straight substances of reality are bent by the waters of psychic sickness. So, to find my cousin's shovel you would have to be a psychic.

After our unsuccessful search, when we walked by my cousin's house, he said:

"Come into my house, folks!" but I wasn't included in "folks." He didn't look at me even though I was standing beside him. Yet the "folks" didn't go in his house. Just me. My intention was always to resolve this unresolvable issue of the lost shovel.

"Sadiq-aka, what should we do about this shovel?"

"You will give it to me in the next life."

"Of course! How can I return something that doesn't belong to this world! I assume you haven't heard of a person named Plato who lived 2400 years ago?"

My poor cousin's face changed in color like meat placed in boiling oil and finally stopped turning when it became a pale bluish color.

"2400 years ago, no way, I barely remember my grandfather's name who I saw with my own eyes as a kid."

"That person who lived 2400 years ago said, 'All of the things of this world are created by replicating original things in the ideal world.' Your shovel might be a shovel in that ideal world."

"Urayim-uka, I don't understand your ideal-shmideal stuff."

"Of course, Sadiq-aka, I don't expect you to understand it. I just wanted to say it out loud. I just couldn't pull that shovel out of the ideal world. Allow me the happiness that comes from pulling this idea out of my brain and putting it into words."

2011

There Are No Cows in the City

Halide Israel

Translated by Darren Byler and Anonymous

When did I arrive at the riverbank near my home village?

Over there my childhood friends are in the water, naked. Some of them are diving. Some are swimming. Some of the cowardly ones are standing in the shallows pouring water over their bodies, their shoulders shivering.

"The boys are really enjoying themselves. I might surprise them if I sneak up beside them," I think to myself.

But the water is not as cold or clear as it used to be in my childhood. Now it is thick and greasy—like dishwater at a low-class restaurant. The water leaves a yellow stain on whatever it touches. I want to find the clear water and begin swimming toward the middle of the river, toward my friends. But my feet and hands seem heavy. It is as if I'm being choked. With great difficulty I reached the middle of the river. But the water is still yellow and putrid. And my friends are nowhere to be found. How did I end up all alone in this wide river? The dirty water is moving and a big wave is going to wash over my head. While I'm wondering how to outswim the wave, suddenly I heard my wife's voice:

"Tursun, hey Tursun! Get up, you're late for work...."

My wife was washing dishes in the kitchen. I realized abruptly that it was the noise of the running water that had brought me to the riverside in my dream. Of course, most of the time, dreams are related to things that happen in reality. When I looked at my watch it was almost 2:30. I rubbed my face with a wet towel, drank some cold tea, and left for work. There were three apartments on every floor of my building. The apartments on the right are for the leaders, the smaller apartments on the left are for ordinary workers like me. My neighbor's door was tightly bolted shut. He is a really responsible person who leads us all—both in work and in rewards. The door of the big apartment on the right was wide open. Right next to the door, on top of the shelf for shoes, was the leader's bag of folders. In front of the shelf were his extra-large house sandals. I passed the door carefully, as usual, and went on out.

I went out, but then immediately was driven back in as though I was blasted by a strong wind. I ducked behind the door. A giant cow with huge horns followed me in, entering the door to the building, going up the half-flight of stairs, and went right through the door into the big

leader's apartment.¹⁹ The entryway was covered with slippery pale green tiles, so the cow couldn't move too quickly. The cow slowed its steps and stood for a while. From the look of its heaving belly, the saliva dripping from its jaws, and its angry eyes, it seemed like it was intent on destroying everything in the blink of an eye. Just then, my leader came out drying his hands with a towel. He was tall and strong. He took two steps toward the door and suddenly his eyes widened:

"Oh, hey! Ka... ka... cow!" he cried out with a strange voice.

The leader and the cow just stood there a meter apart watching each other with wide eyes. The big, sharp horns of the cow seemed to shimmer like they were going to immediately rip through the big body of the leader. The eyes of the leader were fixed on the tips of the horns. He quickly dropped the towel and grabbed the tablecloth on top of the tea table. The silk tablecloth flashed.

As he did this a strange idea flashed through my mind: "Whoa, was there going to be a Spanish bullfight?" The leader was very capable. When he was competing for promotions, I had seen what he was capable of doing in drinking, joking, and all-around partying. Suddenly I started getting excited.

The leader flapped the tablecloth for a while and then quickly brought the tablecloth above his head. It blocked the cow completely.

"Put the tablecloth to the side!" I thought.

Then suddenly I understood the intention of the leader. He was moving back while holding the tablecloth.

As it happened, that cow was not a Spanish cow. It turned around, went out the main door, and ran away. The moment it vanished, two people who looked like traders from the villages, our unit's security guard, and two or three onlookers came running.

"Did a cow pass through here?" asked the security guard.

"It just came out of our building and went that way," I said. They all ran in that direction. A nanny who was holding a chubby baby followed them.

Soon the security guard, the onlookers and the nanny came back.

¹⁹ The leader is likely the Party secretary of the "neighborhood committee," the lowest level of the Communist Party bureaucracy. The neighborhood committee is responsible for provisioning goods and services as well as political ideology instruction among "the masses." In the Uyghur homeland, Uyghurs could often be appointed to this lower-level Party position, as in this story.

"What kind of cow was it? Did you see?" the security guard asked, watching me closely.

"Did it really enter the building? Did it really go into the leader's apartment?"

"It's fine as long as no one got hurt.... I was falling asleep in the heat and was startled awake by this giant thing going through the gate," the security guard said.

A shopkeeper we call Bottle Sawut joined our conversation.

"When I came out of my shop, something was running on the road. 'What is a cow doing in the city?' I wondered. 'Maybe I saw a ghost in the middle of the day,' I thought."

While I was thinking, the rest of the cow-seekers came up.

The nanny followed, saying: "That was a really big cow with huge horns. Thank God no one got hurt."

"There were no children outside because it was noon...."

While we were discussing this, the leader came out holding his briefcase. The security guard ran to him and began to speak.

"I heard that the cow..." He started to say. The leader cut him off angrily.

"What cow? What are you talking about? Are you daydreaming or what? Go! Do what you are supposed to do," he said.

That night after I came back from work, a bunch of people were gathered at the front gate and talking eagerly. The security guard, two retirees, Bottle Sawut, two or three drunkards and my neighbor were among them. When they saw me, they all just stood there laughing. I could have gone straight home, but instead I went up to them as was my habit.

"Tursun saw it with his own eyes. That cow went directly into your building and straight into the apartment of the leader," the security guard said.

"It nearly knocked Tursun over," Bottle Sawut said.

At that time the nanny who was holding the baby came and began to speak. "That cow was so big. I'd guess the length of the horns were one or two meters. It had the temperament that could knock over not just a man, but a whole building."

All of them were snickering and waiting for me to speak. I giggled too, but then I remembered the temper of the leader at noon and didn't say anything.

“So, you’re saying the cow went directly into the leader’s apartment right? That’s a cow with some taste.”

“Bullshit, it doesn’t make any sense for a cow to enter a building and go into someone’s apartment.” The tone with which my neighbor said this suddenly brought my blood to a boil.

“Sometimes the unbelievable happens. If I didn’t see it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t believe it either.”

“I saw it too,” another person said. “The baby wouldn’t sleep and I was walking on the side of the road. The cow ran directly into that building. I just said, ‘Oh my god, Mrs. Tilla has a weak heart.’ Luckily she didn’t see the cow...”

“If you say so. It just entered the building and then... Maybe when it saw that everything was so shiny, it was afraid to do something bad.”

“It just stood by the door, maybe it got stuck on the slippery surface, so it couldn’t move forward or backward and just stood there for a while.

“Did someone come out while it was there?”

“Yes, our leader came out from the restroom drying his hands. He didn’t see the cow, he took two steps forward and then he saw it.”

“Did he cry out when he saw it?”

“Yes, he did.” He meant to say ‘cow’ but he said: “Ka...kaw.”

“Ha, ha, ha, he must have been so afraid.”

“Anyone would be afraid. If it happened to us, our hearts might leap out of our throats.”

“Our leader is our leader.”

“He is a great man...”

“He snatched the tablecloth from the table and held it above his head.”

“Wow, that’s really brave.”

“I thought that maybe the leader had studied Spanish bullfighting when he was abroad and that there might be a show. So I got a little excited.”

“He could have done it if he had wanted to.”

“Our leader is a strong man.”

“And he has a good sense of humor...”

“He held the tablecloth above his head, bent downwards, and suddenly turned left, backed into the room and shut the door.”

“Ha, ha, ha, now that was smart.”

“Ha, ha, ha... he definitely didn’t become a leader for nothing. What about the cow?”

"The cow just turned away and went out. When I saw it from behind, it just went straight out the back of the building. Then you guys came...."

We were talking enthusiastically. Some people who had joined the crowd began to ask:

"What cow? Where did the cow come from?"

"A cow some villagers bought was being transported back to their home village. The back of their truck broke open as they were driving by."

The security guard and Bottle Sawut began to recite the story from the beginning, when I suddenly remembered my wife was working the night shift and I had to make dinner. As I was walking toward my apartment, I saw my son sitting on top of his school bag in front of our gate. Suddenly it occurred to me: What would have happened if that cow had come while my son was sitting like that? This thought filled me with worry for my son. After I cooked my son's favorite dish and was lying next to him watching TV, everything that had happened today seemed to vanish from my mind.

* * *

One night my wife came in saying Mrs. Tilla was asking for me. What did she want? When my wife came back she had an angry face. I thought she wanted to say something to me, so I waited for her beside the TV. She didn't even look at me. She just entered the kitchen and started washing dishes. When I came after her and asked what happened, she dropped the bowls into the sink:

"You, when will you act like a real grown-up? Why don't you shut your mouth and stop repeating the gossip of others. Not only that, but you're talking not just behind a regular person's back but behind the back of Dolet-aka."²⁰ She was really angry.

"Me?... Behind Dolet-aka's back? What did I say?"

"What are you saying? Didn't you start a rumor that during the day a cow came and entered our building and went into Dolet-aka's apartment and chased him? Mrs. Tilla was really angry: 'I thought Tursun was a decent guy, but turns out he is actually a fool' she said."

"Wait, was Dolet-aka there? What did he say?"

"What do you think? He said Tursun should stop speaking nonsense."

²⁰ As in the previous story, "aka" is a form of address meaning "older brother" but used as an honorific for older males.

I was speechless. I slapped my palm to my forehead in surprise. My wife stood looking at me for a while.

Then in a soft voice she added: "I told them, I understand Tursun. He's not the kind of person who talks behind others' backs, there must be some trickery in this. Look, is someone trying to hurt you?"

I told my wife about everything that happened that day.

My wife stood for a while: "Others saw that, right? In that case, you should ask them to be your witnesses and clear your name."

"Now, you're beginning to act like a woman. Who will be my witness when Dolet-aka himself says I'm dreaming."

We stood for a while and then my wife said:

"This is not a big thing. If that cow entered our house and those things happened to you, Dolet-aka might laugh at you for a year. Alright, don't apologize. Don't try to clear your name. Just act normally, you haven't done anything wrong."

* * *

Later I thought about these conversations and asked myself questions like: Am I really innocent? Did I do the right thing by not apologizing and trying to clear my name? I couldn't really find a clear answer. If I said I'm guilty, I wouldn't feel like I was. If I said I'm not guilty, then I would feel like I was. No one can say they don't confront dangerous situations in life. Everyone is afraid of danger. Many people lose their minds when they are confronted with it. Compared to most people, we could say Dolet-aka did very well. It's a skill to protect oneself like he did. At the time I had really admired Dolet-aka. So had the others. If they had acted like him, they would have taken much pride in it, but...

Later, things got complicated. Some of my friends confronted me and said:

"Hey Tursun, you said a cow was chasing after Dolet-aka. How's that possible? This isn't India..."

"Why are you saying such strange things? What would a cow be doing in the city?"

Some of them deliberately tried to get something out of me by acting like they were sympathetic. I didn't want to talk to them. Sometimes I

got angry and started saying what really happened. Gradually I realized that the words I'd said to my friends were on the lips of everyone in my unit; no one wanted to trust me or anything I said. The colleagues I was close to turned their backs on me quickly, and my enemies were delighted. One day after work when I came to the main gate, a bunch of people were talking excitedly. The security guard was spitting as he talked:

"Total nonsense, how could there be a cow in the city! I've been working here for 10 years...." Immediately, I ducked inside a store and there was Bottle Sawut:

"We all believed the garbage that vagrant told us. How could something like that happen in reality? Who actually saw it?"

"How could a person say everything that comes to his mind? That day when I entered the leader's apartment, the leader was really mad. It was damaging to the leader's reputation." These were the words of my next door neighbor.

I heard the voice of the nanny immediately following:

"He's really up to no good. How could he say something like 'Dolet-aka did a foreign dance with a cow while holding a tablecloth in his hands'? Total garbage. I haven't seen a cow since I came to the city. Shouldn't cows just be in villages?..."

I stood still in the small dark corridor of the store. The people busily entering and exiting the store nearly knocked me over on their way. My eyes weren't seeing anything. I couldn't think about anything. Those evil voices were ringing in my ears. I rolled a cigarette with my shaking hands and sucked the smoke into my lungs nervously. The black smoke coming out of my nose and mouth looked like the anger that filled me inside. What the others were saying had little effect on me, but my neighbor's words pierced my heart. After all these years I didn't think that my neighbor would stab me in the back.

Slowly I calmed down. Alright, I thought, these days too will pass, they will also forget about this, the journey of life is long.

I passed the crowd with my head held high. On my way home, suddenly a question came to my mind: What would have happened if what I saw had happened to my neighbor? Maybe he would have shut his mouth like he didn't see anything.... No! He would have described the way the leader had protected peoples' lives and belongings with his bravery. Yes, he would definitely have done that. Why hadn't those sorts of things entered my mind? Suddenly, I really wanted to laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha...."

I met my neighbor's wife, Patemkhan, at the front door of the building, she looked at me with fearful eyes and ran away to her apartment just like I had run away from that cow. When I was opening my door, she opened her door just a crack and peered out at me. The small chubby woman with her triangular face, small darting eyes, the quick movements of neck, feet and hands, reminded me of a mouse.

"Meo...w, meo...w, meo...w..."

I purred just like a cat, pity my boy wasn't with me, he would have been so happy.

--

In the days that followed I sensed a kind of misfortune was coming judging by the scary looks people gave me while trying to scurry away or just saying one or two things before escaping a conversation with me. One day when I came back after work Dolet-aka had traded his door for a shiny new steel door. The next day my neighbor also traded his for a steel door. His door was simpler than Dolet-aka's, but it had the head of a Chinese goddess that scares away ghosts. Their steel doors were usually closed. When we did meet each other, none of us greeted each other, including the women. Some security guards with uniforms also started patrolling our apartment building.

"Maybe terrorists have become more active," I guessed. Another time I was a little surprised when the nanny grabbed the baby waddling down the road and ran away as soon as she saw me. Then I thought maybe she felt a little guilty. Finally, Rosa Heyt came. On the first day of the festival, visitors stood in front of our building just like a queue in the supermarket. Some of my friends were among them with their dolled-up wives, but this time they didn't even look at my door. One day, my wife looked at me really closely just after she came home. She stared at the way I walked, sat, drank tea, and ate my food. When I went to the bathroom she even checked in on me after I finished. After our son was asleep, she came close and said:

"Tursun, tell me the truth. How have you been feeling recently? Do you see strange things?"

"What are you talking about? Don't you know my character? What should I be seeing with my eyes? Still that cow story? Just drop it. I'll just pretend I didn't see anything."

"I believe you about the cow, but... Some people are saying that you have been talking and laughing to yourself. 'No wonder he sees cows out of nowhere.' Don't scare me, just tell me the truth...."

"Idiot. If I were in that condition, how could I talk to you like this? Don't give me a headache. The people who say these things are insane themselves."

"Even if you say so, Mrs. Patemkhan has already ruined your reputation. She's been saying: 'Tursun has become a babbling idiot, laughing to himself and purring like a cat.' You..."

"Do people believe anything that woman says?"

"Her husband and Dolet-aka and others are behind her. Do you think people should believe you instead of her?"

When we went to bed my wife cried for a while: "What am I supposed to do if you've become ill? Our son is still small."

* * *

During these days I became sympathetic with those who are mentally unstable. It seems like most of them became ill because of the evils of other people. I wondered how words like "crazy," "lost," or "insane" spread as quickly as the wind. Is this the result of the Information Age? These labels deprive a person of their basic human dignity and rights. People will run away from you, wink and giggle even if you speak normally; obscene, indecent people try to play you like a monkey. They judge you irresponsibly, believe in every accusation, and spread them at high speed, trying to get some joy out of their boredom. They try to maintain their mental balance at the cost of others' misfortune. These kinds of people take others' lives without spilling a drop of blood; this kind of irresponsibility, this kind of disgrace to the dignity of human life, never gets punished by the law. It's surprising. Why does no one among these people say: "Is that really true?"

When I thought about it, a person who was famous for his talent and decency came to my mind. He couldn't live among people who threw around such accusations and he passed away in sorrow. Another artist became a victim of scandals and spent half of his life in a mental hospital. There are many such examples. Realizing this, perhaps the greatest historical weakness of humanity is that sly and evil people are often able to hurt honest, decent people. The fact that I'm not the first or last decent person to get hurt was a great relief.

* * *

My uncle unexpectedly came from our village:

"I came to see you. During these past few days I dreamt about my sister a lot, and I was worried about you," he said.

But I knew well that my uncle wasn't the kind of person who came to visit someone because he was worried. My uncle was still who he always was. The only difference was last time he wore a black and white *doppa*, but this time he wore an emerald green *doppa*.²¹ Last time he was wearing an old yellow waistcoat, but this time a gray coat.

The wrinkles on his bronze face had grown and deepened. His red eyes had begun to droop. My uncle had been through a lot. He didn't look at me closely and didn't boast about his rich sons in front of me. Maybe he really missed me, or the years had bent both his body and spirit. An expression of pity and condescension appeared on his face just once. Except for times when he was talking with my wife in the kitchen, he went wandering in the bazaar. Every night he sat on the cushions, put his *doppa* on his knee and rubbed his hairless head, saying:

"Oh my God, Ürümqi looks like a big animal, who keeps growing bigger every day. The height of the buildings, the number of cars, people flowing like ants.... Every day at noon these ants come out of the big buildings and rush to the high-class restaurants at the top and foot of the buildings. They fill them all up and won't stop, as if they are going to eat up the whole world...." he said. "When you see that you know there's still enough food for people in the world."

He compared the small cities in the south with Ürümqi, the farmers and the people who are living here, and said: "All of the wealth in Xinjiang is in Ürümqi. That's why old people want to come here...."

A week into my uncle's stay, he told me the truth one evening. After hearing the news that I had gone insane from someone who had gone to see his relatives in the south, my relatives were upset. They asked him to come see me on their behalf and see if it was necessary to take me back to my home village to get well. But he was relieved to see nothing unusual in what I said or in my mentality. That night we talked for a long time. My uncle listened to what I said intently, and said:

"We can fix this, it's really simple, we just give their own words back to them. One night you and I will go to the leader's apartment. We'll take your neighbor with us. I'll apologize to them and say that Tursun hasn't been feeling well for the past few weeks, so he said some things that made

²¹ A skull cap worn by older men in the region.

you angry. Now he's well and is really embarrassed. Accept our apology. All it will cost you is the title 'crazy' and things will get fixed right away."

"What, do I really need to call myself 'crazy'? I'm not crazy. They are." I jumped to my feet angrily.

"Tursun, my child, you don't have anyone who can watch your back in this city. Anyway, whether good or bad, your leader is your father and also your mother. When something comes up he the one who will be on your side. You can't live like this, struggling with these people. Now you have become a madman in their words, what will happen if it continues? Think about your child..."

"Will Dolet-aka do something to him over this tiny thing? Compared to the things that he's doing, this is just..."

"That is hard to tell."

After my uncle mentioned my son, I remembered that recently sometimes my boy's clothes were torn in places and that he had gotten some scratches here and there on his body. I involuntarily took a deep breath and remained silent.

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Everything, everything, even the result, was exactly as my uncle had said. The doors of my neighbors were opened, so were their faces. At one wedding Dolet-aka came up to me and said:

"Hey man, do you see cows now?" Everyone at the wedding burst into laughter. After that my name became "Cow Tursun." Then people started greeting me with a smile, just like they used to and asked me if I was better now. My friends said "Come on, Cow, let's lean on the counter and drink a couple shots." My uncle talked about his son's and his grandson's business and prepared to go back home. The night before his departure, we talked for a long time. He asked me about Sopi-aka, who he had become friends with the last time he visited. I told him that after his job transfer I saw him just once, and I heard that after his retirement he actually became a sufi. My uncle laughed. I also told him about the things that happened after he had said his "one word." My uncle listened carefully and in the end:

"Hey Tursun... Your wife is right. You never grew up. Even the animals don't do things that will hurt them. Now you have become an adult. Try

to think before you speak. Don't be so honest and naïve. 'The things in this world are just nine colors and one war.'"²²

"We say this and that, Uncle, but if you had gone to school and worked in a place like Ürümchi you could have made a really good life for yourself." When I said this, he replied:

"I won't chase after empty dreams like you. If I did, I'd become a leader."

While he was saying that, prickling sparks glowed in his eyes.

My uncle went back home. It seemed like everything was in order. I would laugh at the jokes of others, but in my eyes they seemed like a bunch of clones who were stamped out in the same factory. They didn't seem to think about anything except things that would benefit themselves. They were without morality and empathy. I would drink with my friends and make jokes, but, from my perspective, they were just two-faced bastards: young trunks who had rotted away in their youth (I myself am one of them, of course).

I was alone among people. I missed the times when I had been alienated. Sorrowful, but pure. Disgraced, but full of feeling—like a philosopher. Once, unexpectedly, tears came to my eyes. A salty tear drop fell into my mouth from my cheek. That was in a restaurant. People heady with alcohol were dancing up and down along with the noisy, crazy music. Under those pulsing lights the dancers gave a person the feeling that they were moving on the command of a remote control.

Ürümchi, September 2015

UYGHUR AVANT-GARDE POETRY

The 1980s were a time of intellectual and cultural ferment throughout China. As the hyper-politicized environment of the Mao years gave way to Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening policies, long-suppressed creative energies were released in a remarkable blossoming of arts and ideas. Nowhere was this more true than in the literary sphere, where writers and poets could now draw inspiration from a rapidly expanding set of resources. In multiple languages of China—Mandarin, Uyghur, Tibetan—political liberalization meant the widespread republication of works that

²² A Uyghur saying, meaning that out of ten political strategies nine (the colors in the meaning of flags) are various bluffs or maneuvers, whereas only one is actually war. The saying is similar to the English "keep your cards close to your chest."

had been banned and burned during the Mao era. Traditionalists worked to reconnect to literary lineages battered by high Maoism, while translators introduced China's readers to a world of literature largely unavailable during the preceding decades. Translations of modernist and postmodern literature played a particularly generative role. For a generation of young writers and poets eager to escape the stifling conformity of the collective era, these translations were more than a breath of fresh air: they were a hurricane of new ideas. Well known by now in the West are the Chinese-language modernists whose poetry in the late 1970s and the 1980s was often closely linked with political reformism, a trend that culminated in the possibility and the tragedy of Tiananmen in 1989.

Less well known but equally impressive was the profusion of avant-garde poetry in the Uyghur community. The canonical beginning of this movement came in 1986, when Ekhmetjan Osman (1964–), fresh from several years' study abroad in Syria, burst onto the Uyghur literary scene with a series of striking modernist poems—perhaps most famously, the exquisitely concise “Traitor Mountains”:

Where...

Is...

My...

Echo...

In the years that followed, numerous Uyghur poets—predominantly young ones—began composing avant-garde verse, with some of the more abstract work built around cryptic internal lexicons. An outstanding example is Ekhmetjan Osman's “I Have Sent Darkness in Your Wake” (2004), which addresses the poet's literary predecessors and successors through powerfully evocative metaphor.

Other poets used the lyrical flexibility of the avant-garde to express their inner experiences of life and history. Tahir Hamut Izgil's (1969–) “Returning to Kashgar” (1998) employs quotidian images to relate the poet's emotional state as he prepared to emerge from 3 years' of internment as a political prisoner. In “Burning Wheat” (2004), Perhat Tursun (1969–) weaves a defiant manifesto out of scenes ranging from the criminal to the cosmic. (The poem most likely refers to the controversy surrounding his postmodern novel *The Art of Suicide* [1999], which dealt frankly with issues of sexuality, suicide, and mental illness and was attacked by critics as sacrilegious.)

Some contemporary Uyghur poets have drawn from the avant-garde as well as more established poetic forms. Ghojimuhammed Muhemmed (1971–2018) was one of the most gifted and prolific Uyghur poets of his generation, with thousands of poems to his name and a literary range rivaled by few poets in any language, extending from neoclassicist stylings to modernist provocations. “Chronicle of an Execution” (n.d.) is recognizable in theme to readers across cultures, but skillfully employs the resources of the Uyghur language to build momentum as the poem charges forward toward the hangman’s noose and the condemned man’s final thoughts.

As the twenty-first century began, a rising generation of Uyghur avant-garde poets explored new reaches of poetic possibility, as brilliantly exemplified in Merdan Ehet’éli’s (1991–) “Common Night” (2013), which unifies a startling range of images and concepts around its central nocturnal motif. Many poets in Merdan Ehet’éli’s cohort first became known through online publications and later through social media, with some bypassing print publication entirely.

Uyghur avant-garde poetry was still lively and inventive in spring 2017, when the political walls began rapidly closing in. That spring, the Chinese government began targeting Muslim citizens in a campaign of mass internment; ultimately, more than a million Uyghurs were swept into a vast network of internment camps. Among them were innumerable intellectuals and cultural figures: poets, professors, novelists, editors, and translators. To avoid near-certain arrest, Tahir Hamut Izgil fled into exile; Merdan Ehet’éli, who had been studying abroad, was unable to return home. Ekhmetjan Osman had gone into exile much earlier. Perhat Tursun was arrested in early 2018, and ultimately sentenced to 16 years in prison. The publication of Ghojimuhammed Muhemmed’s complete works was halted in 2017, as Uyghur books were banned en masse; the poet died of heart failure the following year.

Yet amid the destruction of their homeland, Uyghur poets in exile have continued to pursue their craft. Izgil, writing from the United States, has emerged as a major voice of the Uyghur diaspora, while Uyghur poets in Turkey have gained increasing prominence: notably, Muyesser Abdul’ehed Hendan, Abide Abbas Nesrin, Abdukhebir Qadir Erkan, and Imran Sada’i, each of whom has drawn on the resources of the avant-garde to grapple with themes both collective and individual. They are among the numerous diaspora Uyghurs who are determined that their language and culture will thrive against all odds. A year after fleeing his

homeland, Izgil spoke for many when he declared, “Besieged by these discolored words / within all these disordered moments / the target on my forehead / could not bring me to my knees.”

Joshua L. Freeman²³

I Have Sent Darkness in Your Wake

Ekhmetjan Osman

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

You who have never come of age
or faced the talons of desire,
and on a wind of inky distances
daydream your lives away!
Oh my ancestors...
And you who will live after me!

Oh flowers
that open on night's branches
and bear no fruit!

Oh you on whose faces
the past weaves its luminous web!
You who stand firm
like a hidden door receding into eternity!
Your feet are bleeding thresholds.

Even with no address
I received the letter that you sent
and in hopes of finding you
I have sent darkness in your wake.

2004

²³ Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

Returning to Kashgar

Tahir Hamut Izgil

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

Watching the mysterious unknown figure of Kashgar
 I shudder in dread of glorious nights.
 Girls that have married, friends that have died, a dry spring.
 Eyes are a pinch of earth that has vanished from the land:
 a television, cheap tobacco, dirty socks, the original of a translation.
 The green bridge and the greengrocer market are dim in my memory,
 I lie stretched out like a boneless animal,
 my stomach is hungry, my face is dark, my heart is empty!
 But in far Ürümqi someone chews an icy stone,
 her eyes, her face are damp; sin before her, and God behind.
 Clear steam rises from sugared cornmeal gruel,
 sparrows step slowly along the power lines,
 in the low sky a frightening heaviness.
 Mournful elders, wayward youths, eager children,
 in just three years all have grown old and ugly.
 Kashgar—the moment between eyebrow and eyelash,
 paper stuck to the face of the sun, eternal black ink,
 a festering old wound, pathetic love.

But you
 balled up wind and threw it at the sky,
 then you looked at me,
 rain drips from a coin-sized hole in our thoughts.

March 1998, Kashgar

Burning Wheat

Perhat Tursun

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

I am that comet you all have cursed,
 in the dark void drifting aimless and unsettled.
 Love me like an avenger's lost

last chance at revenge.

I am that person whose shadow was carved on the tree,
and from that day on taken for dead.
Love me like the wild dreams that burn
in a killer's manic mind.

I am that wheat that Heaven too has singed,
that shivers even in dog day sunlight.
Love me like a masochist.
Like you cherish reason when besieged by the irrational.

I am that wolf whose cold bones glimmer in the witch doctor's hand.
To soil, to air, to flame, to water I will scatter like a spell.
Love me like miracles not seen even when sun and moon align
in the sixth degree under the sign of the ram.

August 25, 2004, Ürümchi

Chronicle of An Execution

Ghojimuhemmed Muhemmed

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

A drop of sky from Paradise streams
A bud from the bonfires on Hell's branches
A bundle of black rocks in the heart
Grateful gifts for the verses that flow toward the moon
A page of the epics where heroes lie buried
The past that advances shouting Charge!
The odes sung by souls entering and leaving
to doors opening and doors closing
Distant graves drawing ever closer
Girls never seen twice and beds seen many times
Water in the blood, bread in the flesh, vows in the bone
A sword striking a head, a noose lain round a neck, bullets into the chest
And what comes before his eyes in the final breath
is a chain called homeland, an enemy called his people

And the beautiful life for which he longed
is the flower garden he has laid waste

n.d.

Common Night

Merdan Ehet'éli

Translated by Joshua L. Freeman

This is a night made from words.
This is a night poured like cast iron into our spines.
This is a night that lodges us in slippers and in the bedrooms we keep
within books.
This is a night that makes our noses shed hellfruit leaves.
This is a night for us to make merry with lovers in illusory castles.
This is a spring night that softly grasses our daily footprints on prayer rugs
and constantly weighs down our eyes.
This is a celestial night that makes the promising into the probable.
This is a mother night that suckles death verses.
This is a night that no elegy, ode, rain, or beam of light shall ever reach.
This is a hungry night,
this is a naked night.
This is a night far from Satan and from God.
This is a night that calls to mind
the darkness of the womb
the vague cries of infancy
the solo games of adolescence
the first love of youth
the sudden futility of adulthood
the grim dusk of old age
the terror before death.
This is a night that patiently waits
to seep from our pores
and seize our whole body
as we cast off from shore.
This night is a sky for all buildings, shadows, traditions, betrayals, revolutions,
mattresses, bats, novels, songs, pictures, journeys, murders, and
smokable substances.
This night is ink to all pens.
This night is bosom to all secrets.

This night is the Antichrist whose tongue drags along the land of history.
This night is the mud that sticks to our shoes as we walk in the forest of
meaning.

This is a night that shatters Noah's ship and makes traps of its decks.
This is a night that takes all we have, hands it over to the only one who
speaks, and quietly walks on.

2013

NOTES ON SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

1. For more on Russophone literature in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see Friess (2019), Koplatadze (2019), and Melnikov (2021).
2. The translators worked from a version of Zulfiya, "Shards of memory," first published in 2015 (Zulfiya 2015). It is unclear where the work first appeared. The translators wish to express their gratitude to Atabek Alimdjano and his family for their permission to publish the translation. Isajon Sulton's "Destination" first appeared in the newspaper *Vatan* in 1994, but the author could not recall the precise date. The translator worked from a collection of the author's stories (Sulton 1995). The translator expresses her gratitude to Isajon Sulton for his permission to publish the translation.
3. Shamshad Abdullaev's poems "Family" and "Doubled Midday" were both translated by Alex Cigale, who kindly permitted their republication here. "Family" first appeared in *Words Without Borders* in 2017, and "Doubled Midday" was published in *Plume* in 2015 (Abdullaev 2015, 2017). The editors would like to thank Alex Cigale for his translation and Daniel Lawless and Plume Poetry for granting permission to republish the translation here. Hamid Ismailov and Richard McKane's translation of Ismailov's "Lovers in Samarkand" first appeared in *Words Without Borders* in 2012 (Ismailov 2012). Ismailov and McKane kindly permitted the republication of their translation of Ismailov's work here. Sandzhar Yanyshiev's poem "Tashkent as a Mirror" was published in 2001 in the first volume of the Tashkent School poetry anthology *Minor Silk Road* (*Malyi shelkovoi put'*) (Yanyshiev 2001). Sukhbat Aflatuni (the pen name of Evgenii Abdullaev) poem "The Kitchen, Before Plov" was published in *Arion* in 2003; "Return of Nasraddin" in *Jerusalem Journal* (*Ierusalimskii zhurnal*) in 2006 (Aflatuni 2003, 2006).

Vadim Muratkhanov's poem "Homeland" originally appeared in 2002 in the third volume of the Tashkent School poetry anthology *Minor Silk Road (Malyi shelkovoi put')* (Muratkhanov 2002). "Bor-sok" was published in *Novyi Mir* in 2013 (Muratkhanov 2013). The translators and editors would like to thank Sandzhar Yanyshv, Sukhbat Aflatuni, and Vadim Murakhanov for allowing their poems to be translated and published in this anthology. Yuriy Serebriansky's "The Golden Eagle" and "Apples" first appeared in the Russian journal *Druzhba narodov* in 2016 (Serebrianskii 2017). These two stories and "Where did the Aral Sea Go?" were published as a book the following year (Serebrianskii 2017). Sarah McEleney's translation of "The Golden Eagle" was initially published by the American literary journal *Barzakh* in 2019 (Serebriansky 2019). The translator would like to thank Yuriy Serebriansky for his permission to publish these translations and to thank *Barzakh* for permission to republish "The Golden Eagle."

4. For Perhat Tursun's "Plato's shovel," the translators worked from the version of the text published online in Tursun (2013). For Halide Israel, "There Are No Cows in the City," the translators worked from a manuscript version of the story that, to their knowledge, has not been published. The translators and editors would like to thank the World Uyghur Writers Congress for their authorization of these translations and publications.
5. The translation of Ekhmetjan Osman's "I Have Sent the Darkness in Your Wake" was previously published in an article in *The Guardian* (Freeman 2020). The translation of Tahir Hamut Izgil's "Returning to Kashgar" was previously published in the literary journal *Gulf Coast* (Hamut 2012). An earlier version of the translation of Perhat Tursun's "Burning Wheat" was published in *The Harvard Advocate* (Tursun 2016). The translation of Ghojimuhammed Muhemmed's "Chronicle of an Execution" was previously published in *Words Without Borders* (Muhemmed 2016). The translation of Merdan Ehet'eli's "Common Night" was previously published in the journal *Asymptote* (Ehet'eli 2015). The editors would like to thank the translator, Joshua L. Freeman, for his permission to republish his translations here, the Harvard Advocate for their permission to republish Tursun's poem, and to extend their thanks to Ekhmetjan Osman, Merdan Ehet'eli, Tahir Hamut Izgil, Perhat Tursun, and Ghojimuhammed Muhemmed for their poetry.

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INDEX

A

Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale types, 28
Afro-Asian Writers Conference, 129
Afro-Asian Writers' Association, 382,
391

B

Bayaz, 138

C

Caucasus, 102, 111, 112
and the Jadids, 156
and Soviet power, 365

Central Asia

definitions of, 3
and Russian literature, 3

Colonialism

Bolshevik anti-colonial poetry, 213
and memoir, 121
and native intellectuals, 111
and Soviet cultural diplomacy, 130

G

Ganjavi, Nizami
and the ghazal tradition, 101
Gender, 28
and collectivization, 318
and Jadids, 217
and oral duels, 78
and poetic performance, 128
and pre-revolutionary women
writers, 121, 128
and socialist realism, 409
and Soviet drama, 218
and Soviet women's journals, 317
and the Thaw, 408
unveiling, 317

J

Jadids

in the Caucasus, 155
and gender, 103, 217
and Islam, 142
and literature, 6
and lyric poetry, 138
and newspapers, 135

and poetic meter, 104
 and satire, 155, 217, 333
 and Soviet literature, 217, 321,
 333, 339
 and Soviet power, 211
 and Turkism, 142
 and *usul-i-jadid*, 103, 134

K

Khoqand
 and the sack of Uratepe, 121

M

Manas, 13
 Manuscript culture, 5
 and oral tradition, 12, 14
 and print culture, 138
 and the Soviet era, 210
 and Uyghur literary culture, 357
 and women, 129

Meter

'aruz, 104, 129, 317, 408
barmaq, 104
barmog, 317, 408
bazaj mahzuf, 139
bazaj salim musamman, 138
ramal mahzuf musaddas, 408

N

Nasreddin (Hoja or Molla), 154–156
Nazira, 105

P

Persian, 212
 classical literature, 2, 12, 101, 103,
 104
 classical poetry and Soviet poetics,
 212

language and the Jadids, 135, 138,
 141, 155
 and post-Soviet literature, 443, 445
 and Soviet literature, 212, 213,
 317, 351, 357, 383, 405, 408
 Spring poetry, 350
 Printing, 6
 and the Jadids, 135
 and lithography, 102
 Soviet women's journals, 317
 and Uyghur literature, 357
 Pushkin, Alexander
 and Orientalism, 111

Q

Qasymuly, Kenesary, 14
 and oral literature, 59

R

Radloff, Wilhelm, 13, 27
 and folktales, 27
 and oral narrative poetry, 58
 Romances, 59
 Russian
 and colonial writers, 112
 and the Jadids, 6
 literature and Central Asia, 3
 and post-Soviet literature, 7, 444,
 462
 and post-WWII literature, 365
 and Uyghur literature, 6, 357
 and Uzbek literature, 333, 350

S

Shahnameh, 24
 Socialist Realism, 211, 351
 and Afghan literature, 405
 and gender, 409
 Soviet
 anti-colonialism, 430

cultural diplomacy, 366, 382, 390,
408, 430
deportations, 366
and the historical novel, 431
and space flight, 430
Stalin, Joseph, 7
and Central Asian literature, 212
and the Great Terror, 211, 321,
339, 367
and the Thaw, 367
Persianate poetry, 351
Sufi poetry, 15, 24, 29
and women's rituals, 29
Sufism
and post-Soviet literature, 446

T

Thaw, the, 366
and Afghanistan, 405
and the Great Terror, 367
and private life, 408
Tulips, 21
history of, 3
and the poetry of Ghafur Ghulom,
411
and the poetry of Mirza
Tursunzada, 355
and the poetry of Oydin, 319
and the poetry of Payrav Sulaymani,
352
and Sadriddin Ayni, 110
and Stalinist spring poetry, 4
Turkic

Chaghatai, 101, 104
and Jadid writing, 103, 138, 142,
156
and meter, 104, 294, 357, 408
and Soviet modernity, 213
and Soviet poetry, 2
vernacularization, 104

U

Uyghur(s)
Cultural Revolution, 28
and the Cultural Revolution, 358
and the Eastern Turkistan
Republic, 358
and the fantastic, 473
and literary modernism, 472, 499
and repression, 472, 500
and Russian poetry, 357
and Urumqi riots, 444

W

Walikhanov, Shoqan, 102
World War II
and literature, 365
and Soviet deportations, 365

X

Xinjiang, 4, 7, 356–358
and *aitys* poetry, 97
and folktales, 27
and Sufism, 15, 29