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ABAI KUNANBAYEV



SELECTED POEMS

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*To Mark the 125th Anniversary
of His Birth*



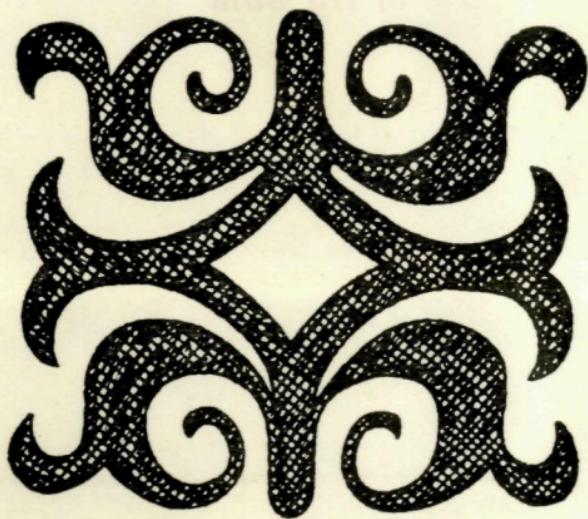
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ABAI KUNANBAYEV



SELECTED POEMS

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Translated from the Russian
Designed by VICTOR CHISTYAKOV

Абай Кунанбаев «Стихи и поэмы»

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ABAI KUNANBAYEV

(1845-1904)

Look deep into your soul and
ponder on my words:
To you I am a puzzle, my person
and my verse.
My life has been a struggle, a
thousand foes I braved,
Don't judge me too severely—for
you the way I paved.

Abai

Abai addressed these heartfelt lines to the generations to come, to his countrymen for whom he strove to pave the way to a more enlightened, better life. He carried his poetry like a burning torch through the gloom of ignorance and prejudice that enveloped the Kazakh steppes, revealing new horizons to his people and the promise of a new dawn.

To his milieu he was a puzzle. But to us he is very clearly the luminary of Kazakh literature, the light of Kazakh poetry. Now that Kazakhstan has acquired statehood, and the Kazakhs—their proud national identity, Abai has found appreciative and enlightened readers where once he was denied understanding. He is read and admired by all the peoples of our great socialist state.

"Don't judge me too severely," he begged. Far from judging him, Soviet people in their thousands and millions revere the memory of this outstanding poet.

It is 109 years since Abai's birth, and 50 since his death.* But if the road chosen by a poet is the road followed by his people, he does not die.

* * *

In our story of Abai, told objectively and truthfully, we pay a tribute to the memory of this poet who chose to share the thoughts, cares, struggle and suffering of his people.

The great Kazakh poet was born in 1845 into the nomadic clan of Tobykty, in the Chinghis Mountains in Semipalatinsk Region.

His father, Kunanbai, a stern and wilful steppe ruler, was an elder of the Tobykty clan.

Abai's childhood years passed in the oppressive atmosphere of discord which generally prevailed in

* This article was written in Russian by Mukhtar Auezov in 1954, for the 50th anniversary of Abai's death.—*Ed.*

polygamous families. Kunanbai, it must be said, had four wives. The children were always quarrelling among themselves, as did their mothers, the rival-wives. Luckily, Abai's mother Ulzhan was a wonderful woman, and with her innate reserve, tolerance, and soundness of reasoning, she managed to make a real home for her son in those conditions, which was a rare thing in such families. Ulzhan loved him best of all her children, and affectionately called him Abai (which means thoughtful, circumspect) instead of Ibraghim—the name given the boy by his father. And Abai he remained for the rest of his life.

Ulzhan and her son, living as they did in unspoken alienation from Kunanbai, found moral support in Zere, Abai's paternal grandmother. This wise and kind old woman, who had herself tasted the full measure of a righteous wife's plight, pinned all her hopes on her grandson who was the apple of her eye. There was a world of difference between the gentle upbringing and the loving care lavished on the boy by these two women and the harsh treatment he was given by his father, and the child's soul was therefore not allowed to shrivel in the rigorously cold climate in which it was doomed to develop.

Abai was first taught at home by a hired mullah, and then his father took him to Semipalatinsk and placed him in the Ahmet-Riza madrasah. A diligent and extremely gifted boy, Abai learnt a great deal in the five years he was there. The other pupils, mostly overage and much older than Abai, spent all their waking hours cramming verses from the Koran which they did not understand, praying, fasting, and carrying on endless and stultifying debates over the letter of the Shariat. As for Abai, he had other interests besides mastering the wisdom of the Arabic scholastic teaching on the dogmas of the Islam. Poetry had already taken possession of his heart and mind. He had felt the first stirrings of this predilection when he was a little boy listening to Zere's stories. When he grew a bit older he tried to memorise the tales, legends, heroic sagas and historical songs recited in the village by the folk bards. Finding himself in the stifling atmosphere of the madrasah, Abai sought relief in the classical and popular literature of the Orient—a blessed oasis in a stark desert. While interested in Oriental languages, he felt a desire to learn Russian as well and to know more about Russian culture. And so, defying the strict rules of the madrasah, he started attending classes at the local Russian school, asking permission of none.

Abai began writing poetry while still at the madrasah. Among the few of these early attempts which have survived we find lyrical fragments, epistles and love poems obviously written under the influence of

classical Oriental poetry, and also some impromptu verses composed in the manner of the *akyns*.*

Being a serious and diligent pupil, Abai could have derived much benefit for himself as a future poet from even the little education the madrasah had to offer. But Kunanbai had different plans for his son.

In the continual struggle for power over the clan which the Kazakh elite was engaged in, Kunanbai made plenty of enemies among his rivals and he felt he had to train his sons and nearest relatives to carry on with the fight. And so he did not let Abai finish his course of study at the madrasah, but ordered him back to the village instead, where he drew him into the investigation of lawsuits and coached him in the duties and administrative functions of a future head of the clan.

Very soon Abai found himself involved in a tangle of intrigues. Since he had to deal with men experienced in clan feuds, he learnt the techniques of verbal tournament—a subtle art which called for eloquence, wit and resourcefulness. The cases were decided not by the tsarist court, but by the Kazakhs' common law which had existed for centuries, and in order to carry or disprove a point a man had to be perfectly versed in Kazakh oral lore. Abai soon earned the reputation of a brilliant, witty orator, and as he further polished his speaking skill he gained an even higher appreciation of the impact of poetic speech. Whereas Kunanbai and the men of his set quoted only the sayings and aphorisms of their ancestors, the clan elders, Abai was able to cite poets and *akyns* whose *aitysses*, or public poetic competitions, he always made a point of attending.

Abai's first imitative verses were inspired by his youthful infatuation with the classic poets of the Orient. As he imbued the traditions of folk Kazakh poetry, his work became more mature and original, and in these verses we can already see the individuality of the future poet taking shape.

According to many of his contemporaries Abai began to write poetry—impromptu verses and epistles—when he was only twelve years old. However, very little of this early work has survived—a few verses and references to other forgotten and lost poems. There are the opening lines of his poem dedicated to Togzhan, the girl he loved, and a prose account of the *aityss* in which the young Abai competed with Kuandyk, a girl *akyn*. His earliest verses might have been discovered and more details of his life might have been learnt from letters, memoirs and recollections of his contemporaries, but the written language was so poorly developed in

* *Akyn*—a folk bard.—Ed.

Kazakhstan that there are simply none. Another factor of no little importance in this lack of material was the general attitude to Abai taken by the *bais*,^{*} an attitude typical for the whole of that feudal set-up. While the ordinary people were full of admiration and respect for the *akyns*, the family-proud *bais* were wont to say with smug arrogance: "Allah be thanked, we've never had a *baksy* or an *akyn* in our clan." This scathing attitude to professional poets explains why none of Abai's early verses, or even recollections of his appearance on the poetic scene, have survived in his native parts. Abai himself was influenced by this disrespect for poets, and often passed off his poetry for something written by his young friends.

Drawn against his will into the family feuds and litigations, Abai refused to connive in his father's ruthlessness and injustice, and very often went against Kunanbai's wishes and interests by taking a fair and unbiased stand in settling various disputes. His son's new-fangled notions irritated old Kunanbai terribly: it annoyed him that Abai sought his friends and advisers among the common folk, and that he showed such admiration for Russian culture. Arguments flared up more and more often between the wily, masterful father and the truth-loving, recalcitrant son, and their clashes threatened to end in a complete rupture. Abai was 28 when it did finally happen.

Now he was free to do what he wished with his life. The first thing he did was resume his studies of Russian, which he had not been able to do since his madrasah days.

He made new friends among the *akyns*, the gifted young Kazakhs, usually not very high-born, and the Russian intellectuals he met in Semipalatinsk. He was 34 years old when he took up poetry again, but he still circulated it as the work of his young friends. Abai, already an educated man, spent the next ten or twenty years studying Kazakh folk art, Oriental poets, and Russian classical literature. And only in the summer of 1886, when he was already 40, did he venture to sign his new, splendid poem "Summer" with his own name. From that day his poetic career seemed to acquire new impetus, and the remaining twenty years of his life were extremely prolific.

With life experience came complete disillusionment in the morals and the entire moral code of the world of feudal laws and clan rule, and Abai tried to break away from it and sever all his ties with that milieu. Having been made an unwilling party to those endless feuds between the clans in his youth, he now clearly

* *Bai*—landlord, reach peasant.—Ed.

saw the harm done by these feuds to the interests of the people, and began to understand the true purpose of the animosity between the clans artificially fanned by the tsarist authorities in pursuit of their policy to "divide and rule". He now saw the *biys** and elders as the colonialists' placemen. Abai wondered dismally about the destinies of his people, and the thought of the ignorant, oppressed and rightless masses tormented him. The verses written in his mature years are full of grief for the tragic plight of a backward people.

In the very first poems written in the period of his new maturity, Abai endeavoured to show his countrymen the real causes of their sufferings. In his sincere and trenchant verses he exposed and condemned the vices of the clan elite, the feudal lords and the officials, and urged the masses to seek enlightenment which alone could show them the way to a new and better life.

By a happy chance, Abai made the acquaintance of some Russian revolutionaries who had been exiled to Kazakhstan in the 1870s and 1880s. They were intellectuals who upheld the revolutionary-democratic ideas of Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov. One of them, Y. P. Mikhaelis, was the closest associate and the most active helper of Shchelgunov, a well-known Russian revolutionary writer, and was actually a relative of his. Mikhaelis was quite young when he came to Semipalatinsk, more or less the same age as were Leontiev and the other revolutionaries who were exiled there later.

Abai's acquaintance with these people soon developed into real friendship. In the summer they came to his village as his guests, and in the winter Abai maintained a regular correspondence with them. These Russian intellectuals helped Abai in his self-education; they selected his reading for him and answered his questions.

The exiles studied the life, conditions and geography of the country that had become their home, and developed as publicists and sociologists. They became the first disseminators of culture in this backward land, zealously promoting education and a more enlightened way of life. They looked upon enlightenment as an essential weapon in the struggle against the existing regime. They considered it their primary duty to acquaint people like Abai with the Russian classical heritage, with progressive Russian writers, and Russian culture in general.

Abai became an ardent champion of friendship and brotherhood between the two national cultures, convinced that this was the only way of rescuing his people

* *Biy*—a judge.—*Ed.*

from the age-old slough of ignorance. In his poetry he tried to explain to the Kazakhs that the Russian people were one thing and the tsarist officials quite another.

Abai's Russian friends, while helping him to acquire knowledge, also learnt a great deal from him, for Abai was extremely well versed in the history, common law, poetry, art, economy and the social system of many peoples related to the Kazakhs.

Abai held the Russian progressives in profound esteem and shared in their ideals, since their striving for a spiritual liberation of the peoples of Russia from oppression and shackling ignorance was the cause he himself was championing in his own country.

He loved Pushkin, Lermontov, Krylov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Tolstoi, and after that memorable summer of 1886 when he openly embarked on his poetic career Abai started translating Krylov, Pushkin and Lermontov into Kazakh, acquainting his countrymen for the first time with these great writers.

Having an excellent knowledge and understanding of Kazakh folk music, Abai composed several melodies for those of his verses, primarily, whose form had never been used in Kazakh poetry before (octaves, sextants, etc.). He also wrote music for his translations from *Eugene Onegin*.

By this time the name of Abai himself—poet thinker and composer—had earned countrywide popularity and esteem. *Akyns*, composers and singers came from all over Kazakhstan to see him and learn from him. Some of them following Abai's own example, assiduously educated themselves. They studied Russian literature and wrote historical and romantic poems.

Abai's popularity was a magnet that attracted not only the Kazakhs, but also many other free-thinking people of the Eastern world (mainly, young Tatars), people who had been forced to leave home to escape the persecution of the authorities, and exiles from the Caucasus. These last were fugitives from Siberian hard-labour camps making their way home through the steppes of Kazakhstan, and they stayed for months in Abai's village. Little by little, this village became the centre where all the progressive-minded people of the time converged.

Abai's close friendship with the exiled revolutionaries worried the local authorities. When a report on Abai, in which he was described as a menace to tsarism, reached the military governor in Semipalatinsk and the governor-general of the Steppeland region, he was put under secret surveillance. The local police and administration watched his every step and sent in regular reports on this dangerous character who boldly exposed the vices of the existing order and enjoyed enormous prestige.

Meanwhile, the number of Abai's admirers grew with every year. His influence now spread to the towns as well. His verses, and those of his friends, were learnt by heart and his songs were sung. The plots of the novels by Russian and Western authors which Abai had read and narrated to his listeners were passed around in their oral rendering. Among the more popular narratives were Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* and *Henry of Navarre*, a Russian folk legend about Peter the Great, Le Sage's *Le Diable boiteux* (which went under the title of *The Lame Frenchman*), novels about the pioneers of the American West, Lermontov's poems, and numerous Eastern poems: "Shah-nameh", "Leili and Mejnun", "Kör-Ogly" and others. Many of Abai's friends who had received a European education followed his example and helped to spread these oral narratives among the Kazakhs.

Abai's own children—his daughter Gulbadan and his sons Abdrahman and Magavya—went to a Russian school in town. Abdrahman was later educated at Mikhailovskoye Artillery Academy in St. Petersburg. Gulbadan and Magavya returned to the village after finishing school only for reasons of poor health.

Both Magavya and his elder brother Akylbai were poets. The work which is generally considered Magavya's best is the poem "Megdag-Kasym" (written on his father's advice) which tells the story of a slave struggling against his owner, a cotton planter in the Nile valley. Akylbai's contribution to literature was the romantic poem "Daghestan".

These poems, like Abai's own works, were circulated among the readers in handwritten copies, and, more popularly still, in the oral rendering of the *akyns*, who also acquainted the Kazakh listeners with their interpretations of Pushkin and Lermontov.

The literary, educational and social work of Abai and his friends was wholly directed against the backwardness, corruption and prejudices of the pillars of the feudal village world, and more concretely against the high-born, ignorant and ruthless local rulers who oppressed the people. In fact, it was aimed against the whole system of tsarism, supported by these *bais* and officials.

Abai's writings, his clear social programme, and his contempt for the powers that be, evoked the rabid hatred of the feudal lords. Acting at one with the high officials and the venal junior-clerk class of intellectuals, they waged war—a dirty war fought by foul means—against Abai personally and the ideas he disseminated. Abai was too popular to be fought openly. And so they used every underhand method they knew. Orazbai, one of the elders and Abai's mortal enemy, rallied those of the rural and urban elite who had a bone to pick with the poet. They hounded Abai's friends, slandered Abai

himself, and finally, in 1897, with the obvious connivance of the authorities, made an attempt on his life. The offices of the governors, the uyezd chiefs and the tsarist courts were cluttered with reports on Abai penned by the clan elders who accused the poet of being "an enemy of the white tsar", of "inciting the people", and of "scorning the customs, rights and conventions established by our fathers and forefathers". Finally, the Semipalatinsk police descended on Abai's village and made a search in his home. And then the chief of the Semipalatinsk police himself brought a whole platoon of gendarmes and had the whole village searched.

The governor of Semipalatinsk also made several attempts to get rid of Abai, but he was afraid of provoking the wrath of the masses and so he did not go beyond isolating him from his exile friends. The authorities examined all the letters addressed to him by friends and readers in remote parts of Kazakhstan, and kept some of them on file.

But they could not isolate Abai from the people. An outspoken and dauntless fighter against the evil doings of the administration, *biys*, clan elders and all the other authorities, Abai earned the reputation of a sage to whom people could turn for counsel in their troubles and misfortunes. Whole clans and tribes from regions far and near sought his advice and begged him to settle their disputes for them, even long-standing land claims and such like cases. Very often he was called in on cases of raids and murder involving different regions, too baffling for the authorities to solve. These cases were tried at specially convened large meetings, called "extraordinary conventions", where decisions were passed on the payment of damages to the poor peasants who had been victimised, and on the punishment to be meted out to the clan rulers whose endless feuds and intrigues caused the population so much grief and damage.

Abai, who had no official standing, was sometimes elected arbiter. He took on these cases solely to avert more disputes and new raids, and to put the curb on the men who were fanning the feud between the clans to flames.

Abai's public activity and poetry were especially appreciated by the young people. They were always asking the *akyns* to sing Abai's songs at popular gatherings, weddings, ceremonial feasts and funeral banquets. Kazakh young men quoted lines from Abai to tell their sweethearts of their love. When girls in Abai's village got married they usually took away with them to their new home a handwritten collection of his verses, poems and precepts.

His growing fame maddened the envious, ignorant elite, who did everything to poison life for him and

for his friends. No means were too ugly or foul, and the worse they hurt the better. They set Abai's nephews and his brother Takezhan against him, and resorted to threats and slander to drive a wedge into his relations with his own family.

The death of his son Abdrahman, the heir of his cause and a gifted, educated young man, came as a terrible blow to Abai, whose staying power was being so sorely tried by the atmosphere of malice and hatred that was smothering him. Abdrahman had been ill with tuberculosis since his student days in St. Petersburg, and not long after receiving his commission as lieutenant of the field artillery in Verny (now Alma Ata) he died. This was in 1895, and he was only 27 years old.

Abai gave an outlet to his grief in stirring poems that have a tremendous dramatic impact. He mourned his son as a father, and as the defender of the people who had cherished the hope that this young man, brought up in the finest traditions of the Russian democratic, progressive thought, would shape into a staunch fighter. And now hope was gone. He had to fight on alone.

But fate had another blow in store for Abai, who was already shattered by his terrible loss, exhausted by the endless struggle, and hounded by the stupid, spiteful mob of *bais* and clerks. His son Magavya, the gifted poet, also died from tuberculosis.

Utterly crushed and broken in spirit, Abai fell ill. He refused to see the doctor or take any sort of treatment, and died in his village home, surviving his son Magavya only by forty days. Abai was 59.

He was buried close to his home in the Zhidebai valley not far from the Chinghis Mountains.

* * *

The last publication of Abai's literary legacy in Kazakh makes two thick volumes. Included here are his verses, poems, talks with his readers ("Exhortations") and numerous translations—the precious fruit of many long years of reflection and endeavour, inspired by the noblest desires and emotions.

Three great sources fed the work of this wise poet.

One, was the oral and written art of the ancient Kazakhs, an art assimilated by Abai with unerring discrimination to enrich his own poetry.

The second was Tajik, Azerbaijani and Uzbek classical poetry. Interest in the cultures of its neighbour peoples, observable from the beginning of the 19th century, has undoubtedly benefited Kazakh culture.

The third source was Russian and, through it, world literature. In Abai's time, the very tapping of this rich source—especially the great Russian classics who until

then were totally unknown to the Kazakhs—was a major progressive factor. It gave an impetus to the development of Kazakh culture.

Such was Abai's genius and individuality that though he did draw freely from these three sources he kept his talent untainted by imitativeness and never once struck a false note. He organically absorbed the old and the new cultures, while fully retaining his own inimitable personality as an artist and thinker.

By drawing from Western cultures—remote from the Kazakhs and as yet unassimilated by them—Abai enriched his inner world with new ideals, besides enlarging his range of expressive means. Like Pushkin, Abai is international in his ideological and moral concepts, yet he is a profoundly national poet and, indisputably, a poet of the people.

Let us examine more closely the influence which these three main sources had on Abai's writing. Very often, we find these different influences organically blended and interpenetrating, which is natural for the work of a mature poet. Therefore, when dealing with Abai's work we can only speak of these elements as the predominant characteristics of this or that period.

His output of the 1880s is mostly devoted to the mores and manners of a Kazakh village, and the life of his contemporary society. At the same time he makes a serious reassessment of his countrymen's spiritual values and announces his new poetic programme aimed at transforming society. These poems have a strong affinity with national traditions, and yet it is precisely here that we see most clearly how much his poetry differs from folk art.

Abai does not simply follow the canons of national poetic tradition, but expands the vocabulary, the imagery and the stylistic techniques of oral art and peoples it with new thoughts and emotions expressive of his own world outlook. His poetry, first and foremost, voices his disapproval of the existing social order, of village life especially, with its backwardness and obscurantism, with the feuds fought by the corrupt elite, and the hopeless and destitute condition of the working people. A great number of his verses, for instance "Old Age Is Here—Sad Thoughts, Poor Sleep and All", "O My Luckless Kazakh, My Unfortunate Kin", "At Last I'm the Villagers' Head", and "If by Chance in Some Strange Class" ruthlessly stigmatise the ignorance, pettifoggery, venality, parasitism and spiritual poverty of the men who ruled the destinies of the Kazakhs. Abai's novel attitude to the family, to parental duty, to the upbringing of children, and—most important of all—to women, was voiced distinctly in his poetry, and it stemmed from higher moral principles than anything known in Kazakh literature before.

The wretched lot of the women in the East, frequently described in folk poems and songs, is here portrayed from a different angle. Abai reveals the very soul of the woman, her thoughts and feelings, of which so little is said in the old poems where the circumstances of her tragic life are mainly described. Abai shows us that she is capable of truly great love if she chooses her lover herself, and that she can put up a fierce fight if her hard-won happiness is threatened. The Kazakh woman—wife or mother—is the mainstay of the family, Abai says. He glorifies her readiness for self-sacrifice, her wisdom, her loyalty as a friend, and her generous heart. Passionately denouncing such aspects of the Kazakh marital institution as paying bride-money, polygamy and enslavement, he demands equal rights for women.

He lashes out at narrow-mindedness and idleness of the old village, and extols energy, will power and industriousness. He shatters the canons of the didactic poetry that prevailed before his time. In his poetic programme, expressed in "Not for Amusement Do I Write My Verse", and "Poetry, the Queen of Literature, Implies", he sharply criticises his predecessors, the *akyns* Bukhar-jirau, Shartanbai and Dulat, who embodied the reactionary ideology of the feudal khans, and calls their poetry "patchy" and "full of imperfections and faults". What Abai holds against them is that they made no attempt to struggle against backwardness and narrow-mindedness, that they offered the young generation no spiritual nourishment whatsoever and, if anything, deterred progress. And Abai proclaims it the lofty mission of new poetry to serve the people, to promote everything that will help to re-educate and change society for the better. Abai proclaims that only toil and a resolute struggle for their rights will win people independence from the *bais*, and only a stubborn pursuit of knowledge will assure a better life for the next generation. Abai does not preach enlightenment in general terms. The whole pattern of his poetic thinking and his imagery orients Kazakh society to Russian, and via Russian, to world culture. In these poems he reassesses the mainstays of Kazakh society: age-old traditions, common law and the moral code. He declares that a man's worth is measured by his intellectual powers, sincerity, honour, and his useful activity and not by his dumb adherence to threadbare customs and traditions.

Abai preached enlightenment through closer contact with Russian and world culture. He did not believe that the language barrier, the different religions, or the difference in historical development should be obstacles on the road of his own people to progress. He simply swept all these obstacles away! Just learn, assimilate

culture developed over the centuries, wherever this may be! In the name of this great historical task, in the name of enlightenment for his native country, he declared war on all the obsolete principles and lashed out at all the advocates of this backward and moribund philosophy.

* * *

Abai took an attitude peculiarly his own to Oriental poetry, and to the ancient and modern culture of the Middle East.

In his youth the influence of the Orient affected him quite strongly. He read all the Arabic-Persian epic poems and the great Eastern classics Firdausi, Nizami, Saadi, Hafiz, Navoi and Fizuli in the original (and partly in translation into the Chagatai). He imitated these poets and was the first to introduce the "aruz" meter into Kazakh poetry, and also a large number of Arabic-Persian words borrowed from these classics' vocabulary. Later, when he came to regard folk art as the most viable and fruitful source of true poetry he selected his favourites from Oriental literature to be his life companions, and these were: *1001 Nights*, Persian and Turkic folk tales and epic poems. People in the Kazakh steppes came to know and love "Shah-nameh", "Leili and Mejnun" and "Kör-Ogly" in Abai's oral rendering.

The traditions of old Oriental classical poetry are of course discernible throughout his writings, while in his love songs, lyrical meditations and the philosophical poem "Mas'hood" this influence is more manifest. But only as regards form and manner. The ideological content of his poetry, the profound awareness of the life about him, and the "earthly" approach to the material world and to human relations, refute his dependence on any models and testify to his complete originality.

Abai began his acquaintance with Russian culture with Pushkin, Lermontov and Krylov. Later he turned to prose and his favourites among the authors of the 1860s-80s became Lev Tolstoi and Saltykov-Shchedrin. He read Goethe, Byron and other West-European classics in Russian translation, and was sufficiently versed in antique literature as well. He translated some of Goethe's and Byron's poetry into Kazakh from Lermontov's Russian translations.

We know from the recollections of his exile friends (Leontiev and others) that Abai studied Western philosophers, in particular Spencer and Spinoza, and was interested in Darwin's theory.

He took a new approach to translating Russian literature at each new stage of his career. In Krylov he sometimes changed the "moral of the story" and in-

vented his own maxims better suited to the Kazakh way of thinking. Yet Lermontov he translated with meticulous care and fidelity. In craftsmanship, his translations of "The Dagger", "The Gifts of the Terek", "The Sail", "I Walk Into the Night Alone" and fragments from "Demon" remain unsurpassed till this day.

Abai had quite a special feeling for Pushkin, and the fragments he translated from *Eugene Onegin* are really an inspired rendering of the novel. He followed the ancient tradition of "nazir", quite lawful in Oriental poetry, which allowed a poet to interpret the themes and plots of his predecessors in a novel way. He knew such renderings of "Leili and Mejnun" and "Farkhad and Shirin", and the story of Iskander, or Alexander the Great, as told by ancient Tajik, Azerbaijani and Uzbek poets. Abai himself adopted this manner in telling about Alexander the Great and Aristotle in his poem "Iskander" following the example of the Azerbaijani classic Nizami and the Uzbek classic Navoi. In his poetic interpretation of *Eugene Onegin* Abai was very particular about rendering Tatiana's truly Russian nature. In his version, this poem took the form of an epistolary novel. He set Tatiana's and Onegin's letters to music, and by so doing made the repertoire of the *akyns* the richer for two beautiful love songs which became so popular that everybody sang them and young Kazakhs used the words in their own love letters to their sweethearts.

Abai's translations were a considerable contribution to the development of Kazakh literature, and they are evidence of his close contact with Russian and European literatures. But it is his original writings that show how really organically he absorbed this influence. It was undoubtedly owing to the beneficial influence of Russian poetic culture that Abai so boldly introduced new forms into Kazakh poetry, new themes, and a new social content. Although he translated less of Pushkin than of other Russian classics, his association with the great Russian poet left an unmistakable imprint on his own work. We see it in his lyrical meditations, in his realistic landscape painting, in his intimate understanding of a loving woman's heart, and in the universal nature of his social themes.

Only a poet who had profoundly assimilated the best in Pushkin and other great poets could have written these songs about the seasons of the year, these lyrical verses, these poetic meditations, the poetry about the mission of a poet, and the poem about Alexander the Great and Aristotle, entitled "Iskander".

The Kazakh landscape and the life of a nomadic Kazakh village make the subject of the songs about the four seasons. But the poet gives his description from

an angle never met in Kazakh literature before, infusing it with new thoughts and feelings.

In the poetry about the mission of a poet, Abai juxtaposes the narrow-mindedness and shallowness of his set to the truthfulness, pride, independence and flight of the poet's inspired thought. On this subject, Abai's views remind us of Pushkin's.

Another remarkable thing is the similarity of themes in the work of Abai and Saltykov-Shchedrin. Abai never wrote prose, but in his satirical verse he ridiculed the officials, *biyis* and clan elders with the same killing sarcasm. In one of his addresses to school pupils, Abai named Saltykov-Shchedrin as the writer who had painted the most lifelike portraits of officialdom and other oppressors of the people. There was both a literary and a political affinity between Abai and Saltykov-Shchedrin. It is not from incidental statements but from the content of Abai's work in its entirety that we see how resolutely he denounced the political system of his day, and therefore how thoroughly and sincerely he approved and understood the Russian classical writers who voiced their opposition to the government.

Following the aesthetic principles of Belinsky Abai placed his talent at the service of society. He also embraced the basic principles of Chernyshevsky's world outlook in that he did not simply depict the ugly truth of his contemporary world but passed ruthless judgment on it.

This lends a special meaning to Abai's friendship with the Russian exiles—those disciples of Belinsky, Herzen and Chernyshevsky.

We have inherited more than poetry from Abai.

There are his "Exhortations", in which we find a great number of aphorisms, wise and laconic sayings that have come to stay in Kazakh literature. It is difficult to define the genre of this work, for it contains the poet's philosophical and moralistic statements, expressing his social and political views, and trenchant satire. Abai seems to be holding a conversation with his reader, and his mood is serene in one verse, bitterly sarcastic in the next, and profoundly melancholy and even dejected in yet another one. Stylistically, each conversation is a perfectly finished piece of work. His reflections are expressive, terse and imaginative. Abai's exhortations often become the mournful confession of a person doomed to loneliness in the grim age of hopeless ignorance.

In those days, when Abai's poetry was circulated in hand-written copies, his "Exhortations" were included every time. Older people loved them especially, they embellished their speech with citations from this work, and carried on long discussions on the meaning

and the moral of Abai's maxims. Apparently, the author himself realised how well his thoughts were comprehended when stated in prose and, knowing the circle of readers who enjoyed this sort of writing particularly, he often tried to speak to them in their own idiom, using their own assessments of moral values.

Abai composed about twenty melodies, and he was as much of an innovator in this field as he was in poetry. His melodies greatly differed from the traditional folk music both in style and content.

* * *

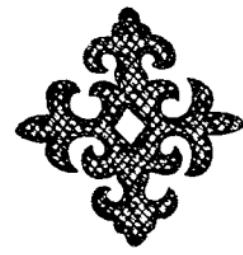
A proponent of critical thought, an enlightened and ardent champion of culture, a tragically lonely man in that grim semi-feudal, semi-colonial environment, Abai was an outstanding figure not only in the history of his own people but also in the history of the whole Middle East. He followed his own course through the darkness and bigotry of his day, paving the way for posterity.

Our generation reveres Abai as an amazing phenomenon. He towers like a spreading mountain cedar in the history of his people. He took the best from the many-centuries-old culture of the Kazakhs and enriched these treasures further with the beneficial influence of Russian culture.

By drawing on the spiritual culture of the Russian people Abai started the most progressive movement in the history of Kazakh social thought. Resolutely and consistently he smashed all the obstacles that hindered the introduction of Kazakh society to progressive Russian culture. By so doing he promoted the emergence of the two peoples in their common struggle against the reactionary regime that alienated them. Abai's poetry acquired a new meaning and popularity during the Great Patriotic War, which sealed with blood the brotherhood of all the peoples of the Soviet Union. And having gone through this great trial with us. Abai became even dearer and closer to us in spirit.

The glory of Abai, the real founder of modern Kazakh culture and the greatest Kazakh classical poet, shall never dim.

Mukhtar Auezov





SELECTED
POEMS



The first snow falls. The blood-sport calls, then
 hunters mount and ride.
The eagle's master knows the place where the wily
 reynards sit—
Just give him a good companion to canter by his side,
A swift mount clamped between his legs and hunting
 gear to fit.
With a cry the men in the saddle sweep the valley at
 a trot
It opens wide upon the plain—there a fox's traces
 show.
He's gone to earth—to find the spot
The eagle's keeper mounts a hill, while his helper
 waits below.

The hood is snatched from the eagle's eyes.
In a flash it sights its hidden prey.
Then the fox streaks up the rise,
But the eagle knows he seeks the rocks and cuts
 across the way.

The fox cannot reach safety that he sought to gain
 in height.
He crouches low, but he can't deceive the bird's
 blood-lusting eye.
His lips curl back, his fangs show white.
He'll put up a fight for his life today, if the time
 has come to die.

Now the fun has begun, the sport and the zest!
The hunters gallop at a breakneck pace, reckless and
 risking their lives.
They know a good fox may come out the best
With his forty ivory knives.

The golden eagle plunges down, its ruffled plumage
 bristles—
A knight with eight bright spears to dart...
The great wings beat. The spread tail whistles.
It speeds like a shot at its victim's heart.

The fox and the eagle have met. And now the
 jousting will start.
The bird and the beast—each a valiant knight—
Will fight till they shed the hot blood of a heart.
While horsemen, the hunters, take joy in the sight.

Black is the eagle, ruddy the fox, on snow the hue
 of pearl,
A billowing mass that heaves and waves
Like elbows a-flashing, when some lovely girl
Brushes her raven-black hair as she bathes.

Her snow-white body and cheeks of red
Are seen as they peep through ebony locks.
The eagle shudders from wing-tip to head,
Then, shifting its weight, it mounts on the fox.

A lusty *batyr** with his fabulous bride
At their first love-encounter on a narrow white
 lodge....
The huntsman struts proudly, his smile glad and
 wide—
His bird won the bout, and the fox could not dodge....

You shake the dust from your tall fur cap and slap
 it on your head,
Put *nasibai*** behind your lip to savour ash and snuff
You hand the fox to the fine old man—the eagle
 left it dead—
He offers you a thousand thanks, his manner warm
 and bluff....
You grow a year younger when a reynard is caught.
Each time a great bird in fur sinks its claws

* *Batyr*—hero, knight.—*Ed.*

** *Nasibai*—a snuff.—*Ed.*

You can't spare the time for an unhappy thought,
But talk about hunting with never a pause.

Indulge in that pleasure. You can always be sure
You'll not cause another man anguish or pain.
My verses have spoken—why should I say more?
To men with stout hearts I need not explain.

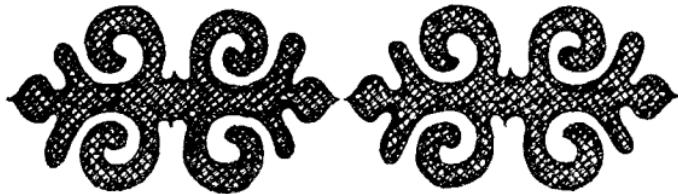
A dullard can listen, pretending to hear,
His mind merely flits over what others say.
For men who can reason my picture is clear.
They relish the phrases and words that they weigh.

For horsemen and hunters, these verses I write,
Who've chased the red fox with an eagle in flight....

1881

Translated by Tom Botting





Her brow is proud and clear as polished silver,
Her eyes are dark, and shed a tender light.
Her eyebrows are so slim, and arched so finely
They're like the crescent in the sky at night.
Fresh roses bloom upon her ivory cheek,
She has a delicately sculptured nose,
And when she parts her crimson lips to speak
Her teeth are pearls, set in two gleaming rows.
Her speech is suitably reserved and clever,
Her laugh a nightingale could not recite,
And when she tilts her head you feel you've never
Seen swans with necks as supple and as white.
She holds herself erect, her walk's divine,
As ripe and hard as apples are her breasts,
Her body is as pliant as a vine,
In beauty rare, indeed, she is invest.
There is a childlike softness in her hands,
The fingers strangely capable and strong.
Her hair which falls in heavy, silken strands,
Is wavy, raven-black and wondrous long.

* * *

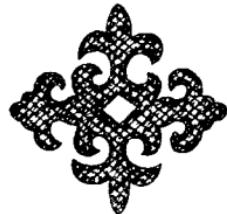
Belles are they all, but which of them is chaste?
Not one among the lot, or so it seems.
To squander their endowments they make haste,
Nor care to wait till they have reached eighteen.
Their conduct is, I fear me, far from blameless:
Some play the game of touch-me-not, and some,
Their independence flaunting, are too shameless
And flirt outrageously with first man come.
What is upon their minds is known to all:
A young *jigit** to marry is their dream,

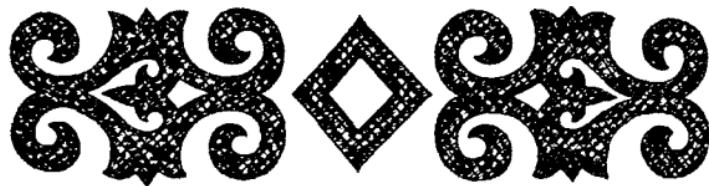
* *Jigit*—a skilled horseman.—*Ed.*

One who by all is held in high esteem.
Such is their one ambition and their goal,
They know not that *jigits* are not all kin:
A modest man will make no claim to fame,
A scheming sort will jump out of his skin
To draw attention to his glorious name.
These last, our beauties never stop to think,
Who do no useful work by hand or brain,
Their fortune feigned, their lifetime spent in drink,
Are worthy not of all their tricks and pains!

1882

Translated by Olga Shartse





Old age is here—sad thoughts, poor sleep and all.
Quick anger's poison fumes inflame your sullen soul.
Not one to share a thought with. Who will come
To soothe and sympathise in answer to your call?

All men are doomed. All who are born must die.
Nobody can recover days gone by.
Both joy and grief must fade into the past.
All plans and deeds cruel time will nullify.

In struggle fortify your soul—if you are wise.
Only the giftless bow to fate with downcast eyes.
Only the feckless play up to the mob.
The truly wise man on himself relies.

All honest labour is distasteful to the base;
Boasting and swindling, they spend their useless days.
Yet the day of reckoning for scoundrels will arrive:
A bad jug breaks at once, the proverb says.

Regard your life as the most priceless treasure.
Hoard wisdom, skill and virtue without measure.
'Tis shame to loiter through the countryside
Squandering time on empty jokes and worthless pleasure.

The stupid and the ignorant despise
The words and admonitions of the wise.
Not everyone can give the truth full credit.
The simpleton believes in nought but lies.

The fool seeks bric-a-brac throughout life's span.
Parades in gaudy garments if he can,
And with contemptuous jeers he treats the words
Of a learned, well-informed and wise old man.

Beneath the surface looks the keen-eyed sage,
Weighs words with all the shrewdness of old age.
He splits a hair in four times forty parts,
While the fool just chatters like a parrot in a cage.

The fool is courted by the people's foe.
He feigns repentance when he brings men woe.
He's full of envy at another's luck,
But when you err he says, "I told you so!"

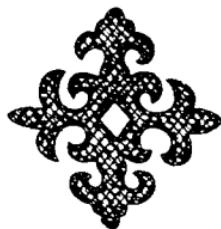
The devil revels when he sees our nation's ills.
Virtue is banned and grief its bosom chills.
Full well I know—the scoundrel won't repent.
The devil's ranks he and his brethren fill.

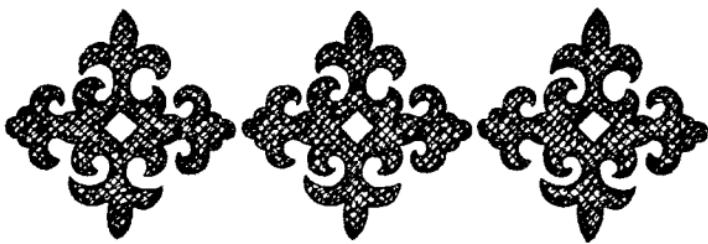
The knave will dream of power day and night,
He rallies venal henchmen on the quiet.
And yet he'll not win credit among men
But fall a victim to his own unholy spite.

A knave is not the one to show the way
To honest men who Allah's law obey.
Though brainless knaves aspire to rule the state,
Like curs by all they shall be spurned one day.

1886

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





O my luckless Kazakh, my unfortunate kin,
An unkempt moustache hides your mouth and
 chin.
Blood on your right cheek, fat on your left—
When will the dawn of your reason begin?

Your looks are not bad and your numbers are
 vast,
Yet why do you change your favours so fast?
You will never listen to sound advice,
Your tongue in its rashness is unsurpassed.

Unable to manage your property,
Day and night, care and worry are all you see,
Now haughty, now wearing a look of offence,
Constant in nought but inconstancy.

All sorts of scurvy, and petty scum
Have crippled your soul for years to come.
No hope of improvement have you until
Master of your own fate you become.

Kinsmen for trifles each other hate.
God bereft them of reason—such is their fate.
No honour, no harmony, only dissent;
No wonder cattle is scarcer of late.

Over money and power hostilities rage.
You look on while your lords in wrangles engage.
If you fail to cast off those honourless knaves
Fear and shame will your lot be through age
 after age.

How can your heart be at ease, I ask,
If you can't even face the easiest task?
If you cannot muster firmness and pluck,
My folk, you will always be out of luck.

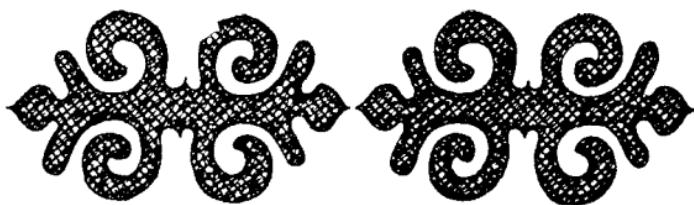
Yet if anyone tells you the right thing to do
You abuse and revile him, so stupid are you.

1886

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



Г. А. С. Пушкин
Л. С. А. С. Пушкин
Март 12631



'Tis laughter we should prize, not empty jests.
Not in appearance, in the soul true value rests.
If anybody laughs with all his heart
He merits trust—'tis him we should love best.

One pays no heed to anything you say,
Another every utterance will weigh.
But there are those who understand your words,
Yet twist them to their benefit some way.

If you're in love, then love with all your heart.
Burn up in flames, yet with your love don't part.
But youths today are apt to shrink away
And give up love as soon as hardships start.

Young hearts should dare and never be afraid.
Be generous, and you will be repaid.
The selfish and the heartless earn contempt.
Accursed be those who won't give others aid!

Be gentle as a brother to a friend.
Share everything that God to you may send.
Let friendship be both honest and sincere,
Let enmity and evil feelings end!

When with a friend, attend his words with patience.
Don't spoil each other's mood with altercations.
Show other people genuine respect
Which, sad to say, I see on rare occasions.

May harmony e'er reign among Kazakhs,
Unknown to the ignoramus and ass.

The worthy never give away a secret
And slurs up on another will not cast.

Keep passion under check, is my advice,
For lechery is a most deadly vice.
Remember—a *jigit* is not a hound
To fall for gutter-bitches in a trice.

Don't let a woman's beauty turn your head.
To peril by blind lust do not be led.
Find out a woman's character before
You marry her and take her to your bed.

The joy of tender passion quickly dies
For those who change their women all their lives.
He who feels bored with a faithful spouse's face
Is just a worthless wretch to be despised.

My praises go to her who knows your soul
By heart, who gives to you her whole
Sweet life and time and being, who attends
Your every heartbeat, and will be for you your
all.

Great danger hides in charms to which each fop
Gains easy access. Let them make you stop
And think before you take a thoughtless step,
Towards a pretty-looking woman-snob.

My praise to him who acts and shows his pluck,
Who keeps his head high, whether in or out of
luck;
The sloven and the womanising fool
Can only gossip, wallowing in muck.

Fools who destroy their families with strife
Can't see how one can love and be loved by
one's wife.

A prudent husband and a wife of modest ways
Are always warranted a happy life.

No food for gossip will a proper woman bring
The burns of slander to her skirt will never cling.
Sweet-smelling as a many-petalled rose,
Her every movement breathes of happiness and
 spring.

Don't woo a rich man's daughter for her wealth.
Don't scorn a poorer wench for scanty pelf.
But if she comes of wise and worthy parents
Marry—she'll bring you peace of mind and
 health.

When an acquaintance to your table you invite
Let wife not hiss and scowl at him with spite,
But let her show respect towards your friends,
Be hospitable, cheerful and polite.

You, too, be cautious in your choice of friends.
Shun him who all his time in frolics spends,
But value him who shows discrimination
And to the word of wisdom well attends.

Young men and women useful work despise,
They'll live without it, they're so slick and wise.
They only laugh and jeer like jackanapes;
There's nothing in them, only selfishness and lies.

You'll never see such swindlers anywhere,
Base mercantility is what they most prefer.
Rows, fights and scandals rage throughout the land,
For benefits worth nothing cur sells cur.

Children alone can still enjoy their play
And be like friends for almost half the day.
And yet they also finish with a row
And then fall out in veritable fray.

And when a little tot comes home in tears
His mother starts to shout, his father swears.

All life is like such friendship and such games.
It's not so soon we'll alter, it appears.

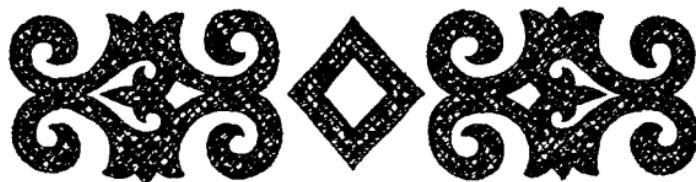
Among your friends you'll come across a man
Who always tries to trip you if he can.
Trust only those who have a sense of honour,
But scoundrels from your side you'd better fan.

Broad-minded people are a rarity so far.
Slander-born quarrels our existence mar;
The worthless litigating busybody
Gets our respect—yes, that's the folk we are.

1886

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





A man is free to walk the bazaar
And free to buy goods from home or afar,
Be it bread or a pearl—for whatever he came,
But all men will never purchase the same.

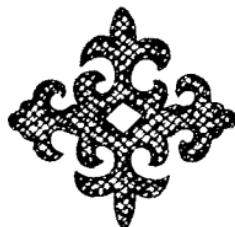
For men have their needs and their tastes are diverse.
Each man buys the goods that accord with his purse,
And so with my words—some will grasp what I say
And some be no wiser and wander away.

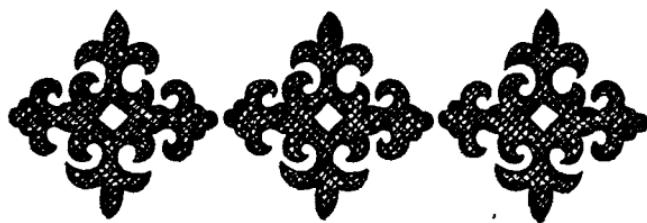
Is there any man here who has heeded my word?
Perhaps he won't like certain things he has heard.
Since people find beads that have dropped to the ground,
So the words that I scatter are sure to be found.

I don't write for one man, I write for you all,
So let no man feel anger on hearing my call.
“Pearls are not pearls when they're cast before swine”—
Jigits, cavaliers, heed those words and hear mine.

1886

Translated by Tom Botting





You should not vaunt your knowledge while you're
still untaught,
Nor bask in rapture's bliss while you are immature,
Nor boast of matchless skill at childish games and
sport—
For things that easy come were never yet secure.

Five things in life there are that you should shun
and ban.
Five other things there are that you should strive
to gain,
If you have made your aim to be a worthy man.
And know—if you try hard your goals you will
attain.

Look to the future, whatever you do!
Bragging and slander, odious lies,
Foul dissipation, laziness, too—
These are five things a man should despise!

Now about virtues my verses shall tell—
Work and persistence, study profound,
True moderation, goodness as well—
Those are the five best friends to be found!

All that is evil abhor and reject.
On evil examples your back you should turn.
All things of goodness—love and respect.
From things that ennable your spirit should learn.

It is not hard to be a scholar
If you abandon childish games.
The very wish to be a scholar
Is one of life's most noble aims.

Don't say, "I doubt I can be learned"
If erudition is your aim.
No school can make a gift of learning
If you blow hot and cold again.

Of wealth and fame you shall be worthy
If all your being you can offer
To learning, and, with due discernment,
Adopt the wisdom sages proffer.

Don't seek to trust, but comprehend
The words of everyone you meet,
And let your questing never end,
Though people say it's mere conceit.

Whoe'er it be, whate'er they think,
You must not heed the mean, uncouth
Let diffidence not make you shrink
From standing in defense of truth.

Do not abandon faith. In fact
Religion's not the foe you face,
But falsehood is—so use your tact—
Harsh words may well be out of place.

Do not recall names and titles of men.
But the essence recall of their words, if they're
 sage.
This land has seen leaders time and again,
While speakers and writers rose age after age.

If you can interpret the sense of each word,
Work out things for yourself, follow your bent.
If you cannot trust the counsel you've heard,
Thrust it aside and refuse your consent.

But if the advice you receive should ring true,
Go to the heart of it—pay heed to the wise,
For fools are abundant and sages too few.
But these are no fool's words for you to despise.

If one who is near you should give you advice,
Don't follow it merely because he is dear.
Bad advocates lead you astray in a trice.
A fool follows blindly and takes up the rear.

Consistently work and on sin turn your back—
The greatest successes the future will bring,
But study for gain, or shirk and be slack,
The little you learn will be not worth a thing.

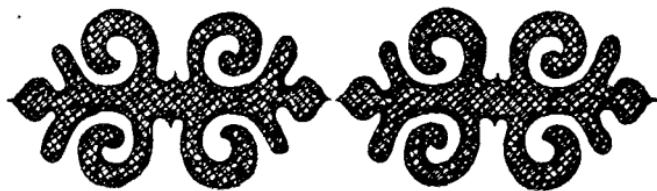
Judge authors by words, and not the reverse,
Or words will most surely addle your head....
The bad will seem good and blessings a curse—
Those words Dauani the learned one said.

Seek their deep inner meaning. Learn them by
heart,
For he was a savant enamoured of truth,
But over the surface do not flit and dart.
Attention, like blossoms, embellishes youth.

1886

Translated by Tom Botting





SUMMER

When summer in the mountains gains its peak,
When gaily blooming flowers begin to fade,
When nomads from the sunshine refuge seek
Beside a rapid river, in a glade,
Then in the grassy meadows here and there
The salutatory neighing can be heard
Of varicoloured stallion and mare.
Quiet, shoulder-deep in water stands the herd;
The grown-up horses wave their silky tails,
Lazily shooing off some irksome pest,
While frisky colts go frolicking about
Upsetting elder horses, at their rest.
The geese fly honking through the cloudless skies,
The ducks skim noiselessly across the river,
The girls set up the felt-tents, slim and spry,
As coy and full of merriment as ever.
Returning from his flocks, pleased with his ride,
Again in the aul appears the *bai*.
His horse goes on with an unhurried stride,
He sits and smiles upon it, hat awry.
Surrounding the *saba** in a close ring,
Sipping their heady beverage—kumyss,
Old men sit by a *yurta***, gossiping
And chuckling at quips rarely amiss.
Incited by the servants comes a lad
To beg the cook, his mother, for some meat.
Beneath an awning, gay and richly clad

* *Saba*—leather bag with wine or other drink.—*Ed.*

** *Yurta*—felt tent with cylindric walls and hemispherical roof.—*Ed.*

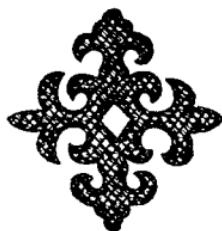
The *bais* on gorgeous carpets take their seats.
And sip their tea, engaged in leisured talk.
One speaks, while others listen and admire
His eloquence and wit. Towards them walks
A bent old man bereft of strength and fire.
He shouts at shepherds not to raise the dust
Aiming to win the favour of the *bais*.
And yet in vain he raises such a fuss—
They sit and never even turn their eyes.
There, tucking up the hems of their *chapans*,*
Leisurely swaying in their saddles as they trot
From nightly grazing come the young *chabans***
Whipping their lusty steeds god knows for what.
A long way off from the aul's last tents
With movement and excitement getting warm,
On horseback, too, the *bai*'s son and his friends
Enjoy a falcon hunt. The bird's in splendid form
At one quick spurt such falcons catch and bring
Crashing to earth the great, unwieldy geese.
Meanwhile that bent old man, unlucky thing,
The toady that had nigh gone hoarse to please
The haughty *bais*, unnoticed, watches on,
And sighs for sorrow that his time is gone.

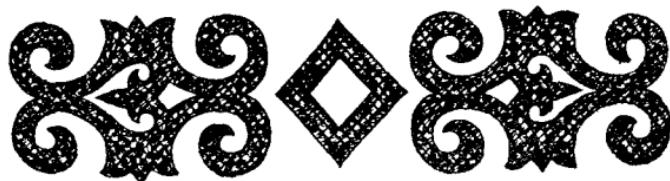
1886

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

* *Chapan*—men's top-coat, gown.—*Ed.*

** *Chaban*—herdsman.—*Ed.*





It pains me now to realise that I have tinkered
With nature's gifts and lived my life in vain.
I thought myself one of the rarest thinkers,
But empty is my fame.... Alas, I have no aim.

I fell back with the backward, and the tug
Of ignorance held me in constant thrall.
My witticisms were pointless, flat and smug,
I never hesitated to condemn or else extol.

A man who's straight we all suspect of guile.
While blatant liars prosper of our choosing.
We cover up aversion with a smile,
And human worth may very well be losing.

Inconstancy and idleness are our greatest
banes.
We put no faith in loyalty of friends,
Our warmth of feeling all too quickly wanes,
We cool too soon: a trifling hurt offends.

But genuine love and friendship mean a unity of
hearts,
No isolation, no withdrawal, no offence.
And in our usage, it is just a farce,
Mere words that have no value and no sense.

I have no one to love now, and no friend.
In disillusionment I turned to writing verse.
When I was pure in heart, how without end,
How fascinating seemed the universe!

Yes, friendship is a gift from God, a gift divine.
You cleanse your conscience when confessing to a
friend.

I tried to form some friendships in my time,
But they were savaged into shreds by ignorance
again.

My soul craves friendship, seeks it daily.
My heart is aching for it, and while I
Have never known a friend who'd not betray me,
I sing a hymn to friendship for all time!

1886

Translated by Olga Shartse





If by chance in some strange clan
You have a friend who's stood time's test,
With whom you're sure you always can
Share secret thoughts and hours of rest,
Don't be amazed if that fine man,
The day misfortune pays a call,
Forgets his friend and then appears
To use your secrets, one and all,
To fill ill-wishers' eager ears.
On meeting your most deadly foe
He'll laud him to the sky, or higher—
A victor who shall yet bring low
All mean opponents, such as you.
Thus primed your foe will seethe with ire,
But when he sees you in the end
That friend will trumpet love too true,
Explaining how, you comprehend,
He feigned to love your worst foe, too,
And this the better to defend
Your cause, as God may be his judge.
Heigh-ho, a friend! And lo, what woe!
No effort did he stint or grudge
Your rival's inner soul to know...!
He swears by bones of men long dead,
By Allah! scorning hot hell-fire,
To prove the truth of what he said,
Thus trampling truth in murk and mire.
His way towards your home he'll wend
To feign the friend but play the liar.
He'll praise his friendship by the hour—
He'll cast a stone, and quickly hide
His hand, thus hoping he can sour
Your clansmen's trust, and so divide

Your relatives and alienate
The cur-like ones from your just cause—
So when the foe is at the gate
They'll rip your flesh with fangs and claws.
On feast days they won't show their face—
At home they spin their web of hate,
Or whisper in some sleazy place
And spew out slander in full spate.
Though good as gold, for them you're base.
If such a one you try to guide
He'll dig his heels in and revile
You, then, maybe, he'll step aside
And worse than any foe defile
Your name with threats debased and vile.
He lives on what good folk hand out.
Betraying relatives with guile
That weather-cockling swings about
Offended, child-like, all the while.
His closest clansmen he'll berate,
But could not tell you if you bade
The goal of pettiness and hate.
No sacrifice he ever made,
His love for self is vast, innate.
The house is burning, he is dazed.
Until consuming flames abate
He'll skulk in hidden cracks quite

crazed....

If trouble comes to you, of course,
In a flash he'll raise the shout.
“Pull the rascal off his horse!”
He urges men to fight their brother,
Until your clansmen fear each other,
Then, wide-eyed, victim-like that lout
Will spout out filth with which to pelt
You. Cunning taught him how to fight
By hitting hard below the belt,
But when your fortune's looking bright
His honest friendship shall be felt
In toothy grins—repulsive sight!
Your enemies he'll sorely trounce,
“I'll not leave one of them alive!”
Cries he. Alack! when winds are high

He drifts where foaming rollers drive.
Half dead with fright he'll moan and sigh.
But let the tempest die away,
There's none more bouncing, brave or spry!
Such ones are heroes of our day.
Alas that they should be so addled!
Take his advice then you'll be saddled
And bite his bit. But turn him down—
He'll boil with bile he'll scowl and frown.
Like others, you have clansmen, too—
In war time would they stand by you?
From storms they hide beneath your wing,
But ride your back in azure spring.
Alas! in general that's the way
Of many of your clan today.
At home their thunderous threats are heard,
They roar in high heroic tones.
Let danger come, then those sharp words
Can choke those hounds like chicken bones.
Their tastes are low, their jokes apall.
They fear a combat worst of all,
But once you've left the field of battle
Up they will jump and start to prattle,
And each without a pause will rave
To make his listeners think he's brave.
No good example will he follow.
An ignoramus, gauche and bleak,
His arrogance is vain and hollow.
He uses force against the weak.
His boastful words are puerile, trite—
“I'm mighty and I'm always right!”—
If friends stand firm in his defence
When he's too weak to overcome,
His mulish mind will take offense
And misconstrue what they have done.
Such lazy fellows none respects.
And he's too weak to cause alarm.
To have his way the lout expects
Give him your hand—you'll lose an arm!
To take offense he's very quick.
His words are mean, his insults slick,
And if you reason with the man

You'll always hear a fool's retort.
Say, do you think such clansmen can
When battles rage, be your support?
Will he stop sowing dark dissention
And spreading slander? No! I say,
That jackal has no good intention.
Will things forever go his way?
If he can eat and drink as well,
Then lie besotted in his bed,
He'll send his people straight to hell.
What does he care if they are bled?
Before I die I long to find
One who is honest to my mind.
Now justice can be seen in none.
Injustice reigns behind closed doors.
In whispers all its trade is done.
Such travesty in courts and laws
All decent persons loathe and shun
And even when a case is won,
The judgement will be full of flaws.
The people are in no one's thoughts.
Men see their hopes and patience die—
For each decision of the courts
Will favour him whose secret plea
Corrupts the truth, yet who has sought
With bribes to mollify the *biy*.
The Czar's official heads the sessions
And that is why tribes far and wide
Are paupers, stripped of all possessions
That from the bailiffs they can't hide.
The judge, the elders, low and high,
Have plunged their fingers in that pie.
No matter how you plead and call
To men to gather and discuss
Their daily life, none come at all
Unless officials summon us.
What use are they to us in court?
The local lords are never fair.
Dividing, ruling and yet bought,
They make men sneer when they declare
Tomorrow morning they intend—
Oh repetitious empty cries!—

..

To stand in court, you can depend,
To seek the truth where'er it lies.
They lie and know it. Who'll defend
The plaintiff who for justice cries?
They're so dishonest in the end
They cannot look in honest eyes.
Before the Russians, *bixs* will grin,
They'll nod and bow like grapes on

vines.

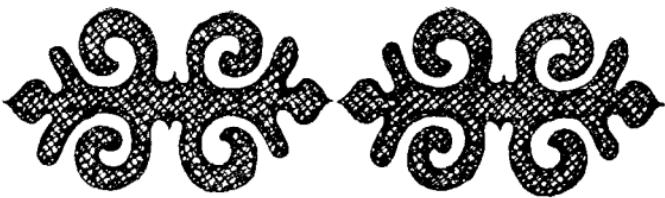
But grapes of wrath are gathered in--
The vintage shall give bitter wines.
Tobikty tribe, among the worst,
Is just a nest of plots and lies.
With envy every clan is cursed
And money-lust lights many eyes.
In idleness they pass their days
And like a mob they rush on seeing
A man who's steered well clear of *bais*,
Retaining something of well-being.
The tribe's inheritance they gambled
And fell in traps that they had set,
In their own pitfall fast entangled
By what they wove with skill—a net.
Well-meaning people, at their cost,
Found efforts wasted on such men.
They could not save the ones once lost,
Nor yet redeem the tribe again.
The tribes have branded us and sneer
As, loathing us, they turn away...
No knowing stranger will draw near
Where cheating goes on every day.
No man will trade with us for fear
That debts of honour we won't pay.
Just ne'er-do-wells, the idle scum,
Without a groat to bless their name,
To folk who've lost their faith will come.
The local powers bear the blame—
Immense misfortunes hard to bear
Descend upon us like a blight....
Ah! let authorities declare
That they will put such matters right—
Their empty words their oaths forswear.

But man to man was once a friend—
Such happy days are dead and gone.
No helping hand will clansmen lend.
Now only memories linger on—
Thus love for people has its end. . . .

1887

Translated by Tom Botting





Poetic speech, the Queen of literature, implies
The finest words put well together by the wisest bards.
Words that a person easily can memorise,
Words that will smoothly flow and touch the heart.
Lines cluttered with unnecessary words
Speak of the poet's helplessness and lack of culture.
Alas, there are so many ignorants among the poets,
So many readers who're not competent to judge.
At first, we know, there was the *ayat** and the *hadis*,*
And in composing them the *beitas*,** too, were used.
Why would the Prophet choose this form of writing
If it had neither harmony, nor melody, nor rhythm?
A learned mullah in his evening prayers,
A seer in his predictions and his omens
Will rhyme his speech and choose his words with care
To give them a harmonious and flowing sound.
It's true that everybody wants to be a poet,
But genuine poets only few of us become.
Who of us, Kazakhs, can compose a poem whose form
Would be a thing of silver, and the words pure gold?
Let's take my predecessors, for example:
The *biys*, who had a well-known predilection
For garnishing their speech with proverbs. The *akyns*—
Those wingless poets who could neither read nor write,
Who spun their crudely rhymed and worded tales
And, fingering the strings of their *kobyz* or *dombra*,
Cried out their lofty-sounding dedications,
And then passed round the hat, collecting coppers.
A shame that they should thus discredit poetry.
By fawning on the rich, by tricks and flattery,
They managed to get gifts of cattle and of sheep.
While living on the charity of other clans

* *Ayat* and *hadis* are prayers in the Koran.—*Ed.*

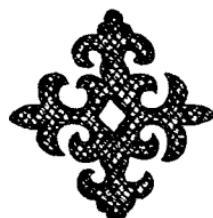
** *Beita*—a meter much used in Oriental poetry.—*Ed.*

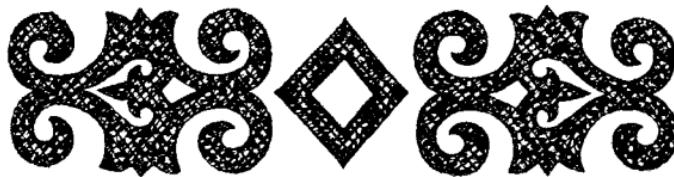
They boasted of the fabulous riches of their own.
They did not flatter everybody—just the purse-proud
bais.
But still they did not make a fortune for their pains.
And, judging by their like the Kazakhs had the notion
That poets windbags were and poetry was nonsense.
I shall not speak in proverbs like a clever *biy*,
Nor shall I beg for coppers like an old *akyn*.
I shall keep to the point, because the moment's ripe
To speak of you, my reader, and improve your mind.
If I were to describe the *bâtyrs'* plunderous raids,
Or write in racy verse of love and pretty girls,
You'd hang upon my words, you'd never have enough,
Because you're used to hearing idle gossip,
Which dulls your mind and takes it off more serious
things.

“But such is life,” you stubbornly persist.
All round you money takes the place of human values,
So you'll forgive me if I sound too indiscreet.
Here, everybody's looking for a windfall,
They'd even try to graft a grapevine to a pine.
But what can you expect from all these people,
Where in a thousand hardly one is honest?
And most are happy in their ill-gained wealth,
And bask in flattery, however insincerely offered.
They stir up animosity among the other rich,
And seize their chance to profit by their quarrels.
Such things as loyalty and honesty and honour,
Are senseless words that long have lost their meaning.
It's common to make much of gossip, lies and rumours,
To flee from knowledge and avoid all thought.

1887

Translated by Olga Shartse





A man is clad in mourning, he is stricken,
He mourns the death of someone dear to him.
His heart is wounded, bleeding, yet he's singing,
It is a mournful song, but still he sings.

A wedding's on: all are excited, happy,
Or maybe it's a gay match-making feast,
Or, say, a *betashar*,* an ancient custom,
And songs make part of every one of them.

A son is born: a *shildekhana's*** given
To welcome him, and songs are sung again.
Our fathers' proverbs and their sayings,
Aren't they melodious and songful too?

A man is launched into the world with songs,
And there is singing when he's laid at rest.
Thus, all the glad and sad events in life
Have songs to go with them. Why is it so?

But you, you cannot understand a song,
You do not care to sing, and if you did
You'd surely sing it wrong. But can a song
Be silent since your sort are deaf to it?

Just what is song? A harmony of sounds
Combined with smoothly flowing, well-matched
words.

If it is sweet in tune and has good lyrics
There is no sense in questioning its worth.

* *Betashar*: lit. "removing the veil" or introducing the bride to her in-laws.—*Ed.*

** *Shildekhana*—a feast given to celebrate the birth of a child.—*Ed.*

All people who have vision will agree.
Not so a bloated ignorant, of course.
Still, mind the words that you would fain
address
To even those who seem to understand.

Beware of ridicule and choose your audience:
The Kazakhs are not used to long recitals,
They will begin to whisper with each other
Or, even worse, they will fall fast asleep.

Do not expect reward, and if it's offered
Don't take it: for it cost you not a thing.
Make friends with people whom you can rely on,
And keep away from those who trade in song.

There's Shortanbai, Bukhar-jirau, Dulat...
Their verse is patchy like a patchwork quilt.
How obvious their imperfections and their
faults
To anyone who's versed in poetry....

I strive for polished verse and clarity,
My message I address to people's hearts.
I want both old and young to realise
That poetry is not a pastime, but an art.

1888

Translated by Olga Shartse





AUTUMN

The clouds are grey and gloomy, boding rain.
An autumn mist envelops the bare earth.
Chasing each other through the spacious plain,
To warm themselves, run foals of last year's
birth.

No grass, no tulips. Silent everywhere
Are children's noisy games and young lads'
mirth.
The trees like poor old beggars stand and
stare,
Bereft of leaves, as naked as the earth.

The men tan cow- and horsehides in big vats
And mend old padded gowns and winter garb.
The housewives stitch up holes in the felt
tents.

Old women sit and spin their endless yarn.
The cranes set off towards the south in
flocks.
The camel caravans go marching slowly on.
All's quiet and sad in the auls amid the
steppes.
Laughter and games until next spring have
gone.

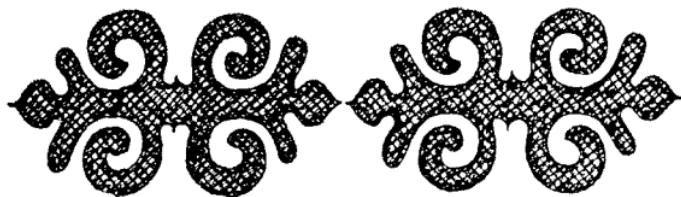
A cruel wind blows. The air gets cold as ice.
From chills old men and children suffer sore
The hungry dogs run off to hunt for mice,
Not finding bones and meat-scrap as before.

The sky is black with dust raised by the wind,
The autumn's damp, but as bad customs say,
To light a fire is a mortal sin
And so it's dark in tents both night and day.

1888

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





WINTER

Broad-shouldered, white-coated, powdered
with snow,
Blind and dumb, with a great big silvery
beard,
Grandad Winter plods on with a frown on his
brow,
By everything living hated and feared.

The grumpy old fellow does plenty of harm.
His breath stirs up blizzards, brings snow
and cold.
With a cloud for a hat on his shaggy head.
He marches along, all the world in his hold.

His beetling eyebrows are knit in a frown.
When he tosses his head—dismal snow starts
to fall.
Like a crazy old camel he acts in his rage,
Rocking and shaking our yurta's thin wall.

If the children run out to play in the yard
He pinches their noses and cheeks with cruel
hands.
No sheepskin can keep out the freezing cold;
With his back to the wind, the shepherd stands.

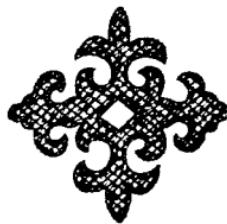
The horses in vain try to shatter the ice—
The hungry herd scarcely shuffle their feet.
Greedy wolves—winter's henchmen—bare their
fangs;
Watch, or disaster your flocks may meet!

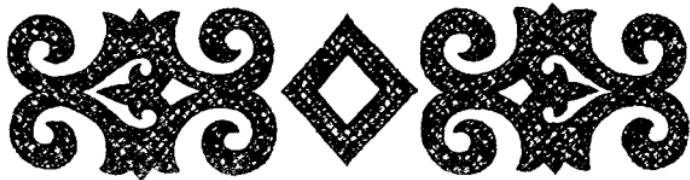
Drive them off to safe pastures—don't wait until
 day.
You won't die if you sleep less—come, quicken
 your step.
Kondibai and Kondai* aren't as wicked as
 wolves—
Don't let old man Winter, feast in our steppes.

1888

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

* *Kondibai, Kondai*—hostile clans living near Abai's native aul.—*Ed.*





In the silent, luminous night
On the water the moonbeams quiver.
In the gully beyond the aul
Tumultuous, roars the river.

The leaves of the thick-crowned trees
Whisper on hill and dale.
The earth lies sleeping beneath
A shimmering emerald veil.

The mountains respond in a choir
To the shepherd dogs hidden from view.
You come in a flowery dress
To your midnight rendezvous.

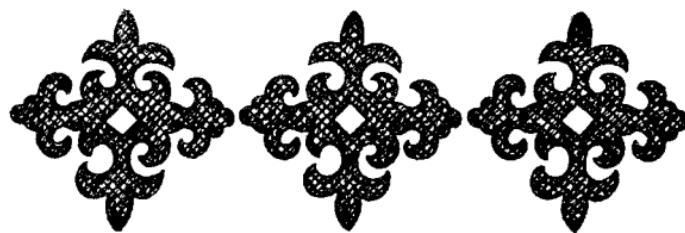
At once both bold and meek,
Full of sweet girlish grace,
You furtively look around,
Blushes light up your face.

Not venturing even to speak
With a soft half-sigh, half-groan
On tip-toe you rise and press
Your trembling lips to my own.

1888

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





At last I'm the villagers' head.
In bribes I gave all I could spare.
My camels are humpless, half dead,
My horses are maneless—I sold all their hair.
I can't do the job, though some people reckon
I try with exemplary zeal.
I'm ready to run if the strong merely beckon,
But if some of the weaker appeal
I look sad and drowsy, such languor I feel,
I can't hear a thing and my head starts to reel!

When I heard the dread news—"elections are near!"
Like bolts from the blue I could feel the words rive.
I tried to look calm and cover my fear.
I smiled, although feeling more dead than alive,
For straight through the gate on one humdrum day
A courier rode up and I ran to greet him,
"The chief of the district is heading this way!
Send a train of your waggons back there to meet
him . . ."

Oh dear! I'm put out, for time's running short.
My poor heart is thudding and my brain is half crazed.
I try to do all the things that I ought,
My duties beset me until I am dazed.
I shout for the elders and call on the *biy*,
"We have to make haste for our time is quite spent.
The head of the district is coming, you see!
So set up your very best felt *yurta* tent."
I make a brave speech, although I am scared,
"Dear clansmen, I promise to do all I ought...
To justify trust I am prepared,
If Allah will only lend me support.
To help all my friends I always have sought!"

But what do I do when I'm really alone
With the chief of the district? Why, then I denounce
Those very same folk of my own....
Then after betrayal to them I announce,
"Good people you don't have to kowtow today,
For I've told the chief just what he should think,
And he puts his whole trust in whatever I say.
I got him confused...!"—at this juncture I wink—
"He'll have many a doubt when he goes on his
way...."

* * *

Ah, that was a meeting! The going got rough—
The braggart, insulting and wild,
The hero, the squeezer, and tough,
Electing discretion, seemed so sweet and mild.
But the struggle did not last for long.
For they convinced some and all of the rest,
Who said "this is right, and that way is wrong,"
Were soon taught, perforce, that a "Yes" can be best.
All small and some great matters, stage after stage,
Were solved in a way that most thought unfair.
The *biy* was well primed and shaking with rage—
The simple man's feelings he never would spare.
Cattle—till then part of one common herd—
Were returned to each owner, according to brand.
Creditors squawked as soon as they heard,
Pecking at poor folk on every hand
With demands for down payment, with threats and
appeals,
"The good life," they yelled, "won't come back any
more!"
The steward looked wise and sat on his heels....
Now who in the world will look after the poor?

* * *

Oh, I'm active, I don't spare my strength.
I dash to and fro, round and round, up and down.
I make trips of considerable length,
And my flag in the wind is my long waving gown,
For I've let go both bridle and rein.
When the chief of the district is near

I will curse men again and again!
And my stick they have reason to fear
For it's thick and causes them pain,
So they don't answer back any more,
Not one of them here dares to perk....
Oh, it's hot! I shall open the door
And then rest from my day's honest work.

* * *

The steward's a really stout fellow,
His boasting fills others with wonder
When he laughs he lets out a bellow
Till the *yuntas* resound with its thunder.
Like a stream in full flood his eloquence flows
In which words and phrases rush gushing and
spout.

But when to the house of the big chief he goes
The small local moguls had better look out!
At times there is deep discontent,
The district chief's anger I fear,
Then in hustle and bustle my whole day is spent.
A scuttle first there and then here....
I cannot, however, say I am content
And my temper is not very good.
I ought to be humble, but that's not my bent
I wouldn't be good if I could!
Bit by bit I shall tighten my grip,
Till the clansmen are clamped in a ring....
I go slowly and don't make a slip—
Against big men I don't say a thing.
I am cautious, I don't touch the great,
But the little men!—that's whom I bait.
To the chief of the district I swear
That the clansmen are all lazy tykes,
But when I'm back home I declare
Whatever my audience likes.
On the smallest of trifles I pounce,
Of the slightest default I make use,
But I'm careful not to denounce
In public a rogue for abuse.
I call on the people around
And I ask them to lend me their aid,

"An honester man can't be found!
No dirty tricks have I played.
By me, and I swear it! no man is wronged.
And no knavish way shall I choose."
I curse the day that for power I longed.
For it wears out my soul as it wore out my shoes!
What's the use of a man who I know is a crook?
It's a sin and a shame, yes, it's really too bad—
Men swindling and cheating wherever you look.
Alas and alack, my life is most sad!
Yet I feel next year's ballot approaching—
I might get the full set of balls*, don't you see?—
So why spend today in reproaching
The very same people who might vote for me?

* * *

Kind counsellors, lend me your ear,
The story I tell is unvarnished—
Every year new prisons appear,
By slander all honour is tarnished.
My grief dulls my eyes like a cloud,
For the clans lack respect, refusing support.
Why, oh why, should such shame be allowed?
Why can't the plain people behave as they ought?
They all are informers, I know
And they write up my sins for the chief.
Soon his wrath will fall like a blow.
With a speed that surpasses belief.
Before the judge I'll be hauled.
Like a thief in the court I'll appear.
In a dark cell, shivering, cold,
I shall languish for many a year....
Will all those rogues who denounce me
Walk out of the court and go free?
They'll demand that the gaolers should trounce me
And harsh justice be done unto me.
Things are not what they once used to be!
Most leaders slip up on the way.
Accusations are looked into well,

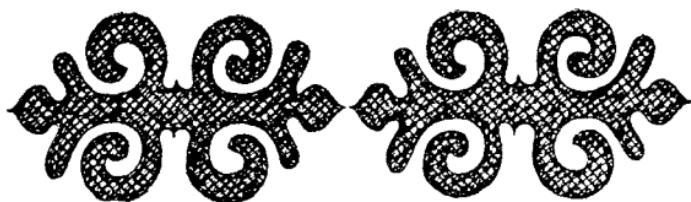
* The local functionaries were chosen by a ballot in which a set of balls was used.—*Ed.*

And even your own, one fine day,
May pave your pathway to hell.
Lawyers count up the crimes you committed.
They'll uncover lies that you told them and then
They'll prove all the facts, for it must be admitted
That lawyers are most cunning men
Who can see through the murkiest case.
So do not give in to your yearning for power.
While you still have not fallen from grace
Pay heed to my warning, for prison walls glower
And steel bars are waiting where prisoners cower.

1889

Translated by Tom Botting





Before a fool, O sage, 'tis best
To let the tongue of wisdom rest.
The truth stays unperceived, you'll find,
By those of us whose hearts are blind.

If you would voice your thoughts, O sage,
The ear of intellect engage.
The wisest words are naught to one
Who is from birth a simpleton.

If verse but be at all profound
He'll think it vain and empty sound.
Perplexed and weary, he will flee
From aught of any subtlety.

Though beg he may that you recite
Your lines for his express delight,
If but you do so, like a sheep
He'll blink and yawn and go to sleep.

Insouciant as a child at play,
In fun he seeks to spend his day.
By things instructive bored too soon,
He loves the pranks of a buffoon.

All learned writing he detests
And only such light verse digests
As treats about the escapades
Of heroes and of lovely maids.

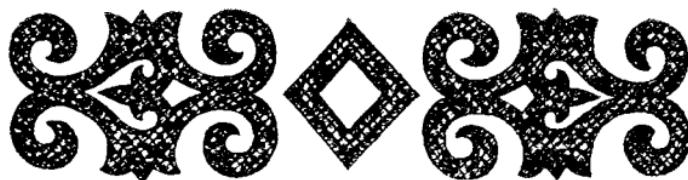
Your songs, O bard, save for the few
Possessed of heart and feeling true.
By their unerring instinct led,
They will distinguish gold from lead.

To idle chatter ever prone,
'Tis gossip dullards love alone.
Do not forget this dictum, pray:
There's naught will please an ass like hay.

1889

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





OCTAVES

You start your flight from a distance,
Impinging on the soul's resistance

You penetrate all existence.
Agile,

In a flash

Dashing to overtake the prey in flight.

You ninety-times strung and well-tensed tongue,
Speak, if you will—to speak is your right!

Engravers' tools cannot achieve,
Nor needlewomen ever weave

A pattern such as you conceive...
Pure pearl for the wise,
Cheap in fool's eyes—

Something ignorance feels it won't need.
O tongue, heed no fools! Don't grieve in vain—
So deaf are their ears, so dull is their brain!

An empty chuckle-head,
Where all thought lies dead—

That's the trait of a mulish brain.
Such people say, "Now let us agree,
What most folk think is what it must be!"

Whenever you hear, if ever you see,
Such lapses in logic and absence of will
Let them serve as a warning—don't talk, tongue,
be still.

The blood throbs hot,
Fierce rage runs rife

Seeing the sots and their way of life.

“Wake up! Stand up!

Get up! Step up!”

You tell them time and again.

But they, without shame, will listen no more,

They flop on their backs and soon start to
snore.

To brew mischief and trouble,

While they spout at the double,

Provides these types with the keenest delight.
All bluster and gas,

Crass brains of an ass—

Sons who defame their father's good name,

Petty and narrow, lacking in shame,

To no saving grace can they lay a claim.

Gibbering nonsense and balderdash,

Sneaking, intriguing, provoking a clash—

That is the favourite game of such trash.

At the beck and call of scum,

Braggarts beckon—just see them run!

The lower the type, the closer they come.

Honour and truth have both fled away,

Nobody cares for such things today.

No bitter rancour should you feel.

Devote your life to the common weal.

The joy in hard work will be lasting and real...

Peals of laughter, loud and hollow,

Follow on jokes licentious and vile,

But never yet led to a deed that's worth while.

A hard-working man will not lack a square meal,

For alms, like a beggar, he need not appeal.

Learn to trade, or plough a field.

Reap the fruits such labours yield.

Improve your skill and work with zeal.

Be honest, man, don't lounge about!

Abjure the role of scrounging lout

Then wealth you'll acquire, good fame and
health.

As long as Kazákh can't respect a Kazákh
The good things of life our Kazákh clans will
lack.

Among yourselves, Kazákh, make peace.
Let none abuse you. None can fleece
United clans. Your quarrels cease.
While powers-that-be can lie and steal,
Misusing trust, with no appeal,
Your life will be one long ordeal.
Let honour and your heart awake!
My warning stands for all to take.

If a man is idle and also replete
You can be sure very soon he will meet
His shame before men and utter defeat.
In discord misfortune grows rife—
Stop hating, stop baiting your neighbours in life,
For evil and ruin lie lurking in strife.
Stop your informing. Silence is better.
May you never again write a poison-pen letter.

You're so idle I know when you ride
It's to steal someone's cattle you hope you can hide.
Cattle-thieving—by whom were you taught?
. . . But someone shall judge you. He shan't be
bought,
Then things that for years have been rousing
your lust
Will be things that may yet bring your head
to the dust.

It is not in my body that I am infirm,
But deep in my soul, so that I must yearn
For fugitive solace at every turn.
I find the air stifling and heavy all round....
For hours I weep without making a sound,
Held in the grip of depression profound.
This dull satiation is numbing my heart,
Distracting, divorcing my mind from my art.

My spirit is weakened. It lacks all resistance.
My acts, like my thoughts, are devoid of consistence.

My life's days are numbered, my goal is still
distant...

Without the gay whirl of days long gone by,
Or erstwhile beauty—here beauty must die—
I cannot endure this repulsive existence.
No pilgrim am I of the kind who holds back,
Yet travel I cannot, provisions I lack!

One honest man cannot defeat
The legion of rogues who bait us and cheat—
With them our existence is riddled, replete....
My life's finest years have faded and fled,
My most precious forces lie shrivelled and dead,
While the hot coals of scorn are heaped on my
head.

Time flashes by, yet life is untasted...
Intentions and efforts all have been wasted!

To seem to possess news from inside,
To pass as an orator, wise and lynx-eyed,
Well versed in law, is a headman's pride.
There is a sight oppressors find sweet—
Poor people crawling in dust at their feet
Fawning like curs that bad masters beat.
Headmen ruin a man whose conscience is clear,
And yet raise up another who cringes with fear.

You who have taught men the meaning of fear,
Spreading the bane of black terror here,
Should know that your acts won't bring good
fortune near.

The people have learnt that they cannot trust you,
And you can't trust them, whatever you do.
Just try to make people take part in your game...!
Though your wife among lechers may have won
fame,
If you pry and you spy you'll be naming your
shame.

You'd need a thousand eyes
To sort out truth from lies—
And grow more sad, though not more wise.

Your seeming-friends—even they are few—
The ones you've told your secret to,
Will turn away, avert their head,
And, goaded on by what you've said,
Will work your shame in your own bed.

All in blood,
Covered with mud,
Still clansmen arise, conditioned to squirm.
But once they are standing and feeling more firm,
When fear has abated, then you may be sure
They'll pen accusations against you once more.
Where is your honour, conscience and shame?
Oppression will never bring you much gain.

When dogs start to bark
Then the little boys hark,
They grab up their sticks, expecting a lark;
But grown-ups shout, "Shame!
Put an end to that game!"
What the boys do is bad and worthy of blame
But haven't you, too, denounced boys in this way?
You should shame yourself, as you do boys at
play.

Oh that freedom should reign
And that men could maintain
Conditions to favour the clear, searching brain!
The indolent mind
Is indifferent and blind....
But I stand apart. I am not of the kind
Who revel in sleep and the good things they ate
And that is the reason I'm at odds with my fate.

Hoping to comprehend the world,
To see the meaning of life unfurled,
I gazed at one side and saw only churls,
And the same on the other. Wherever I looked—
Fools to be found, but not to be brooked.
Vast the frustration that swept over me...
Stand watch at the helm of two ships out at sea
While facing the storm, and you'll comprehend me.

At mountains I shouted and cried.
I sought for an answer, and each time I tried
 I heard many voices resounding again.
I had to make sure that the sounds that I heard
Could in fact form an answering word.
 I wandered on far, and I wandered in vain....
 I found all around dead rock and bleak stone
 That answered my call with a low hollow moan.

The mounted men have galloped away,
Leaving me far behind on the way,
 An empty road with no soul near....
Ah! There is no curing my ills I fear,
So let flame burst from my mouth to sear
 The air all around, cremating each tear
 That I must weep. Ah, how tears scorch
 For my being is just one blazing torch!

A deep feather bed,
Feels as heavy as lead
 And offers no rest to this weary head.
My heart is uneasy. I hear all around
Whispering scandals, sibilant sound,
 But to speak about life here no one is found....
 Forever men try to throw dust in your eyes,
 I see the old dodges and hear the old lies.

Five people there are who know me as brother.
Four of us suckled at the breast of one mother,
 Yet long lonely hours my soul seem to smother.
Although I have clansmen throughout all this land
And many acquaintances here close at hand,
 Still I'm abandoned. As lonely I stand
 As an old shaman's tomb that all men avoid—
 Such is the truth, and truth leaves my soul void....



Not for amusement do I write my verse,
Nor do I stuff it full of silly words.
It's for the young I write, for those
Whose hearing is acute, whose senses are alert.
Men who have vision and are quick to give response
Will understand the message in my verse.

Approach my poems with an open mind,
And in them many answers you will find,
Though you mayn't grasp them fully the first time
Not having heard such words before in rhyme.
How strange! When people fail your meaning to
 divine
They instantly demand to hear a different kind!

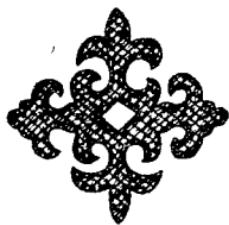
To Ali-azret I don't sing a hymn,
Nor to a beauty with a "golden chin".
I don't preach death nor voice forebodings grim,
I do not teach the young *jigits* to sin
Or honour to forget. My love for men is genuine,
My one ambition is their confidence to win.

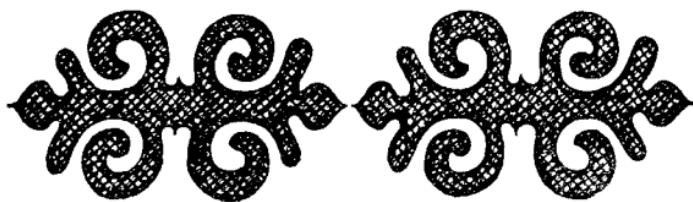
Of highwaymen are bred those liars bold,
Those windbags, idlers, born into the fold.
They have no home, no herds, no sense, no soul,
For what they really are they're known to all.
I'd rather have my voice forever silent fall
Than by such people be admired and extolled.

My brother songsters, listen I implore,
Do not be tempted in your poems ever more
By empty words you will yourselves deplore.
You'll dissipate your talent, never to restore,
And tell me, are not you already bored
With braggarts, woman chasers, and their lore?

1889

Translated by Olga Shartse





When your mind is as keen and as cold as ice,
When hot passions burn in your petulant heart,
Both fiery passion and patient thought
Must be ruled by the will, lest they stray apart.

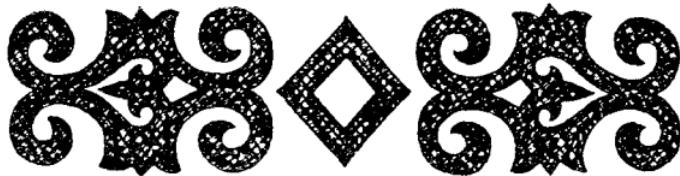
Only he that can hold his heart and his thought
In the vise of will shall attain real heights.
When divided, those powers are not worth a straw
And neither will stave off a perilous plight.

What use is the mind without passion and will?
For a thoughtless heart even midday is dark.
Be able to keep all three in accord.
Let your will make your heart to your reason hark.

1889

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





By overpowering desire I'm obsessed,
I madly crave your passionate caress,
But mine is true love and I wish you happiness,
Though I may perish in my stark distress.

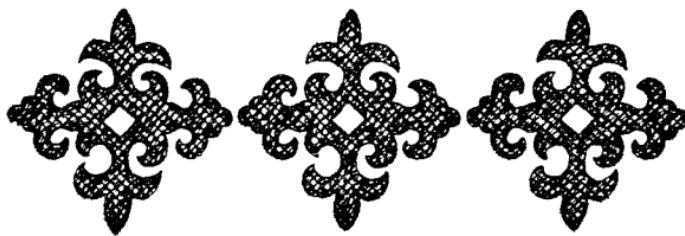
Now that you're gone, on life I have no hold,
My soul is plunged in gloom and strewn with ashes
 cold.
I've lost my will and reason. I'm empty and deplete.
There's only you for me in all the world.

I am your slave to torture and to tease.
My blood you fire as you choose, or freeze.
When I despair my heart is heavy, dead.
With hope returned—I feel alive, released...

1889

Translated by Olga Shartse





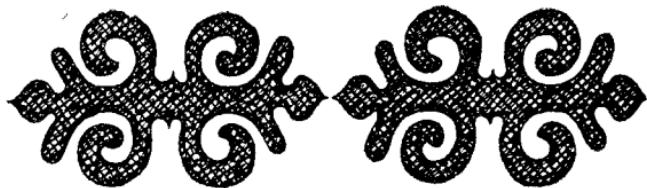
A SONG

This parting's killing me!
She's abandoned me.
Life has lost its bloom,
I am sunk in gloom.
Allah, I am weak.
Strike your slave, he's meek.

Peace and sleep have gone,
Grief has made me wan,
I am stooped from woe,
And my head hangs low.
How can I go on?
I am woebegone.

Brooding on my hurt,
Longing just for her.
Hoping she'll send word,
All my thoughts are blurred.
Broken is my heart.
Oh, why did we part!

If my plea could fly
Straight across the sky,
She would feel contrite,
And the wrong she'd right.
Happy and elate,
I would hope and wait.



Oh, what has fate in store for me?
Will you defy
My lawful claim,
Or will you lie
To spare me pain
And thief-like leave me stealthily,
Forgetting all you promised me?

Why must you torture me, what for?
You spurn your husband,
Lost to shame,
And bring dishonour
To your name.
The world for lovers you explore,
And decency itself ignore.

Here lies my heart. You see it flaming,
I cry and moan,
I'm ill and lone,
And I entreat:
I'm at your feet,
An abject dog who loves insanely,
While in my body life is waning....

Tomorrow, we don't know what we must
face.
The end may come,
And we'll succumb
To sword unsheathed,
But I still breathe!
My smile is but at sad grimace,
And here's another man to take my
place!

The course of love is all upclimb.
You reach the top
And you are there.
But if you stop,
Who's there to care?
I dreamt all of my life about those
heights sublime.
Will you remember me some time?

I'm in the grip of mortal agony.
I haven't done
What I have sworn,
I've no more breath
And I feel death
Already creeping up and claiming me.
Oh well, live on, wherever you may be!

A heart's that true won't be demurred,
Its choice it makes
But once,
And never takes
A backward glance.
It only waits to hear the word,
And death to treachery will be preferred.

Your reasoning was always clear,
It's not too late,
I love you. Come.
Don't say it's fate,
It's love. Just come.
And no reproach you'll ever hear.
The world's so dark without you, dear!

I love you so! Oh, how my heart has
bled!
But if you come,
I shall not speak.
I'm overcome,
I feel so weak,
The last spark from my soul has fled,
I'm dust and ashes. Finished. Dead.

Your eyes have never lighted up for me,
You are not coming back
At all.
You never sought me out
Or called.
For me you have no warmth or sympathy.
Goodbye then. Can you hear my plea?

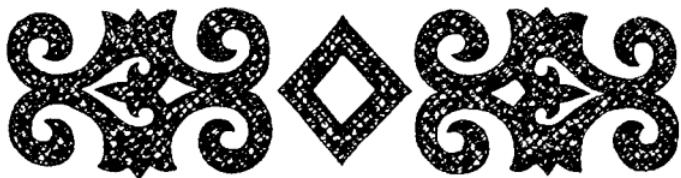
I know you are not coming back to me.
Your scorching body
I embrace,
And gaze upon
Your lovely face
In dreams alone. You've banished me.
It's Allah's punishment. So let it be.

You pierced my heart with arrow stray,
It wasn't aimed,
You feel no blame,
May Allah judge you.
But I claim
When your betrayal's on the scales of
 justice weighed
There will be no forgiveness till your
 dying day.

1889

Translated by Olga Shartse





I hail your slender brows, your eyes!
There's nobody like you beneath the skies.
A radiance like yours, a light so clear,
Has not been shed upon the world for years!
I long for you so terribly,
Tears dim the universe for me!
Your image in my heart I keep,
It haunts me even in my sleep.
To you alone my love belongs,
I sing your beauty in my songs,
For you I'd forfeit youth and wealth,
I'll love you till my dying breath,
And neither foes nor tongues of venom,
Nor the appeal of other women
Will ever cool in me the trace
Left by your loveliness and grace....
The joy of intimacy tender,
Of ultimate, complete surrender!
To kiss your lips and breathe the perfume
 heady
Of your small breasts and hair unbraided,
To see desire in your eyes,
To drown in them and realise
That it is you, that you are mine,
That there's no other of a kind....
Your silken skin I can caress forever,
To be like this with you together!
My heart stands still, my breath expires:
You are aflame, you've caught my fire!
We are together... And our *yurta* is too
 small....
But it is just a dream. You came not when
 I called.

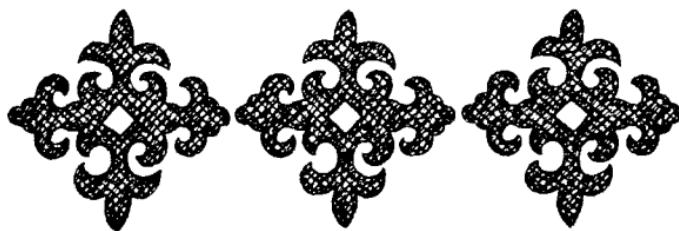
Remember, though: I am a falcon, you're my
 prey,
And I shall overtake you anyway one day.
You're brave, courageous and proud,
With all the virtues you're endowed,
I love you more and more with every hour,
I'm yours to rule. I'm in your power.
Oh, how I want to be alone with you.
Come, oh my pheasant, make my dream come
 true!

Please let me hold you close, if only once,
And look into the burning darkness of your
 glance!

1889

Translated by Olga Shartse





Your letter filled me with unrest
And coaxed my heart from out my breast.
In speaking thus I do not jest—
My life is yours, beloved.

In dread from smooth-tongued wooers
I flee,
But in the words you write to me
There is, I feel, no flattery—
They are sincere, beloved.

Like oil am I cast on to flame;
No power on earth the blaze can tame
That burns within me, laying claim
Upon my heart, beloved.

O, take me, take me fast away,
And happy will I be for aye.
But if to do so you delay,
I will be lost, beloved.

Be merciful to me and just,
Do not betray my faith and trust,
Play not with me, and in disgust
Turn not from me, beloved.

Nay, better kill me first, for I
Would rather close my eyes and die
Than on a joyless bride-bed lie.
Another's wife, beloved.

O falcon, you so bold and gay,
On living flesh you, carefree, prey;
Too many maids—alack-a-day!
Your favours court, beloved.

I am the pheasant, falcon mine,
That humbly doth forthwith resign
Her life to you, with no design
Except to please, beloved.

O, like a reed, dear love, to lie,
At once a pliant reed and shy,
In your embrace. and, with a sigh,
Yield to your love, beloved!

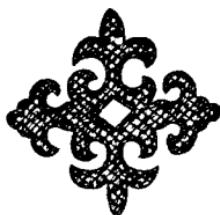
I speak to one that I revere
'Thout ruse, 'thout artifice or fear:
Oh, that my words had power to sear
A falcon's heart, beloved!

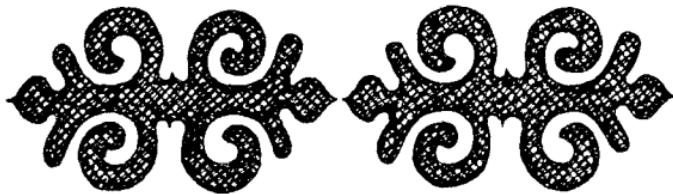
Let all who hear this fervent plea
Touched by its humble message be;
Let none withhold their sympathy
From her who loves, beloved.

And if in song my fate is sung,
Let no one's heart by pain be wrung;
Let all who love, both old and young,
Be filled with joy, beloved!

1889

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





Of her long, thick braids she may well be proud.
Hung with silver coins, from her beaver hat
They sway as she walks, soft and raven-browed.
Have your eyes ever seen a beauty like that?

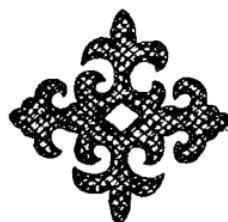
Clear, transparent as mirrors, her soft, dark eyes
Caress your glance and your soul excite.
Have you ever met such a skin as hers.
Or such pearly teeth, or a face so white?

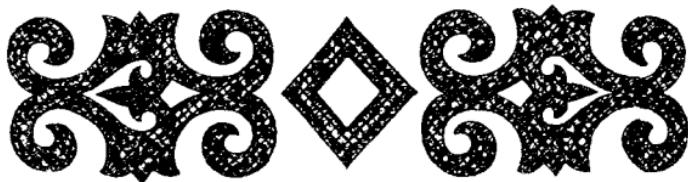
You will seldom see such a slender waist,
Such dainty hands and such tiny feet.
She is always standing before my eyes.
Like a ripe red apple, mellow and sweet.

If you ever happen to touch her hand
Your heart starts beating beyond control.
If your face approaches her lovely face
Her nearness sends a thrill through your soul.

1889

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Where are you, my fiery youth. reply?
You arrived and left me like a guest.
All the secrets of this life have
 fathomed I.
Only beauty's secret stays unguessed.

Knowing all the falsehood of this
 world,
To your fellows do not be too kind.
Do your best to fortify your soul
Otherwise no refuge will you find.

Never having tasted love's delight
Can one really understand its worth?
If calamity should prove too heavy,
 right
Is the one who bids farewell to this
 sad earth.

Friends are only then true friends
 indeed
When they stand beside you in your
 need.
If you do not graze your herd yourself,
Who will drive it homeward from the
 mead?

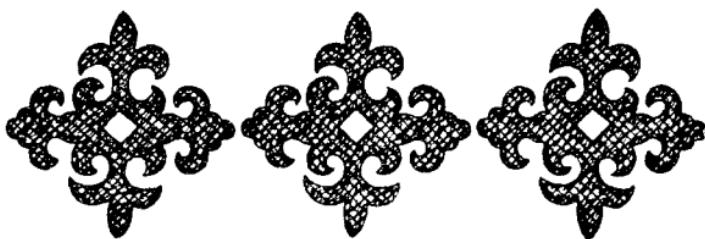
You yourself are master of your fate.
Work is pleasure—idleness a scourge.
Little worth is there in florid speech
Out of which no wisdom will emerge.

Let this be remembered by you all:
Whosoever lives an idle life
Will be left with nothing at the end.
Earthly goods are gained by toil and
strife.

1889

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



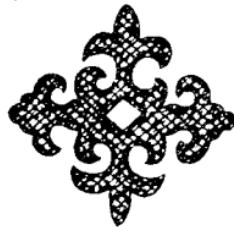


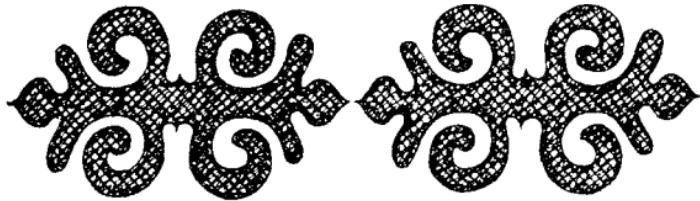
My sorrow will not pass, not even if the Moon
Through nature's whimsy at the Sun is hurled.
E'en though to me another you prefer,
None do I dearer hold than you in all the world.

My faithful heart that loves but you alone
From you will bear, tormented though it be,
Most cruel slight. yes, even broken vows
And undeserved neglect and mockery....

1889

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





Oh, what oppressive misery!
I feel so stifled, I can't breathe,
My tears are flowing uncontrolled
And there is not a single soul
That I can tell my troubles to.

I feel so wretched, and so low
That when I see someone I know
I cringe and turn a painful red,
Avert my eyes and drop my head,
Rush past, or flee the way I came.

I am confused. I stay awake
All night. Of food I can't partake.
I feel so weary and so spent,
Why was to me this torture sent?
And when will I know peace again?

Pain burns my heart. What awful
 pain!
Oh Allah, will it never wane?
Oh Allah, show your slave the way,
Oh, help me, I beseech and pray,
Give me some thread to hold on to!

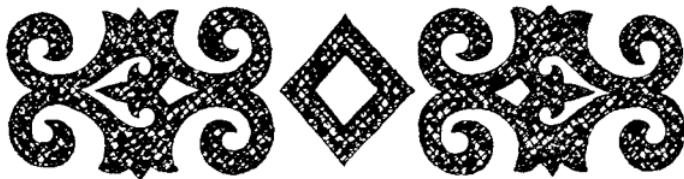
The poplar rustles in the breeze.
How young and vigorous its leaves!
And I, with grief I rock and sway,
I'm like a drunken man today,
And my *chapar* is soaked with tears.

Once I was proud, and I forgot
That trouble could yet be my lot.
I'm feverish, my aching heart
Turns hot and cold in fits and starts,
And not a ray of hope appears....

1890

Translated by Olga Shartse





"That old man," say the young,
"Has one foot in the grave!"

Yet Fate has endowed me with a facile tongue
To make up verse with a rhythmic flair—

A gift—But a curse also she gave—
An audience of dolts, quite unaware.

For many decades I have sought,
And hoped in vain that I might see,
Among the many I have taught

One man who chose to follow me.
For years I've tried to guide the blind

The end approaches, time I lack.
By now it would seem I should not mind,
Not rush about, but just withdraw

And be sedate for evermore.
Do not surrender to your sadness—

Do not despair, don't fear the test—
Awake, my soul, arise in gladness!

Don't crouch inert within your nest.

A helpless fledgeling, like to die,
Spread out your wings, my soul, and soar

Like some proud falcon through the sky!
Sorrows and troubles I guard in great store,
I cannot imagine existence without them,
But ring out my song. Rise up once more!

Sing to my sorrows. . . Let men hear about
them!

Bitter my sadness, oppressive it's weight
I am ready to teach, if men would but hark!

Resentment's fierce blaze in my breast won't
abate.

Ignoramuses bait me. My whole life is dark....
How can I reach them? How to expound
The message I bear to fools all around?

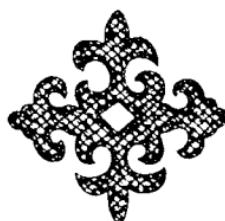
To people who do not hold the world dear?
They have sunk to their necks in debauchery's grime.
They cling to their lies and they don't have a fear
To sully their souls with the wickedest crime.
Not having decided to leave my own land,
Not having discovered another homeland,
I still linger here, shame searing my soul.

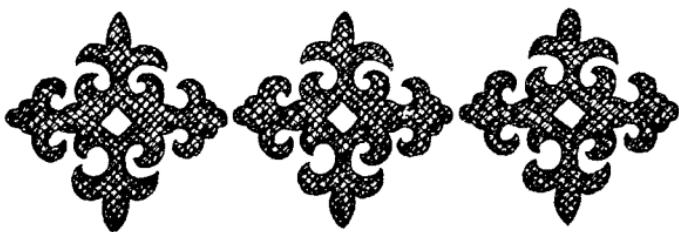
Unlucky am I since my birth in this place--
For bigots unbridled are out of control,
Yet I always have fought against what would debase.
Now lonely I weep for my people's disgrace.
A dark bitter cloud above my head lies,
For Fate has allotted a life I despise.
I could be a man, but that's not decreed....

My own clan, my people would not let me rise.
Not one has a care but to drink and to feed
And, hog-like to wallow in slander and lies.
Ah, what in the world for me is there left,
But to lock up my house and there to abide?
Oh, how can I live of friendship bereft?
For though I love people, from them I must hide...
If you learnt that the wife whom you loved were
untrue
And continued to sin again and again,
Although well aware that you heard, that you knew,
You would suffer as I do,
knowing my pain....

1890

Translated by Tom Botting





All things may pall on you with time,
Not writing songs—a task sublime!
When an inspired song you sing,
You feel released, your soul takes wing.

Flow freely then and ring, my song!
Let lofty thoughts come in a throng,
Let tears pour from my eyes and flood
The whole of me and warm my blood.

I don't expect a rolling stone
To understand my heart-felt song.
It's worthy men who'll lend an ear
The message of my song to hear.

And even should he miss a word
His thoughts and feelings will be stirred.
For all his bitterness and wrongs
He'll find reflected in my songs.

My heart is filled with sorrow dire,
A mounting, ever-spreading fire.
'Tis only after I am dead,
That what I've written will be read.

Can anyone more luckless be!
Oh people, listen, bear with me!
And anyone who wants my song
Just take and keep it for his own.

I have no wish to be extolled
By judges ignorant and cold.
To have a listener I long
Who'd share my dream and love my song!

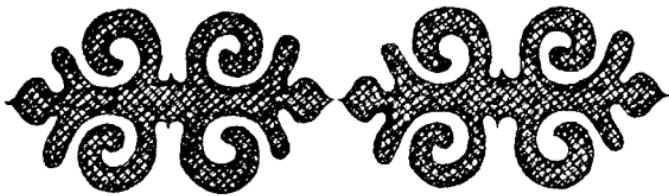
You're many Kazakhs, but too few
Will give real poetry its due
You are not up to it. You're fain
To chase like wolves about the plain.

You will not stop my words to hear,
You're used to catching songs by ear,
Their meaning hardly penetrates,
So why waste breath upon ingrates?

1890

Translated by Olga Shartse





O heart, you pray for agony and bliss,
You pray for love again whose venom is
An antidote to sadness and distress,
The soothing balm that brings forgetfulness.

However bitter be the blows of fate,
Love's presence will their pain obliterate.
Love is the prop, the one support of life
That brings you safely through its storms and strife.

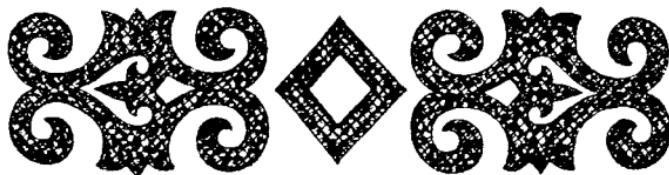
He who would live 'thout love is less than man,
To envy him no beggar rightly can.
He who is loved and loves, though poor he be,
Will never know the depths of misery.

Love is the bright, the ever glowing light
That banishes the fears and dark of night.
'Thout love, as dust is all your wealth and fame,
And you, O bard, have nothing to your name!

1890

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





SPRING

How the poplars rustle when spring arrives!
The wind through the fields clouds of pollen drives.
All alive is caressed by the steppeland sun.
The world like a happy family thrives.

Girls and lads sing songs and merrily laugh.
The old man goes from his home with a staff.
An invalid from his bed could be roused
By the songs, the sun, the poplars' green scarf.

On springtime pastures my people gather;
Kinsmen embrace and rejoice together.
Joking and laughing, they stand and chat,
About everything—from their herds to the weather.

To her wanton calf calls the camel-mother.
Sheep bleat, in the bush birds greet one another.
Moths flit in the trees and over the grass.
Such a noise neither rain nor thunder can smother.

Fowl! By the tiniest pond or lake,
Beat the reeds—and a swan to flight will take.
Look how the falcon that you release
From under a cloud attacks a drake.

You return from the hunt, and a girl cries, "Please,
Handsome lad, show your kill—is it ducks or geese?"
All the girls are dressed in their very best.
Valleys dotted with tulips stretch east and west.
In lakeside copses the nightingale trills.
And the cuckoo responds from the mountains with
zest.

The merchant brings goods on his camel to sell.
Lambing is nigh; flocks are doing well.
Though hard is the husbandman's daily toil,
With the fruit of the land his barn will swell.

The world is resplendent with bounty and joy.
The Creator's blessings His children enjoy.
From her bosom the earth nurtures all that the sky
Has sired with sunshine poured down from on high.

To Creator Nature we owe our praise
For the rapture afforded by these spring days,
For our thriving cattle, our happy hearts,
For the bounty with which our toil she repays.

The spirit of spring makes the timid brave.
All are generous now but the miserly knave.
All rejoice in the jubilant power of the earth,
All revives but the stone on a mountain grave.

The white-haired old men, withered and wan.
Feel warmer watching the children at fun.
The voices of singing birds fill the skies.
Lakes resound with the cries of duck and swan.

At midnight the moon and the stars shine bright.
How could they not burn on so dark a night?
And yet they must fade as soon as it dawns
And the day begins, full of life-giving light.

The young bride earth bids the stars depart
For the sun, her lover, with beating heart
Has waited all night for a rendezvous;
Now the fields blush with dawn—their caresses
start.

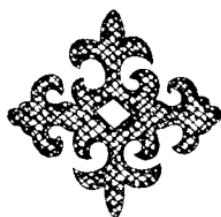
Only the wind from the earth's expanse
Will fly to the heights where the gold stars dance
And tell them how happy are bridegroom and bride,
How the world is warmed by their joyful romance.

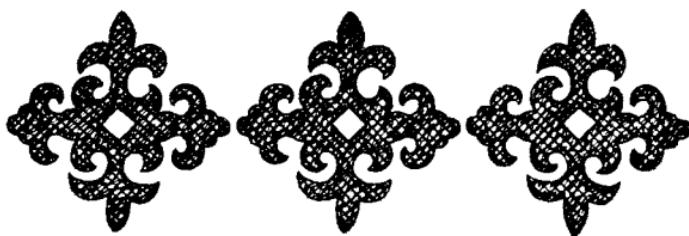
All winter the earth, getting pale and wan,
Awaited her bridegroom, too long gone,
But now once again, revived and young,
She gets happier as the days go on.

To look straight at the sun may strike one blind.
So I, who live on its benefits kind,
Only at sunset can watch it retire
Into its tent with gold vines entwined.

1890

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





The apple of his parents' eye,
He was their only son and heir.
His every wish they gratified
And cherished him with loving care.

But infancy soon over,
The darling boy was growing
As spoilt as he could be.

They took him to the mullah then,
Great things they hoped to come.
The teacher proved an ignorant
The boy learnt nothing from.

He did show promise as a child.
The parents could not be so blind!
But that's what love is said
to be.

He didn't shape as they had hoped,
For all their pampering
In idleness at home he moped,
And didn't want to do a thing.

Wake up! The years are rolling
past,

Your loving parents cannot last
A whole eternity!

The boy they doted on so madly.
The son they cherished and adored,
Indeed had turned out rather badly.
And was a disappointment sore.

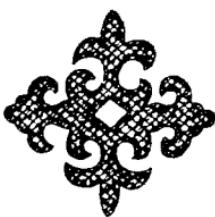
He didn't use his talents.
He failed his loving parents,
And dashed their fondest dreams.

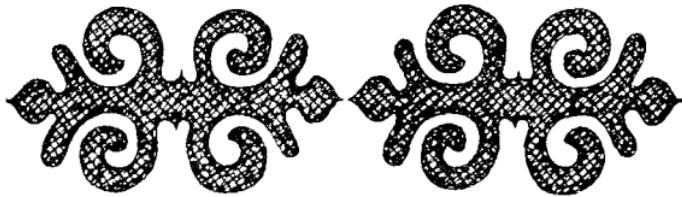
"What will become of me?" one day
He'll ask himself when it's too late.
"Why bother now?" he'll shrug and say,
Succumbing to his sorry fate.

You must have seen such feckless sons.
What useful lesson did you learn,
And is the moral clear?

1891

Translated by Olga Shartse





Here the young folk are branded
With the wastrel's black mark.
They are mean, underhanded
And they lack friendship's spark.

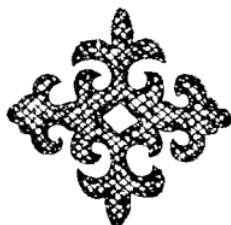
Each lad's soul can be bought.
For a living they scrounge.
They are feckless, untaught,
Through the whole day they lounge.

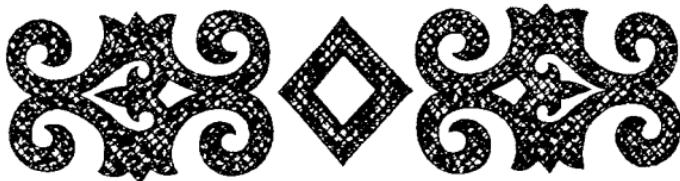
There's not one in the batch
Whose life is well spent.
They will gorge and they'll scratch
Like pigs round the tent.

They jest, they curse and brag—
Too sickly-sweet their smile.
From place to place they drag.
Their life is swinish, vile.

1891

Translated by Tom Bottling





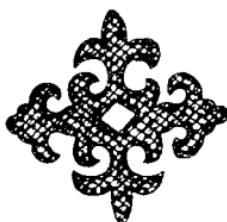
His addled brain thinks there cannot be
A single thing beyond his nose.
He struts for all the world to see—
But what to look at no one knows.
“An ignoramus!” people sneer. . . .
“Fate makes us equal,” cries the clod,
“On earth no soul owns any peer.
We all are humble slaves of God!”

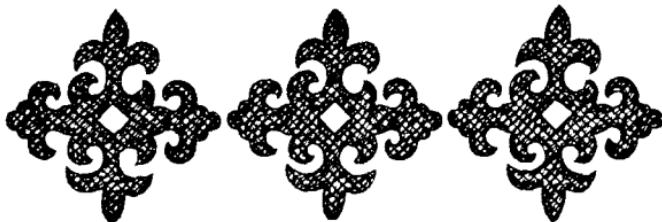
The man who lets his spirit see
Will grasp the glory, truth and soon
A flood of light will set him free
And joy within his breast will bloom.
But what remains for shallow men?
A mere existence—not real life—
Dragged out in some dark foetid den,
Imbued with pettiness and strife.

The mullah with his mighty turban,
Who twists our laws in every way,
While looking wise and very urban,
Is he not a bird of prey?
From any soul that's mean and dark
It's useless to expect much good—
But very few my words will hark. . . .
By fewer they're understood.

1891

Translated by Tom Botting





There was a time when thought and deed
Were fired with youth's impulsive flame;
Desire's swift steed with lightning speed
Bore you ahead to wealth and fame.

Your sorrows never lasted long.
Your work was easy, grief soon past.
And any goal—you felt so strong—
Was bound to be attained at last.

You earned your bread not begging alms
But with your strength and inspiration,
You scorned both self-complacency
And underlings' self-denigration.

Without unneeded braggadocio
You'd parry anybody's blows.
No sudden twist of fate could quash you.
You were a man when need arose.

But youth won't blossom on forever
Its fire subsides, its sweetness sours.
So see you do not miss your chance
In this fast-fleeting life of ours.

Don't be too simple in your ways.
Your partner's smile may seem so winning,
Yet it may hide a scorpion's tail
You might have missed at the beginning.

Be friendly when you deal with friends.
Be quick yet just when dealing vengeance.
Who overdoes his part—repents.
The door to rectitude is patience.

Assist an honest man in need,
And you will have a lifelong friend.
A scoundrel's flattery don't heed.
It turns out worthless in the end.

This false and never constant world
Seems to a youth a springtime orchard.
He looks at it with happy eyes
By no misgivings is he tortured.

He takes whatever strikes his fancy
Without a thought—just like a toy.
When people start to shout about him
The empty hubbub gives him joy.

He frankly gives his faith and love
To all and everything on earth;
He does not know that men are false
For he has still to learn their worth.

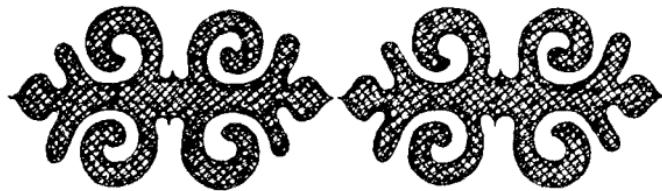
O you who smear the world with lies,
Tell lies to me—I'm old and tempered.
But do not touch the frail young reed
For it is still too young and tender.

A youth believes in all you say.
Sincere and pure in all his feelings.
Now tell me, are you not ashamed
When in surprise he whispers “Really?”

1891

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





We grow pale and we blush,
With our blood mounting high,
Seeing nothing around
For each other we sigh.

So of passion we learn.
To a tryst having come,
We have so much to say
Yet lack words and are dumb.

With a fluttering heart
You come out to your dear
And the rustle of leaves
Is a sign she is near.

Palpitation, and fear
Grips her heart like a vice.
Like a candle she burns,
Yet her hands are like ice.

Both our souls are aflame
While a mist veils our eyes.
Kisses render us mute.
All we utter are sighs.

Leaves conceal us from sight.
Midnight looks from above.
With our lips we drink in
The sweet balsam of love.

Hands touch hands, lips find lips,
Kiss comes fast after kiss.
All our beings are bathed
In the radiance of bliss.

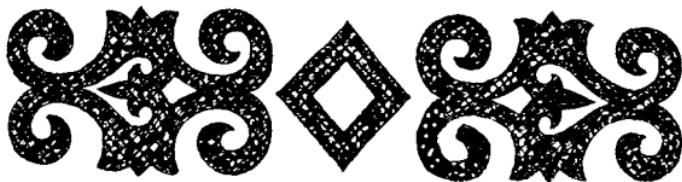
Fear and faltering cease,
Fever burns in each limb
And our eyes all at once
Have become moist and dim.

Depth of judgement, wise words,
What do all of you cost
In the realm of romance
Where all reason is lost?

1891

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Eye of my eye, I beg,
Give ear to this I say:
For love of thee, dear heart,
I slowly waste away.

The wisest of the wise
Will hasten to agree
That not another maid
Can be compared to thee.

Whene'er of thee I sing,
Though tears near turn me blind
The tenderest of words
I always seek to find.

Thy scorn has ever been
Uncommon hard to bear,
But with restraint will I
Now speak of my despair.

No more dost thou bestow
Upon me than a glance,
Of all I think and feel
Thus feigning ignorance

Though ever by thy side,
Adoring, I remain,
Thou treatest me, alas,
With ill deserved disdain

A home without a hearth
Is not a home, 'tis said.
A man who lacks a heart
Will often lack a head.

My love I cannot force,
This do I know, on thee,
But to confess it is
The debt I owe to thee.

Hide not from me that I
In awe and love may gaze
Upon thy snowy brow,
Upon thy lovely face.

Thy teeth are pearls, thy lips
Are dainty flowers in bloom,
Thy sable brows are each
A newly born half-moon.

As graceful as a fawn,
As slender as a tree,
As lovely as a rose
Thou seemest, love, to me.

Emerge from thy retreat
I beg of thee, come nigh,
And let me feast on thee,
Beloved, my weary eyes.

When thou art gay—'tis spring,
When sad—the world turns chill;
To me thy laughter is
A songbird's dulcet trill.

Feign anger not, nor play
So heartlessly with me,
For I would sacrifice
My very life for thee.

Thou'ret radiant as the sun
And fragrant as a rose.
At sight of thee my heart,
Enraptured, flames and glows.

O, to give voice to love!—
But no, I dare not speak....
Words fail me, love, when I
To pay thee homage seek.

A gift of God art thou
That doth the heart console,
A sherbet for the flesh,
A nectar for the soul.

She who is beautiful,
In truth, is doubly blest.
To worship beauty was
The prophet's own behest.

By pain my soul is wrung
To think that we must part.
To be with thee, my love,
Is balsam for the heart.

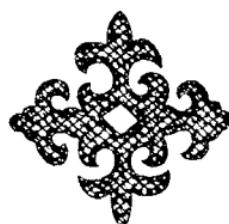
Thy wooers are many, love,
Amongst us choose thou must.
I tremble lest from me
Thou turnest in disgust.

To speak is agony....
Turn not from me in scorn.
When thou dost smile at me
My heart in twain is torn.

All that I want from thee
Is but a word, a sign.
O, that my agony
Were ended, Goddess mine! . .

1891

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





My soul, what are you seeking, pray?
Tell me the truth for once, today.
I'm worried by your haste, so let's
Discuss it in a friendly way.

The vain adore those praises loud
Upon them lavished by the crowd.
But since that crowd is fickle, blind,
There is no cause to feel so proud.

And will a sage be hailed by men
Who've little honour left in them?
The eulogies will be inane
Where honesty has sadly stemmed.

Such specious praise befouls our minds
With putrid stench, so when you find
Some people who will speak the truth,
Don't shun them, thinking they're unkind.

Each word's for sale, each gushing sigh,
But then the hypocrites' flattering lie,
The buzz of wasps that swarm around,
Is really not the thing to buy.

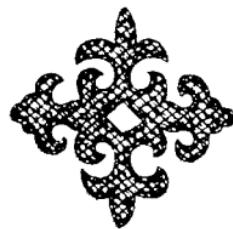
I'm sickened by their words of honey,
By praise so crude, it's really funny.
It's like expecting love from whores
Who sell their hot embrace for money....

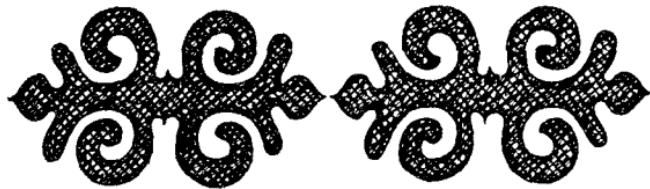
I am no slave to praises cheap,
I'll live, though glory I won't reap.
I shall ignore the criticism
From shallow men, in malice steeped.

Life, after all, is like a wave,
It all too quickly ebbs away,
And good or bad it's all the same,
It's full of poison anyway

1892

Translated by Olga Shartse





Wit is the mother of sorrow.
Knowledge gives birth to rage.
Sorrow and wrath fill my bosom
Pouring out on the written page

Little reason have I to rejoice.
My life's neither that nor this.
In dismay I look back on my past
Where everything went amiss.

Spirits defected and sad
Abound on this sorry earth.
If neither stupid nor mad
In life you find little of worth.

Wealth will not bring men brains.
Beauty will not bring wealth.
All his life in his views like a child
 remains
He who practices cunning and stealth.

Who can be satisfied
By empty, counterfeit praise?
No one wishes you luck
When your fortune is on the rise.

What worth are cunning and craft
When fortune her favours denies?

Supposing you are an official,
Bringing order and peace gives you
 pleasure.
But peace and order are not the things
A Kazakh for long will treasure.

If anyone raises a cry
They instantly flock to his side.
No use asking wherefoe and why;
Even flogging won't turn the tide.

At him who says "Abide with the law"
Askance the mob will look.
Thereafter they'll shun him like mad:
He won't hold them by hook or by crook.

Let me tell you about my people.
Listen, it may seem odd;
Some stick up their noses like steeples
As if they were earthly gods.

Others know all the laws,
Tell tales to the powers-that-be.
Which the latter encourage, of course,
With a substantial fee.

Still others are holy by sight,
Mention God after every word,
But really are full of spite
Commit sacrilege undeterred.
Others frequent the mosque
Though themselves may think it absurd

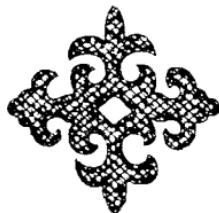
O impotent greybeard, go home,
Leave the wretched people alone.
If someone among the folk
Starts a row in the street or at home
And the quarrel leads to a feud
You bless either side, eat their food
And don't even try to make peace,
But advise them not to spare cattle
On bribes to the local police.

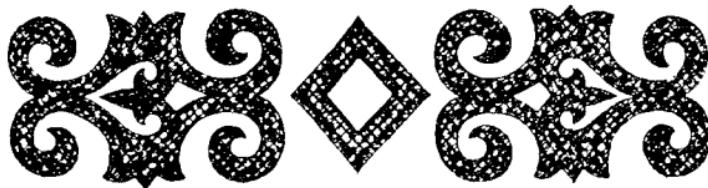
Don't act like a dog, inviting woe.
Go home and sit still, by Allah, go!

To my deepest regret, I have lately found
A lot of such greybeards prowling around.
They never do anyone anything good,
Just set off loud squabbles which end in
a feud.

1892

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





'Twas all too brief, his sojourn in this world.
Yet we may envy him that it was so.
He never saw his army's banners droop,
Nor knew the shame of bowing to a foe.

He never felt the misery of flight
But left the world with an unsullied name,
As flourishing and full of youth's delight,
As passionately honest as he came.

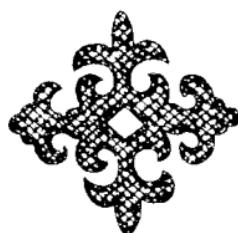
He never sensed the frailty of old age
Nor writhed with disillusionment in men.
He never saw the green *jailau** burnt out
And rivers dried, no more to flow again.

He left us with a pure and cloudless soul
Not having bowed his head or bent his back,
Nor begging for some favour on his knees;
To leave like him is verily good luck!

1892

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

* *Jailau*--highland pasture.—*Ed.*





All that tosses your soul
From hot into cold
Will wither one day,
Getting stale and old.

At the outset of life,
Disappointment still far—
You began to discern
The way things are

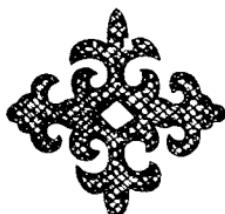
All you counted as joy,
All that thrilled your young heart
Only brought you remorse
And with shame made you smart.

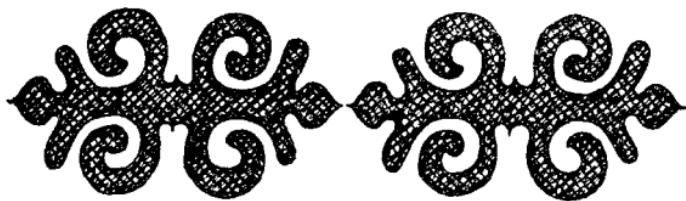
And it seemed later on
Just a trivial tale;
To retell it to friends
Was of little avail.

Only one without shame,
Lacking prudence and wit
Would blab on undismayed
By a wise word a whit.

1893

Translated by Dorian Rottcnberg





With a grimace of distaste

I stop in my paces

On seeing a gas-bag

With airs and graces.

I hurriedly step to one side.

What he does is correct,

So he thinks in his pride,

Without a defect or blemish to hide.

In public he roars—

He's henpecked indoors.

A sad little figure with a titter and snigger.

His friendship is firm

When it earns him a gift,

If not—then friendless the man will make shift.

With a vulture's keen eye

He will try, if he can

To prey on and plunder a big-hearted man.

Pure nonsense he'll babble

To stir up the rabble.

He makes a brisk trade with both honour and oath.

First trouble he sowed,

Then he took to the road,

Begging a bite from every *bai*.

A cockscomb when poor

Is a danger and more—

He will prove a real curse when he's after your
purse.

But it would be a sin

To let a leech win,

He would fritter your wealth, doing harm to
himself.

If a man's well-to-do

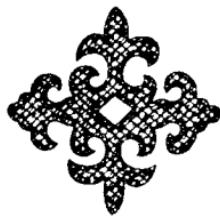
What on earth should he do—

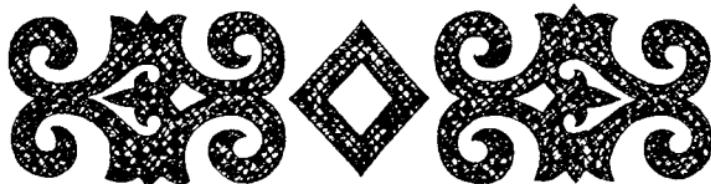
Since folk are so quick to cheat and to trick?

Advice none will heed
And don't feel the need
 Their fighting to cease, to live on in peace.
No men are just
There's no one to trust.
 And no friendly word can ever be heard.
No men inspire,
So no men admire,
 Or dream of a goal to which to aspire.
The heroes round here
Are all bandits, I fear
 Not one worthy man can be found far or near!
A feather-head sheds
All thought from its brain,
 Like a gander's back—untouched by the rain.
I gave, I believed,
But I was deceived....
Now caution. I see, must temper my trust.

1893

Translated by Tom Botting





Good deeds won't survive for long.
The longest survivor is wrong.
Hope's horse is becoming sluggish,
Won't gallop—just limps along.
Spur it as hard as you like,
Sorrow it won't overtake.
Start thinking about some woe—
Countless others emerge in its
wake.

Like shadows, sorrow and care
Follow me everywhere.
Till the clouds overhead disperse
The face of the heavens won't clear.
So the suffering soul won't revive
Till the heart is relieved of
despair.

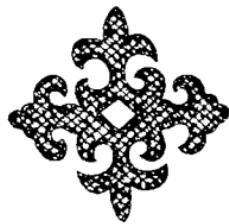
The smile will fade from your lips
And sorrow gain total sway,
Turning you into its slave
If you cannot cast it away.

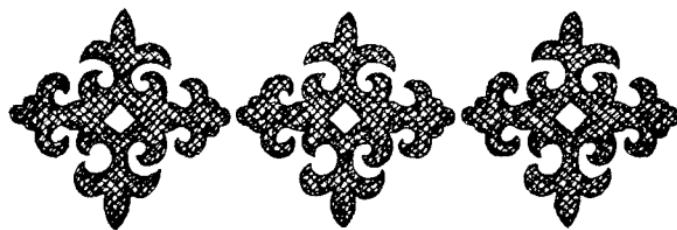
Can one help being crushed by woes
When they come one after another?
Worthless kinsfolk are worse than
foes:
Try and live with a grumbling
brother!

Most intolciable of all!
But what can be done with the lot?
I am sick of kinsmen and neighbours
Boasting of God knows what.

1893

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





My autumn has come, yes, the frost-tinted
fall....

How to preserve my vigour and force?
In my mind it is May. I hear the clear call,
But cannot make springtide abandon its course.

O my soul! Now in May the winter returns
And can a rose blossom when smothered in snow?
Ah! But if a fierce flame within a man burns,
It shall not be extinguished when winter storms
blow.

Narrow, short-sighted the human being!
No far vistas call to souls without wings,
Blind to all beauty, but gloating on seeing
Egoistical, petty, insignificant things.

Each an insatiable, ravening beast,
Wolf-like, cunning, knowing no rest,
Forces his way to take part in a feast,
Seizing the roast that looks fattest and
best.

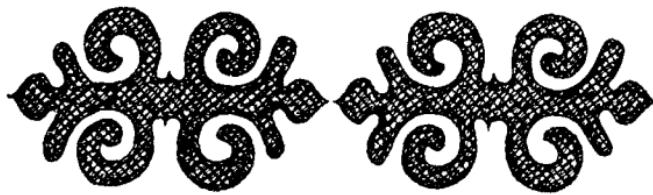
To cheat and make money they never despise,
Or to guzzle and swill, when another man
pays....
“Look sharp! Don’t be caught!” is their code,
honour-wise....
Such are the money-hogs, such are their ways.

Only the foxiest men they respect.
Modesty seems to them craven fear.
Could anyone in a lifetime expect,
Escaping deceit, to find happiness here?

1894

Translated by Tom Botting





I'm sorely disappointed in our modern youth,
What with their arrogance and disrespect for truth.
They are incapable of ruling or creating,
And most of them are swindlers in the making.

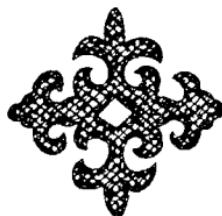
They're not aggrieved by evil. Kindness leaves them
 cold.
They're not deterred by either faith or fear of God.
They trade in promises and have no other care
But to procure a horse and plenty of rich fare.

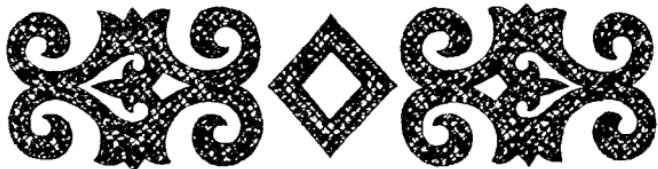
What are such good-for-nothings really worth?
Can they be made to ply some trade or till the earth?
They want to get along in life by any means but fair,
And worry not that they're distrusted everywhere.

A youth like that will swindle in all matters,
His conscience must be stitched from varicoloured
 tatters.
His honour he may pledge and swear by all the world,
But no one ever takes on trust his knavish word.

1894

Translated by Olga Shartse



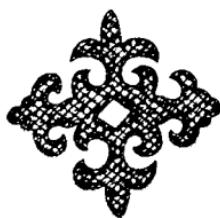


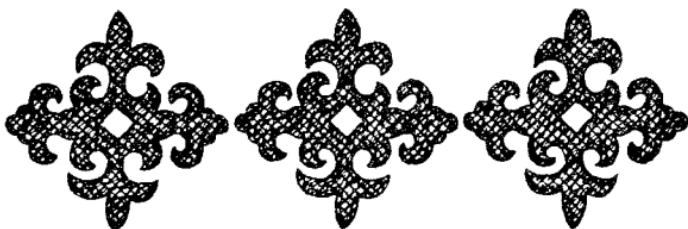
The language of lovers dispenses with words.
With their looks, with an inner sense they converse.
Believe it or sneer at it—just as you wish,
But a lad or a lass in love never errs.

I, too, knew that language some decades ago.
And whenever addressed I would let my heart go.
Then that language was near and clear as could be;
Now, alas, it is long since foreign to me.

1894

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Don't rush after chance in a headlong chase,
But let talent's call forever be heeded.
You are a stone from the world's very base,
So take up your place where most you are needed.

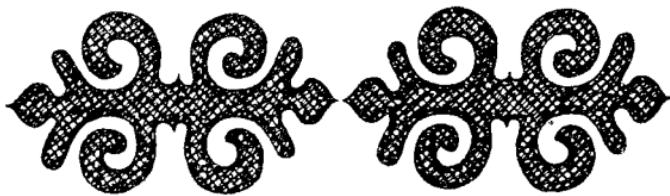
During the race both pursued and pursuer
Must draw strength from his will, or slacken and tire.
A man is adorned in the eyes of the viewer
By virtue and justice, the finest attire.

When a gifted Kazakh with these traits takes his stance
He stands between flames and the frigid ice-pack,
Consumed by the heat if he would advance,
And frozen to death if he tries to turn back.

Do not let self-interest make you a slave.
Do not try to shine with a glorious light.
Do not hide your sins, though many and grave.
For what you most love in this world you must fight.

If you possess riches you never should flaunt them
To make other men small and yourself to seem great.
If some seethe with envy you never should taunt them,
Or you'll find great misfortunes are lying in wait.

Be honest and modest in life every day;
Then be sure you will not have laboured in vain
If children take paths that lead them astray
Their tutor will guide them to truth once again



Hear me, God, hear this prayer
That I speak through my tears.
Send me calm, send me peace,
Help me conquer my fears.

Help me, God, hear this prayer,
Hear my heart's silent plea.
Spare my son, spare my son,
Do not take him from me!

Though my heart is afire,
Yet as ice is my breast.
By a terrible dread
I, thy slave, am oppressed.

Thou so mighty and wise,
Deign to hear what I say;
For the life of my son
Full of sorrow I pray.

I am shaken and weak,
And distress turns me numb. . . .
To his illness, O God,
Do not let him succumb.

Send him back to me, God.
Let me gaze on his face,
Let me hold him again
In my loving embrace.

In my heart there is fear,
Fear that battles with hope.
Like a man who is blind
For support do I grope.

O my son, pray take care
In whose hands you are placed,
For physicians at times
Make pronouncements in haste.

From your father your pain
Do not try to conceal:
Something gnaws at your heart,
You are troubled, I feel.

Put no faith, O my son,
In a sorcerer, pray.
Call in doctors without
And further delay.

Call in doctors, my son,
Who are famed for their art,
Spare no money, I beg,
Spare my old, anxious heart.

To your cousin, my son,
Your protector and friend,
To your cousin my thanks
And my blessings I send.

To your needs he attends
And is faithful and true.
O my son, if I could
I would be with you too!

Worn with tears that my heart's
Boundless sorrow betray,
For your sickness to pass
Day and night do I pray.

In this letter of mine
Like a prayer I repeat:
Gather strength, O my son.
And your illness defeat.

All our kinsmen and friends,
When they learn you are here,

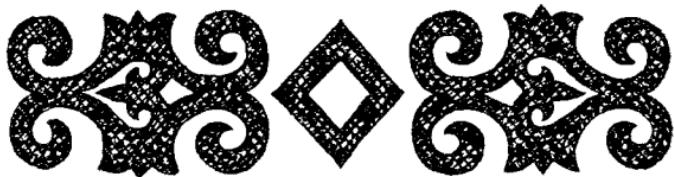
Will in welcome to you
At our threshold appear.

For your joy is their joy
And your pain is their pain,
For they long as do I
To embrace you again.

1894

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





Childhood flew past,
Youth did not last,
Old age is coming,
Ruthless and fast.

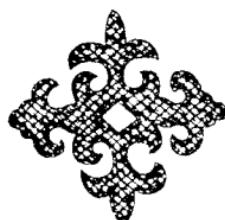
Are you conforming
Under its sway,
Honour forgotten,
Faith thrown away?

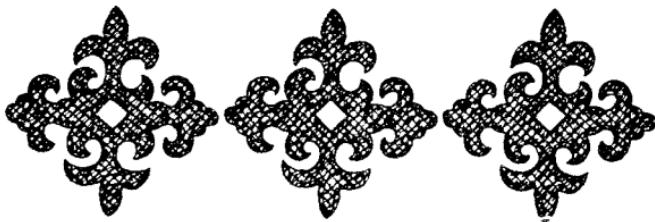
Or perhaps you've brought doom
On yourself who can know?
Like some mother camel
Who never will go

Out of her stall,
Year after year
Wasting away
Shapeless offspring to rear.

1895

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Maybe nature is mortal, but man is not,
Though there's no coming back
When he draws his last breath.
The separation of *I* and *Mine*
The ignorant only regard as death.

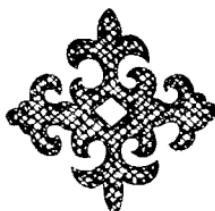
Those who become the servants of gain
Neither praiseworthy deeds nor name,
But can there be mention of death if men
Leave utterances of immortal fame?

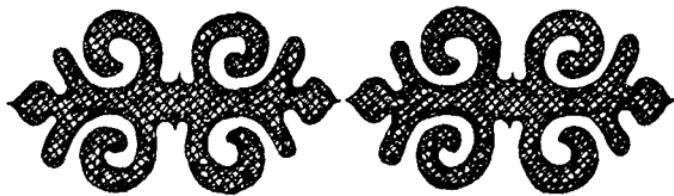
Some live without caring for earthly goods,
Too aware of the numerous earthly ills.
But for others it's difficult to discern
The evil that earthly existence fills.

This world and the other can't both be loved.
The divine and the earthly must needs be divorced.
But a man's no believer if he in his heart
Loves this world all too much, and the other
perforce.

1895

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





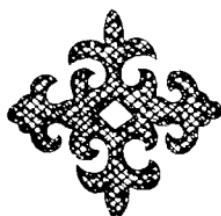
Magish, my daughter dear, don't weep.
Be strong, don't give in to despair.
Or else the bitterness will settle deep
And poison your heart beyond repair.
The flower of your life has withered, died.
And darkness shrouds your aching soul,
But in this world we cannot long abide,
The agony of death awaits us all.
Don't think you're walking in the dark
All by yourself, bereft and lost.
Our grief, Magish, is just as stark,
As bitter is our dreadful loss.
And it's a common rule, you know.
All men are mortal, born to die.
Death reaps the high-born and the low,
The old men and the young alike.
For all of us will strike the hour
However we rejoice and thrive.
And no man born can overpower
The Reaper when he swings his scythe.
We're all subordinate to death,
All mankind, for all times to be.
I know he was your very breath,
I know he was your world, Magish.
With grief your broken heart is wrung,
But tears won't bring him back to us.
His hour struck, his song is sung,
And stilled the strings of his *kamuz*.
Where are the days that seemed so fair?
Where is the sun we sadly rue?
Is there no flower anywhere
That beauty will stay faithful to?
Ah, intricate is fate's design
To know its secrets we've denied,

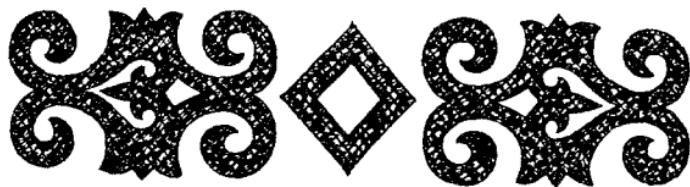
We're left to suffer and repine,
While he, obeying fate, has died.
Magish, it cannot be undone.
Don't cry, my dear, be strong and proud
Your falcon's soared up to the sun,
The earth means nothing to him now.
Ah, death, why did you want to take
The best, the finest of my sons?
My grief with tears I cannot slake,
And even those I love I shun.
Have pity on us, do not cry.
To us he also once belonged.
We can't beat death, but you're alive
And with that strength you must be strong.
My soul is drunken with despair,
I'm broken, blind and deaf from grief,
The agony's so hard to bear,
And nowhere can I find relief.
I'm poorer than a beggar now,
I'm stooped and sunk in hopeless gloom,
My hand gropes for support, but how,
Where shall I seek support, in whom?
My eyes are dry, I cannot weep,
Too laden is my heart with pain.
My son will never wake from sleep.
I'll never see my son again!

To loneliness I'm doomed forevermore,
To be with people I've no strength or wish,
My mortal wound is still too fresh and sore,
Please try to understand, Magish.

1895

Translated by Olga Shartse





Why did you orphan me, O God?
Why did you send me so much grief?
Why were my days of bliss so few?
Why was my happiness so brief?

The bitter flames that char my heart
Resist the soothing balm of tears....
Why sealed you, God, the path to joy
That I did blindly seek for years?

Teach resignation not to me—
Too young to be resigned am I.
Why did you take Abish from me?
Why did you let my husband die?...

My widowed heart, my lonely heart
Love's warmth will know no more, alas!
My bloom is gone without a trace,
I am as lifeless, withered grass.

But twenty summers old and two
Am I, and yet my heart is cold....
Nay, cloudless days are not for me,
No promise doth the future hold.

Such is my anguish that the birth
Of every dawn I face with dread.
The past has flown, the blissful past,
And dismal looms the road ahead.

Robbed of my lover's soaring dreams.
Bereft of his ennobling thought,
Deprived of him and of his love,
I go through life unloved, unsought....

My heart is wounded and it weeps,
Its tears, unseen, the spirit sear....
In distant parts he met his death,
His last farewell I did not hear.

The parting words we never spoke
Lie like a weight upon my breast....
If only I could drown in tears
My pain, my torment, my unrest!...

O God, why did you will that I
To sorrow be forever wed?
Why did you spread dark robes of fog
Upon the road that I must tread?

A heavy veil upon my face,
Bowed down with grief, I walk alone....
Beside my cold and empty house
My husband's path with grass is grown.

His lofty thoughts, his prophesies
Must stay unknown for ever more,
For ill can I describe what he,
That noble spirit, hungered for.

A modest man he was and just,
Far-sighted and possessed of wit,
Proud, yes, but never arrogant,
A man of wisdom infinite....

With him all that I loved has gone
And only memories remain.
My sun has set, nor will it rise.
For me who worshipped it again.

O let me, weeping, speak my heart!
I want the callous world to know
That darkness hems me in, unpierced
By e'en a shadow of a glow.

Lost in a sea of grief, its tide
That rises fast, in vain I fight.

I longed for you, but bitter fate
Extinguished joy's unsteady light.

We live but once—why then is life
So meaningless, and I, its slave,
Thus wearily am forced to drag
Affliction's burden to the grave?

I call for death, but, merciless,
My summons it declines to heed,
Not caring that until I die
My widowed heart will, silent, bleed.

My heart is spent and drained of strength,
I only live because I must. . . .
The flame of hope has long been quenched
By destiny's relentless gust.

Death is the saviour I await,
The healer for whose touch I long . . .
Come, death, make haste, do not delay.
No more my sufferings prolong!

From very childhood, so willed fate,
Upon my life there lay a blight.
With him I loved, night turned to day.
But now . . . now day has turned to night.

Grief clipped my wings and chained my
limbs
And left me mute and petrified.
Abish did dream-like come to me
And dream-like vanished from my side.

How live without him? How endure
The days bereft of love's caress?
How heal the wounded heart? How fill
Life's aching void, its emptiness?

Far from my home he carried me,
But he was near, and I knew bliss.
Alas! From off a sun-warmed peak
I fell into a dark abyss.

All that was sweet delight to me,
All that was ecstasy to me,
All that was paradise to me,
All that was joy . . . is gone from me.

Kept long apart, for two whole years,
And reunited all too late,
For ever are we parted now
By you, O harsh and spiteful fate!

Blame not your child who begs for death
Now that her love is gone, O Lord,
For 'twas from you she did receive
The wondrous gift of love, O Lord!

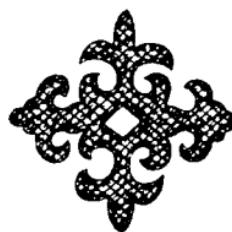
With broken spirit life I face
And for my love, despairing, call
And tremble like an autumn leaf
From off its branch about to fall.

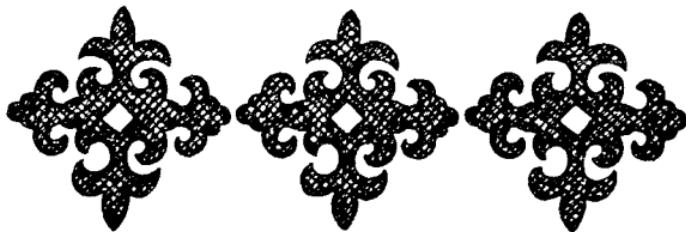
Farewell, farewell, O joy of day,
My strength is gone, my sight is blurred,
My heart no more sweet solace seeks
But flutters like a wounded bird.

I die a thousand awful deaths,
I burn in Hell's eternal flame. . . .
The words I speak mean little, for
Words are as naught beside my pain.

1895

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





A maiden languished in the palace of a khan,
He was an elderly, infatuated man.
He gave her slave girls of her wishes to take care,
And dressed her in brocades and satins rare.
The khan was confident that she was his to buy,
And did his best to bring surrender nigh.
The maiden threw herself into the lake instead,
Preferring death to sharing his brocaded bed.

* * *

Girls can't be tempted by the lure of gold alone,
They want a handsome young *jigit* to call their own.
What use a man whose head is shaking, he's so old,
Who strives to capture what is lost beyond recall?
An old man cannot hope to win a youthful maid,
In her emotions and her love she does not trade.
A marriage where the bride is younger than the groom
By thirty years or so is veritably doomed!
To these old fools, of course, it never does occur
How dull it is for their poor wives who are mere girls.
I'm pained to watch. For, after all, they are no beasts
To copulate without some spark of love at least.
He gladly pays bride-money to avert old age
And catch a pretty girl-bride in his golden cage.
His youth that's past and gone he wants to rediscover
By sapping all the youth and vigour of another.
He lives with her unknowing if she has a mind.
He has a young and lovely wife, to else he's blind.
She's like a playful kitten, full of pretty wiles,
And dupes the pleased old fool who's past suspecting
guile.

* * *

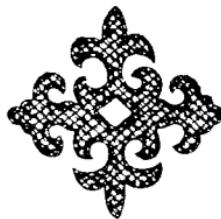
Beware, old khan, you are to be a cuckold yet.
Revenge on your senility the imp will get.
You brag about your wealth and things that money
buys,

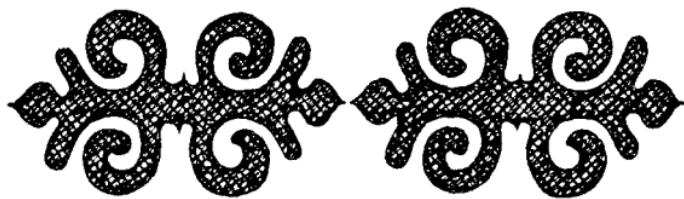
But it is there precisely where your ruin lies.
Your faithful *baibishe** you rudely scorn and chide
To win the dubious favour of a youthful bride.
But she is spring—you're winter, what is past is past.
You are a gnarled old twig, and she—a shoot of grass.
Do not deceive yourself, there will be no reward.
For she will never love you, she's already bored.
Between the two of you a generation lies;
To try to bridge the gulf is not, I fear me, wise.

1896

Translated by Olga Shantse

* *Baibishe*—the first wife.—*Ed.*





The tick of a clock is not something slight.
The sounds mark the fleeting fractions of day,
Each minute a transient life in full flight
That never returns when once passed away.

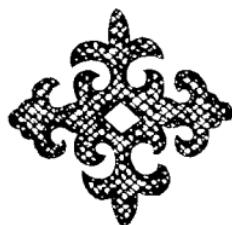
The ticking of clocks unheeded still shows
The count of our days and seconds extinguished.
Time is not constant. It changes and flows—
The past, in its march, cast off and relinquished.

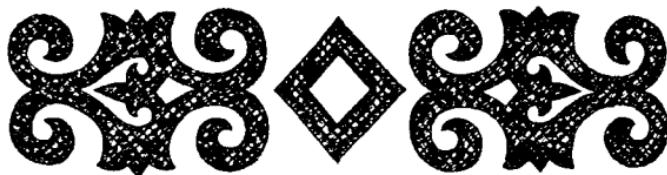
Men hide from the fact that none want to know—
A clock gives a tick and life is diminished.
Protest as you may, it always was so—
These small sounds proclaim that life is soon
finished.

The hours become months. The months become
years.
We soon face old age—our life-span is short.
All mortals soon pass through this valley of tears—
Only Allah eternal can be our support.

1896

Translated by Tom Bottling





The bird of the soul flies to all parts
When a man is sunk deep in reflection.
A song is the shadow of strange-patterned flight,
Unerringly showing the soul's introspection.

A song soars and hovers, it sweeps and it streams,
Touching the soul, provoking new thought....
A song contains all the joys of the mind,
But by men hard of hearing it cannot be caught.

A song awakens the deep-sleeping heart,
Soothing the soul with sweet music heard,
Creating a mood of joy and of sadness,
Balm to the soul like a little child's word.

How few know the sense of the lays that they sing!
And even those few will not heed it for long.
Is none of you willing to listen and learn
The gentle accords of my own plaintive song?

Our melodies rise in a high and clear tone,
As if for attention forever contending.
They capture the heart elating the soul,
Yet poignant the sadness that weighs on each ending

Songs are diverse, like men—wise and foolish.
Some contain phrases that jar on the ear.
Others there are of such profound meaning
That all stop to ponder on precepts they hear.

A word to the wise I never begrudge,
Writing a verse to explain a song's sense,
Annoying the deaf who can't understand,
But bringing well-wishers a pleasure intense.

To those with a sacred spark in their soul
My motives are clear, such men comprehend....
At first life is warm, but at last starkly chill.
Though life starts with joy, in tears it must end.

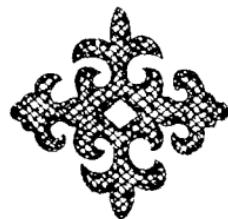
Yet the passage of time can be joy unalloyed
To those who have learnt how a song is enjoyed....

The ignorant think a *zhar-zhar** song delightful,
No man who can sing well is silent by choice....
So lift up your voice with emotion resurgent—
All hearts will be captured, all souls will rejoice.

1896

Translated by Tom Botting

* *Zhar-zhar*—a wedding song.—*Ed.*





When the heart of a bard
Is unburdened and free,
It invites inspiration's
Divine harmony.

And awaking from sleep,
No more tortured, serene,
Sings away unrestrained
As a swift mountain stream,

And in childlike delight
Greets the wonder of day
With a torrent of sound,
With a rich interplay

Of the colours and hues
That turn prose into verse. . .
Then it is that the bard
Scans the vast universe

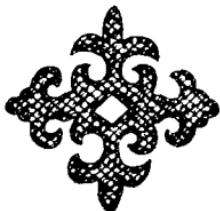
With an eagle's keen eye,
And, alive to its woes,
Goes to battle against
Man's most pitiless foes.

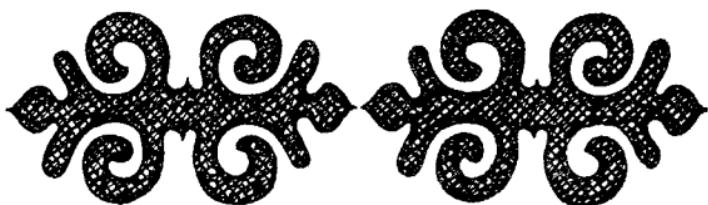
And with faith at his side,
Sits in judgement upon
Brutal tyrants whose role
Brings contentment to none.

Loving honour and truth
With resentment he flames,
And his verdict aloud,
Fearing no one, proclaims.

1896

Translated by Irina Zheleznova



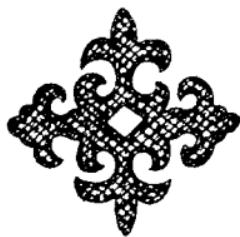


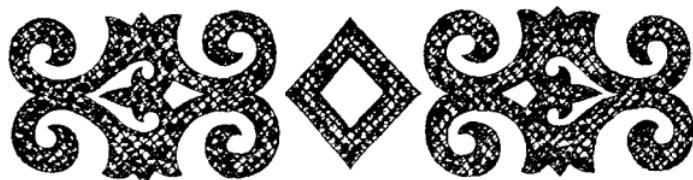
When the heavens are covered with clouds
And grey rain pours down from the sky
Deep anguish my spirit enshrouds,
My sorrowing heart starts to cry.

After rain, the sun reappears
And sweet is the brooklet's language.
Yet my eyes overflow with hot tears,
My heart fills with more poignant anguish.

1896

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Time is like whisps of fog on the hills.
You watch them and boredom your spirit fills.
You look at the chain of featureless days
And a sense of fatigue their flow instills.

Days like as twins, days gloomy and grey,
Like birds they arrive and they fly away.
Some one among them conceals your death,
Yet which will be last, only Allah can say.

Your soul and your consciousness make up your *I*;
Flesh and blood are its envelope, doomed to die.

But the soul is immortal, and so, for its sake,
Bear all, let your conscience be ever awake.
By day and by night
The flesh seeks delight
But how trivial, how petty it is, how trite.

Love, conscience and truth—let *them* be your guide
Till the time when you merge with eternal night.

For wealth with your soul you will have to pay.
For honours—from slander your heart will despair.
Life will not be deceived—it will break you one day
Like a thread grown thin with long wear and tear.

Man deems that this world of ours is his own,
But in fact it belongs to Allah alone.
All that men possess are their flesh and goods,
Yet they too will dissolve in the vast Unknown.

Let your heart feel compassion for others' woe.
Work selflessly for your fellow-men, so

That for loving His children Almighty God
His blessings on you will also bestow.

All people are different, each has his worth.
Strong, together, are those who were weak since birth.
To everyone deal out mercy and truth.
Give aid to all men—'tis your mission on earth.

Who is bad, who is good, one cannot say for sure.
False spirits may often appear to be pure.
Only scoundrels praise themselves out aloud,
The richest in virtue in words are poor.

1897

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





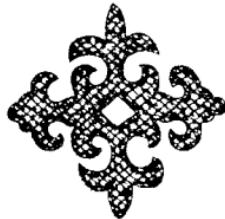
Do not believe the flatterers, for they
Are certain to betray you one fine day.
Trust only in yourself. A sober mind and toil
Will happiness and weal for you purvey.

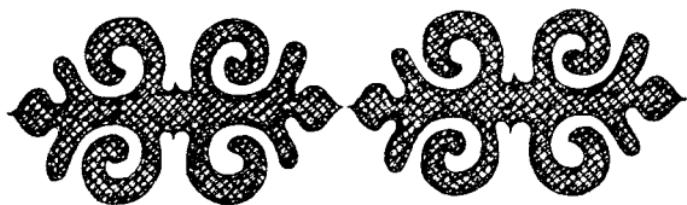
Do not believe in sweetly flowing praise
Lest it should make you blind and leave you dazed,
And vainly proud of your ostensible success.
Your worth you should be able to appraise.

If trouble comes, stand up to it, be strong.
If happiness—then welcome it with song.
Look deep into your heart, you will discover
pearls,
To you alone these precious gems belong.

1897

Translated by Olga Shartse





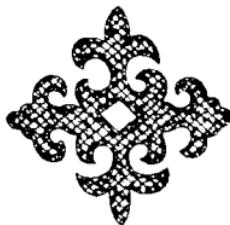
Oh lover mine, it's been so long!
What misery since you've been gone!
I wonder, darling, if you know,
How much I want you for my own?

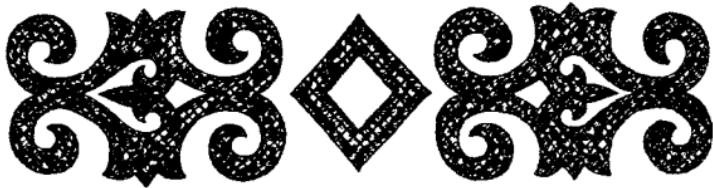
But if you are no longer mine,
Where will I ever solace find?
Oh, tell me that it is not so,
Not true, you can't be so unkind.

You are my light, my sun and moon,
Without you life has lost its bloom,
The world is dark and plunged in woe,
And I, I'm dying in the gloom....

1897

Translated by Olga Shartse



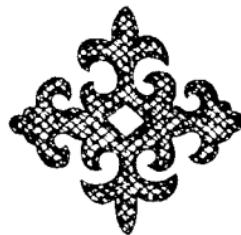


Their singing resounds like full-throated bellows...
But can it be called a song that they yell?
They swagger around, the idlest fellows....
What good about them can anyone tell?

Ignorant men lurk around in the dark—
Although the name “man” can hardly seem right.
No good can they do. Their existence is stark....
Can such a dull life bring any delight?

1897

Translated by Tom Botting

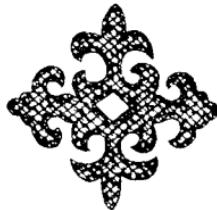


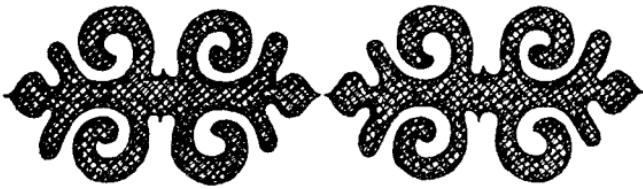


Our people see all hope has dwindled,
While foulest falsehoods flourish rank.
Throughout our life we're cheated, swindled—
We fight, but all our shots are blank!

1897

Translated by Tom Botting





A snowdrop up-thrusting when spring came along
Knew not if its life would be short or long.
It thought it could grow as high as an oak.
Drunk with sunshine it stood. Try and tell it
 it's wrong.

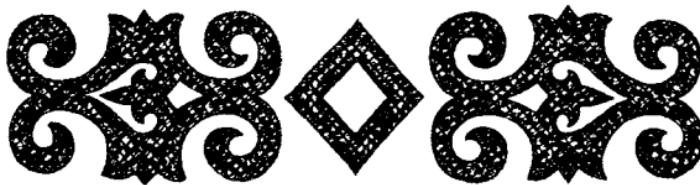
But then autumn breathed cold, and at once it froze.
Scarce to the height of a molehill it rose.

I also had plentiful dreams in my youth.
With dreams unfulfilled, life draws to a close.
My steel is blunted, I'm long in the tooth,
My voice is hushed and my mood morose.

1897

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





A mellow tune and a gentle song
Stir the soul and caress the ear.
I forget my cares, I forget the world
When the sounds of a lilting song I hear.

I do not see and I do not hear
Anything far or near. =
When I am cold it brings me warmth,
When I am sad—good cheer.

So a traveller lost in the barren sands
When he slakes his thirst from a chilly spring
Forgets his fear of wild beasts for a time,
Not seeing, not noticing anything.

A song revives in the memory
The woes and joys of the distant past.
The soul is cured of its pains and cares,
All seems to be well at last.

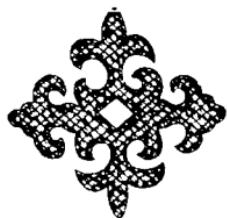
It seems to me that I hear the sound
Of another's life long since gone by.
The dreams and memories of the past
Come to life before my eye.

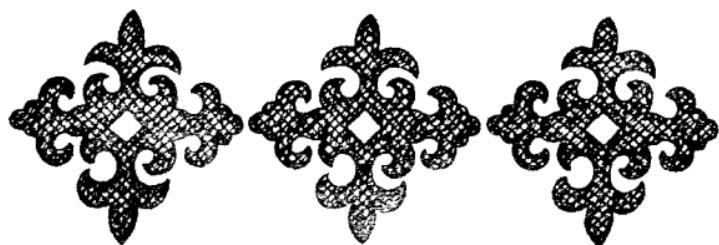
All that I went through comes back again,
Half-forgotten trouble and care revives
And for a time it even seems
There is some truth in lies.

Thieves seem honest and swindlers fair
And worthless sluts seem both pure and chaste,
Although there is hardly a poison on earth
That I did not chance to taste.

1897

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





The ardent impulse of my soul
Will like a sharpened arrow fly,
Like lightning it must pierce the pall
Of darkness in the leaden sky.

Alas, the passion of my verse
Upon the ignorant is lost.

The fire of my daring thought
Has shaped my tongue into a spear.
To fight in battle it's been taught,
And bring my call to every ear.

But people still prefer to dose
And nought will shatter their repose.

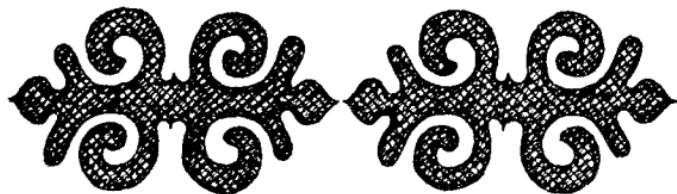
Words which the brain alone records
They come and go, an empty sound.
If by the heart they are absorbed
To call an echo they are bound.

They sing my songs, the words
they learn,
Their meaning they do not discern....

1898

Translated by Olga Shartse

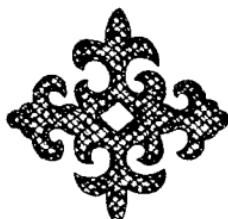


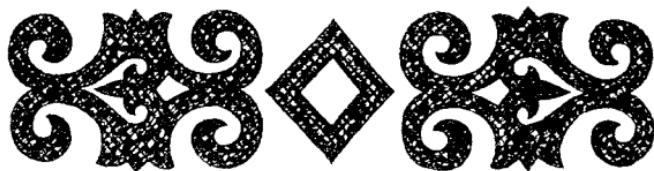


How cope with this accursed world which robs us every hour?
Where has it gone, your former strength, your handsome, youthful face?
Bitterness hides in hope, for life is full of evil power;
No sense in blaming for your ills the hapless human race.
All pleasures are succeeded by misfortune in the end.
Why strain yourself for several days of transient delight?
Nothing is worth abandoning your kinsmen and your friends.
Who turns away from earthly goods is absolutely right.
Cut short the current of your words if they flow not from your soul.
The tongue is prone to treachery, it's always telling lies.
Desires, ambitions always lure to some ephemeral goal.
Aye, it is they that hide the truth from our frail spirit's eyes.

1898

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Is not the cold damp earth to enclose my clay when it
dies?

Will not my fearless tongue become like a timid maid?
Will not my heart be frozen, turned into lifeless ice,
My heart, that fought against vice and the biddings of
love obeyed?

Will not the final hour arrive for me just the same
As it must for all other people, with certainty, soon or
late?

Will not my stern descendants notice them and condemn
The countless mistakes and errors that I so rashly made?

Yet I will not, alas, be able to make reply.

Though you are free to condemn, bear, I beg you, in
mind
That I was harassed enough during my earthly life.
To punish me twice for the same offence would be
indeed unkind.

Make an effort to understand; to your sympathy I
appeal.

It wasn't really so simple, my torn and suffering soul.
My way through this arduous life was difficult, strewn
with thorns.

I fought with the darkest of darkness, take account,
I beg, of it all.

Hot-tempered was I and one time a little bit feather-
brained.

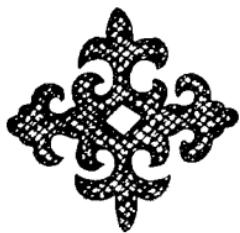
I used to practice deceit and was given to envy and
spite.

Though later I grew more wise, yet to this day remain
Imperfect in many ways, barred by my faults from
the light.

I wasn't entirely free to seek the road to perfection,
Condemned to err by my foes—by those who had borne
 me hate.
They pestered and harassed me more than I should
 like to mention.
May the Almighty God relieve you from such a fate!
To be buried leaving so much unfinished and unac-
 complished,
All I intended—undone; could ever a fate be worse?
But let me not give away all of my sorrowful secrets—
Nothing is so indiscreet, so apt to betray as verse.

1898

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





If an empty heart is accompanied
By a lack of reason and will,
The immortal light of the soul will fade
And your human worth will be nil.

It skims o'er the surface, my will-less mind
And no longer can sound the depths.
O my friends, my spirit is worn and tired
'Tis indeed high time that it slept.

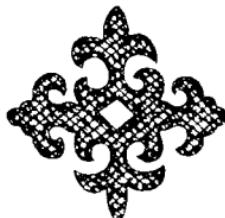
When you curb the urges of mortal flesh
'Tis with pity you bid them adieu.
But if you should fall in your flesh's snare
The one to be pitied is you.

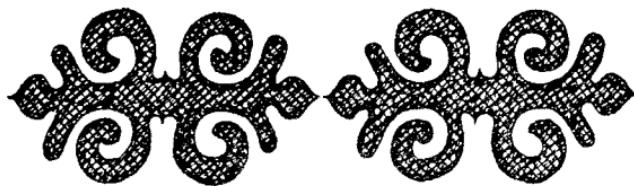
For then you become a senseless brute
Whose soul is both dark and dim.
Whosoever fails to fathom the depths,
Life loses all colour for him.

No more can I say that I am a man;
Surrounded by gloom, I stand.
How can I find any sense in life
When ignorance binds my land?

1898

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



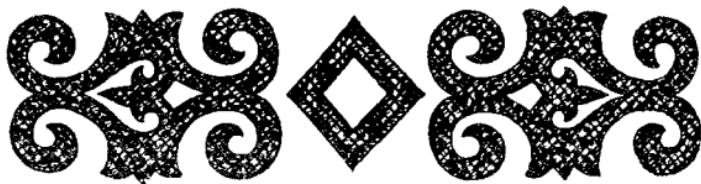


Day after day falls behind.
No peace in the world can I find.
Thought follows thought in my mind
Swifter than any wind.

1898

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Ever weaker and duller beats my heart
Lying compressed in my ailing breast.
Every now and then with fright it will start.
By day and by night it knows no rest.

Disease has banished by carefree ways,
Dire sorrow oppresses my ailing mind.
Repulsed, from the world I avert my gaze,
Nothing but vanity in it I find.

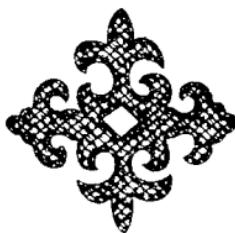
My spirit craves for the long-dead past.
Accursed be the present this day and hence.
Now for calm and for quiet my spirit thirsts,
Now plunges itself into new torments.

Now, full of despair, I give vent to tears,
Obsessed with my ailments all day long,
Now quench my tears for fear of men's sneers
And pretend to be haughty, nonchalant, strong.

Ever weaker and duller beats my heart.
Concealing its woes, into gloom it retreats.
Now, glowing, a sudden tattoo it starts,
Now, deadening down, it hardly beats.

1898

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Do you remember your youth, my friend,
When your blood was fiery hot?
You were drunk with life, you had joy without
end,
All strangers were friends, all foes forgot.

Both love and repose in the company
Of your friends you could always find.
Happiness seemed within easy reach;
But alas, those days are behind.

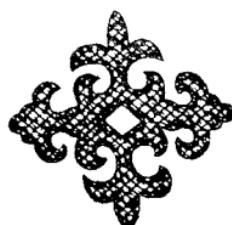
So, alas, have fled your happy dreams
When joy gushed forth in streams.
It seems as if it were yesterday,
But, alas, so it only seems.

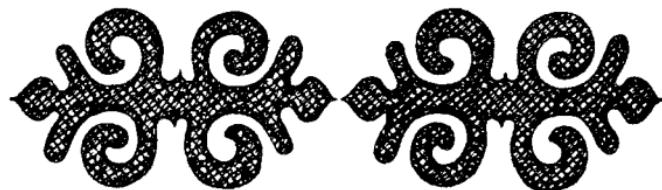
Curse or implore, beg or beseech,
Weep or sigh—they will not return.
Your love has departed, your friends have gone
Each of them in his turn.

Let me weep some more if I still have tears,
Or be patient, if patience is left.
If there is any cure for my tortured heart
Let me heal its bleeding cleft.

1899

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





This harsh world has broken my heart
Into forty pieces leaving just grief,
My soul has been savaged and torn apart—
Now ravaged it lies, deprived of belief.

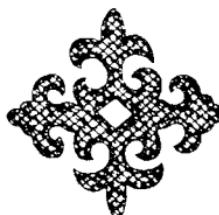
My friends have all gone. I'm alone at the end,
Some renegades fled, some true friends have died.
There is now not a soul upon whom to depend...
Grabbers and foes on every side.

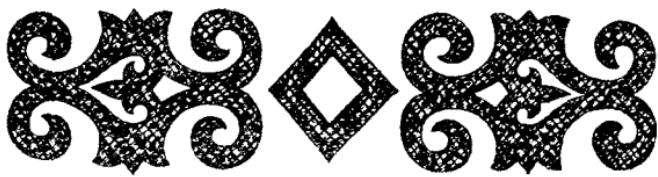
All hope has pined and fled far away.
I gaze at old age now drawing near.
Fools—there are plenty, carefree and gay,
But what is the good of having them near?

You martyred for faith, racked and tormented,
Search through my heart with compassionate gaze,
Sense my great pain, forever augmented,
Take pity on me through soul-tortured days.

1899

Translated by Tom Botting





My puppy grew into a dog—
And my leg it bit one day.
I taught a youngster once to shoot
He may take my life away.

1899

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Why do his lips arch in a smile?—
It hides his spleen and so deceives...
His mind keeps changing all the while,
A chameleon among the leaves.

Any stance, or suit he'll try
To win attention and a place.
When he was headman his cold eye
Would match his haughty, sneering
face.

He'll shake your hand, give you his
heart...
To ingratiate himself he seeks.
Behind your back his tricks soon start—
How rancid, false the fellow reeks!

Today he's hearty, warm, delighted.
Making any sacrifice to please you,
But tomorrow you'll be slighted,
For he will curse, denounce and freeze
you.

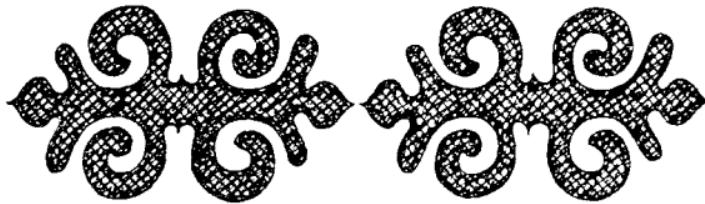
He'll violate you every right.
His devilish soul is cringing, mean.
Although his words are smooth and
white,
His soul is sullied, swart, unclean.

It is not merely spleen and temper
That dulls his reason and his eye,
But some foul illness, slow distemper
Condemning him to wilt and die.

1899

Translated by Tom Botting





Knowing naught of life's consuming pain,
Children strain to grow and reach the sky.
So the shoots of spring stretch toward the sun
And the frosts of winter months defy.

But the days go by relentlessly,
And what once you sowed at last you reap.
Oh, to pass through life as does the sun
That each morning wakes, reborn, from sleep!

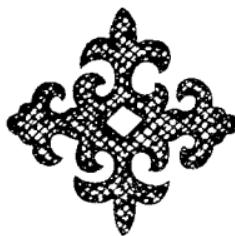
Worry gnaws despondent at your heart
And, unasked, too soon becomes your mate.
Like a broken ear of wheat you sag
'Neath the weight of life and sorrow's weight.

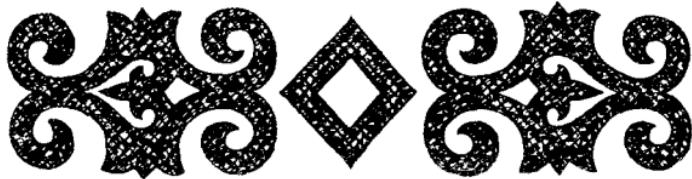
Though you fight the creeping shades of night,
Though you dread to watch the darkness fall,
Yet does death, that cunning thief, approach,
Robbing you, remorseless, of your soul.

Flesh soon turns, for so 'tis ruled, to dust,
Life is but a dream whose flight we mourn.
What the morrow holds is sealed to sight;
Know: to die, O mortal, were you born!

1899

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





Lonely heart, do not seek response
On your road with calamities lined.
My soul, do not wander, keep still for once
If no refuge from life you can find.

A feeling expressed is always false.
No voice responds to my calls.
Oh whither, my restless, unhappy soul,
Do you draw me away from my native walls?

Friendship, happiness, peace and love
On the market of life are not worth much.
The peddlars of honour won't put them above
A copper ha'penny—life is such.

The people's judgement for them are scales
On which to weigh slander and flattery.
Those past-masters in the art of deceit,
They've forgotten what shame and honour be.

With whom can I share my anxious thoughts
If friendship is out of fashion?
Whose sympathy is there to soothe the heart
When the world has no room for compassion?

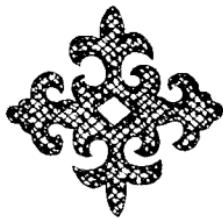
Always and everywhere men are base:
Pity someone and he will repay
By begging a loan, and if you refuse
In fury from you he will turn away.

A lying hypocrite's honeyed words
Won't find their way into hearts sincere.
A flattering scoundrel can do no good
To himself or those who give ear.

You are burning away with a useless flame,
O my soul whom the anguish of loneliness rends,
What is the use of burning in vain
For where is your love and where are your
friends?

1900

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





When the shadows of day
Merge inertly in one,
When the sun slowly sinks,
In no haste to be gone,

All my sorrows I pour
In the dusk's patient ear,
Shyly speaking of things
I want no one to hear,

Down the roads of the past
That so tortuous wind,
Down the roads of the past
Blindly forcing the mind.

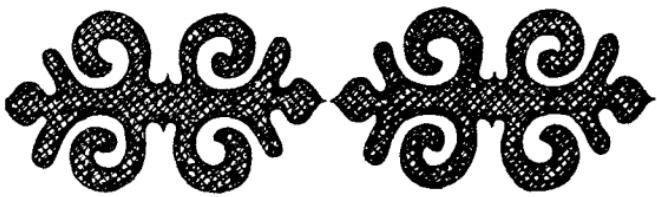
And unfateful and trite
As my memories are,
Yet they leave on my heart
An indelible scar.

Like a lost, hungry pup
Whines my thought as in vain
To recall in my life
Some bright moment I strain.

To sow good I did strive,
But 'tis evil I reap.
To the end of my days
Am I fated to weep.

1900

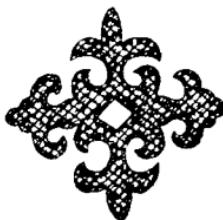
Translated by Irina Zheleznova

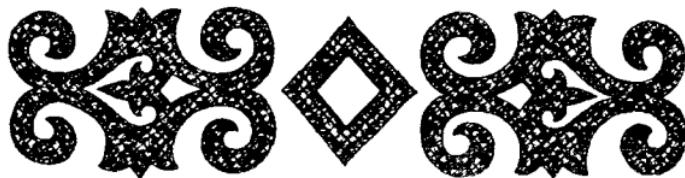


I hoped—the leaves of hope are shed.
I dreamed—my dreams were all deceit.
It pains my heart when I recall
My tale of ruin and defeat.
It was a life of empty dreams.
I wish I never dreamed at all.
For now the strength has left my arms,
The warmth of hope has left my soul.
Give faith to men? Mirages—they,
No peace, no truth will men accept.
They cheat and follow beaten ways,
The word they give is never kept.

1901

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Beware of frittering youth away
In empty pastimes, talk and play.
Give enmity and friendship thought.
Their worth and merits learn to weigh.

Don't be too quick to imitate
Those virtues people celebrate
Don't strive to ape them, my young friend.
Your talents you must cultivate.

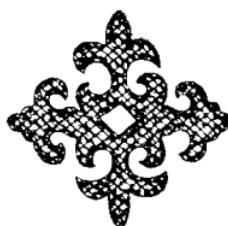
Guard your spiritual wealth, be shrewd,
Avoid the vulgar and the crude.
Let modesty keep house for you,
And moral debt it will preclude.

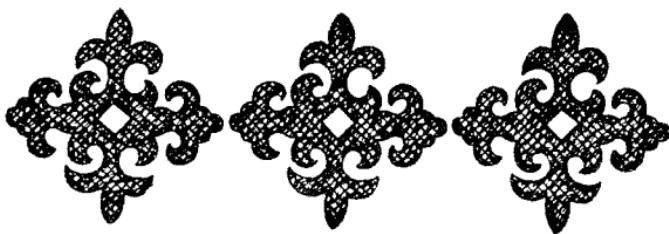
Trust not in everyone you meet,
Endeavour to be more discreet,
Or foe from friend you'll never tell
And all your life will know deceit.

A rogue will swear and then forswear
His loyalty. He's always where
Men are at odds. But in the end,
He has not got a coin to spare!

1901

Translated by Olga Shartse



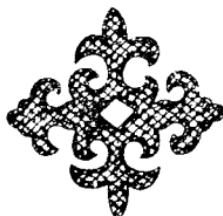


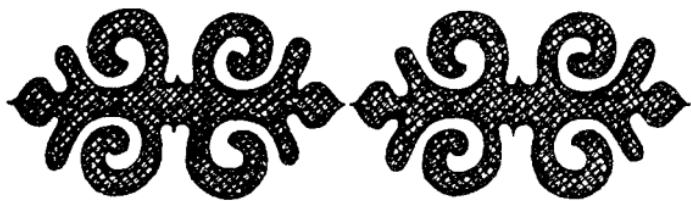
Your phrases profound
Reach hearts and resound....
When orators falter
You deem it your duty
To show words they can alter,
Lending speech a new beauty.

Life's load I must bear,
Yet I never despair,
Though I've suffered so long....
I seek someone to trust,
For friendship is strong
When a friend has proved just.

1901

Translated by Tom Botting





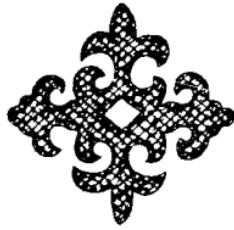
Butterflies dance in the sunlight bright,
On sweet-scented flowers they gaily alight.
But when storm clouds gather, they up and take
 flight,
Leaving the garden behind in their fright.

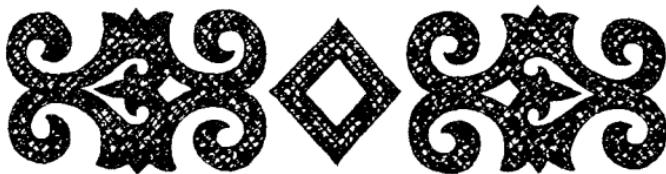
People are granted a definite span,
A cycle of sorrows and joys for each man,
We love and we hate, we scheme and we plan,
Doing as much as a mortal can.

Time has no mercy on old or young,
It can't be appeased the term to prolong.
With doubts, alas, our road is thronged,
Before they're resolved, the bell is rung....

1902

Translated by Olga Shartse





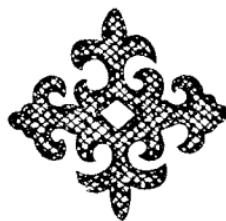
The heart is a sea in which joys are gems.
No heart can survive for long without joys.
But when all the warmth goes out of his soul
Nothing can bring a man to rejoice.

Friendship, wrath and delight are the heart's
concern.
Honour, honesty are the concern of the mind.
Honour and honesty are what counts:
Pride and envy make spirits blind.

The flame goes out in an old man's heart,
And no endeavour succeeds without flame.
He has to attend to conflicting advice,
Wavering, faltering, timid and tame.

1902

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





When jagged lightning flashes fleet
With thunder rolling on the plain,
The one who flings his bolts, Ragít,
Adorns the world with green again.

Then woe to those who cross his will,
For great Ragít no mercy shows....
Words, too like thunderbolts can kill,
As he who guides their flight well knows.

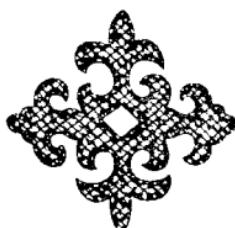
But who discerns a forceful word
That like a flash of lightning sears?
Not those whose plaints in courts are heard,
Who for a lambkin's price shed tears!

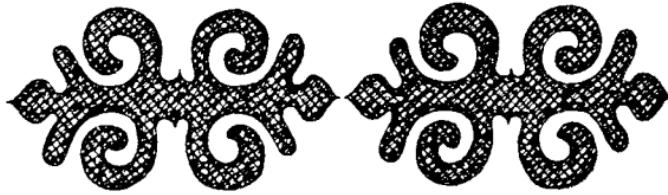
Let them repent to some degree
The sinful things that they have done,
Or they shall drag through life and be
Like mangy curs, consoled by none.

Oh, what people!
What a life
Among these louts—
All tears and strife!

1903

Translated by Tom Botting





Pray lay aside your *dombra*,^{*} lass,
Do not torment me with its song.
The pain it rouses in my heart
Too long have I endured, too long....

Do not remind me of the past,
Do not call forth its blinding tears;
Awaken not, I beg of you,
Its all too bitter memories.

Instead, come near and smile at me
And speak sweet words that will dispel
My sorrow and the flames that, fierce,
Within me rage subdue and quell.

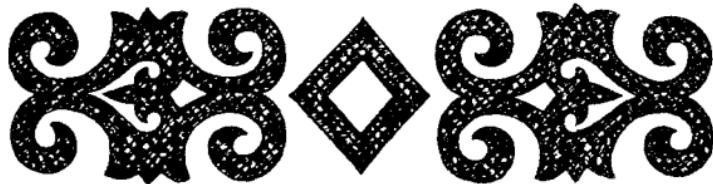
Speak tender words to me that are
As balm-like as love's own caress;
Speak tender words that will defeat
My loneliness and my distress.

If this you do, my tortured heart
For joy and gratitude will sing,
Amid the darkness of the world
A ray of light discovering.

My soul is sick, my soul is worn
By petty and unending strife.
Take pity on my sufferings,
Restore my faith in love and life.

Translated by Irina Zheleznova

* *Dombra*—national string instrument.—Ed.



In recollections of the past,
In meditations mute and long
I scrutinised my days and saw
That I was always in the wrong.
How can I hide it from myself?
My deeds were wicked all along.
Make efforts to reform myself?
I fear I'll never be so strong.

Just as the stones that strew the hills,
So are my sins uncounted too.
Shame and repentance cloud my eyes
When all my spirit's faults I view.

It is no well clogged up with silt;
Not for my hands to scoop it clean.
It is not God who made me so:
My deeds have marred it, cruel and mean.

Of what do I accuse myself?
I fell to all temptations met.
The way I spurned sincerity
I'll never in my life forget.

The voice of reason I'd attend
Then act against it and regret.
Cunning and falsehood year by year
I spun into a vicious net.

Monstrosity, I lost all count
Of mischievous and wicked deeds,
Until such gruesome fruit grew up
From early misdemeanour's seeds.

When hearing someone's empty praise
Proud, I was sure that sin succeeds;
Indeed, the vilest of the vile
My own enormity exceeds.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





ISKANDER

What do the Kazakhs know about Iskander,
The son of Philip, King of Macedon?
Both strength 'thout end and courage had Iskander,
But he was vain, a vain ambitious man.
King Philip died. His son, then twenty-one,
Ascended to the throne and was crowned king.
Obsessed by lust of power, thereupon
He laid his plans his neighbours' lands to seize.
He armed a force, his scheme of conquest ripe,
And went to war against his neighbours all.
Much blood he shed, whole nations he wiped out,
Seized towns and citadels, and kings dethroned.
He conquered all the lands round Macedon
And flooded them with their own people's blood.
He made his laws, he subjugated all,
And ruled them with a cruelty unheard.
All the khanates were his, all khans deposed,
But his ambition drove him on and on.
He was possessed by it, he wanted to be king
Of all the world, to rule the universe.
A hard and ruthless ruler was Iskander,
His subjects trembling at the thought of him.
His retinue to his ambition pandered
And called him Khan of Khans, and King of Kings.
The whole wide world he wanted at his feet,
To worship him and, cowed, to sing his fame.
And, arming countless legions to the teeth,
He set him out upon his great campaign.
And none Iskander's armies could repulse,
All did surrender to his mighty force.
With no resistance meeting, he marched on,
This man, the would-be ruler of the world.

And then they came into an arid desert
(A trial sent Iskander from above!),
Their store of water they could not replenish,
And thirst tormented men and horses both.
Iskander, by this lack of water tortured,
Like all his men was spent and near collapse.
The thought occurred to him to kill his servants,
Lest he be called upon to share the drops
Of precious liquid with them... Next his horse
Who had succumbed to thirst he then lay down,
And though his sight was dimmed by suffering,
A gleam he caught of something that did seem
Like water.... To his men he called and rode,
Ahead to see what 'twas, and lo! did find
A babbling brook... His face into the water,
Iskander plunged. The water tasted sweet
And cool to him. A salted fish was brought
And dipped into the brook upon his order.
He was amazed, for was it not a wonder:
The fish was salt no longer—it was sweet!
Iskander cried: "What miracle is this?
Drink of this water, bathe your faces in it,
And then we'll ride along this brook upstream,
For it must lead us to a land of riches.
Men, drink your fill, sing glory to Iskander,
For it was I, the King of Kings, who gave you
water!

Now, follow me, myself I'll lead the force,
And seize the town that must stand at its source."
The music blared, and to its rousing sounds
The mounted men, well armed and clad in armour,
Obeying him, across the desert started
To seize another city for Iskander.
They rode beside the brook without a halt
Until at last they reached a narrow gorge.
No further could they go, the way was blocked:
A golden gate stood there, and it was locked.
Dismounting, King Iskander to the gate
 strode resolute and at the handle pulled
With all his might. Alas 'twas all in vain ...
And to his men he turned to seek advice.
Men who are never crossed become cross-grained

And such was he. A wilful man besides.
So when he saw how helpless were his men,
How none of them could offer sound advice,
He was enraged, the blood rushed to his head,
And, pounding on the gate, he shouted
In voice so angry it would rouse the dead:
“Unlock that gate! You hear me? Open!”
Now footsteps sounded on the other side,
It was the keeper, and he answered calmly:
“Through this one gate your armies shall not ride.
The way is barred, for it leads straight to Allah.”
Iskander shouted arrogantly: “Open!
I am Iskander, conqueror of the world.
I shall not be humiliated. Open!
And tell me what strange country lies beyond.”
“Do not be arrogant,” replied the man.
“Subdue your temper and your avarice.
You are a wicked and ambitious khan,
And men like you are not admitted here.”
“I’ve seen the world,” Iskander said more softly.
“I have great plans, I’m after lofty aims.
Just give me something then, some trifling token,
My story of this happening to support.”
The keeper said: “You want a token? Here,”
And something wrapped in cloth pushed through a
chink.
“Here, take it, wicked man, your token.
Try to divine its meaning, give it thought.”
Iskander snatched the token eagerly,
A precious prize, he felt, again he’d won.
But sad his disappointment, for the cloth
Contained a bit of ordinary bone.
Infuriated that he had been mocked,
He flung the bone away with angry haste.
Beside himself with fury he invoked:
“How dare he laugh at me! A trick so base!”
Then Aristotle, wisest of his friends,
Picked up the bone and to Iskander said:
“It’s not an ordinary bit of bone
As you, my King, will soon see for yourself.
We’ll weigh this little bone upon the scales,
And gold upon the other dish we’ll place.”

He had no equal in his day in wisdom,
And none, of course, can disobey a sage.
Iskander had the balance brought at once,
Upon one dish the little bone was placed,
And on the other—gold, and yet more gold,
The bone looked light but always tipped the scales.
Iskander watched in wonder and dismay.
He added all his armour to the gold,
But still it had no power to outweigh
The bit of bone that tipped the scales again.
And then Iskander said to Aristotle:
“That bone’s devoured all our treasury.
Think hard, my friend, and tell me, if you know,
What will outweigh this magic bit of bone.”
The wise man bent and scooped a little earth
Into his hand and threw it on the bone.
The dish soared up. It had no weight or worth.
It was an ordinary bit of bone.
Iskander called the sage aside and asked:
“Is this a miracle or is it sleight of hand?”
His puzzlement he did not try to hide.
“What does it mean? I want to understand.”
“This is an eye bone. Men have greedy eyes,
They always crave more land, more gold, more
wealth.

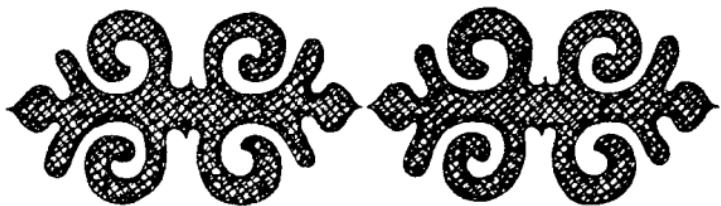
But when they die the lust is gratified
By one small handful of the plainest earth.
The greedy are much troubled by their eyes.
It’s a peculiar property they have.
But when their owner dies and has been buried,
The orbit, filled with earth, is just a bone.
I have not finished. Bear with me, my lord.
The golden gate before you did not open,
Because you had forgotten certain truths
This eye bone you were given for a token.”
Iskander pondered on the vanity
Of his career and his great aspirations,
And thought about the miracle he’d seen.
The brook, the gate, the bone, was divine will.
He bowed to it, and turned his armies home.

* * *

On this, my reader, ends the tale at last.
No ordinary tale, you'll realise.
The moral's clear: when wealth you have amassed
Don't lust for more to satisfy your eyes.
Don't let the vanities of life enthrall you,
Do not be lured by pleasures of a moment,
And do not forfeit conscience and honour,
Or you will pay for it with moral torment.
Why boast in order to be praised by people
For merits of a trite and transient worth?
They'll marvel at your wisdom to your face,
And when your back is turned they'll laugh and
 scoff.
A braggart is so anxious to succeed,
His merits he proclaims for all to hear.
Your qualities are best judged by your deeds,
If you've done good—the praise will be sincere.

Translated by Olga Shartse





MAS'HOOD

O Mohammed, friend of Allah, help the bard;
Let his labour be successful, not too hard!
It is said that under Haroon-al-Rasheed
A brave *jigit*, Mas'hood by name, lived in Baghdad.

Mas'hood went out of town one summer day
(What purpose he pursued I cannot say)
And there he saw a thief who meant to rob
An old and helpless man upon his way.

In vain the poor old man called out for aid;
For everyone who saw them was afraid.
Yet, wishing to relieve the stranger's plight,
Mas'hood attacked the robber undismayed.

He grappled with the thief in mortal strife
Who wounded our brave hero with his knife.
And like a slinking jackal took to flight.
Then, safe and sound, to thank him for his life

Up came the man and noticed how he bled—
The knife had left a deep gash in his head.
The man decided to repay the lad in kind,
So after thinking for a while, he said:

"With all my heart I thank you, bold *jigit*,
You showed real courage and should be repaid
for it.

You saved me from inevitable death;
Allah reward you for your noble deed.

"No *bai* am I and no *batyr* or khan;
One out of many—just an ordinary man.

You rescued me, a simple man. If anyone
Can value courage in a noble youth, I can.

"A stranger here, I come from distant parts.
Tomorrow I am going to depart.
I ask you, son, to come and visit me
And take the present which I give from all my
heart.

"I doubt if anybody could be braver.
Allah himself has sent you as my saviour.
For Allah's sake I earnestly implore you
To let me shake your hand now as a favour."

"I simply took your side against a thief.
It was my duty, not a noble feat, believe.
But since you ask me now in Allah's name,"
Said the *jigit*, "Your offer I'll receive."

At dawn Mas'hood set off as he was told.
The man already waited, bent and old.
He took Mas'hood and led him by the hand
Into a graveyard, lone and sorry to behold.

There by a tomb a single fruit-tree stood
On which there grew three ripe and shapely fruit,
One white, one yellow and the third one red.
"Choose any," said his guide, "for all are good."

"The white one makes you wisest of all men,
The yellow makes you wealthy beyond ken.
But if you choose the fruit that's coloured red
All women in the world will love you then."

Long thought the lad about the old man's words
The first and second fruit his fancy had not stirred.
"It seems to me, o venerable father,
I'll take the red," at last the old man heard.

"My saviour, you are free to make your choice.
Yes, take it, and I wish you to rejoice.
But why did you reject the other two?"
The old man asked him in a pleasant voice.

"Had I preferred the white one," said the lad,
"A mind of mighty power I could have had.
But I would rather not become a sage
For then indeed my fate would have been sad.

"In wisdom nobody would equal me;
By troublemakers envied would I be.
And then, not finding wise and honest friends,
No peace of mind or comfort would I see.

"And so my soul would always be tormented.
I'd lose my sleep and never feel contented.
Exhausted to the limit by attempts
To quell the stupid noise by fools fomented.

"And if the yellow fruit should bring me riches
My welfare would cause envy in the vicious
And all of them would permanently dream
Of profiting from me by means malicious.

"They'd hound my steps, pursue me night and day
And seek to flatter me in every way,
For people nowadays all dream of gain;
So riches, too, would take my peace away.

"To profit without labour is a crime;
Wisdom and avarice, we know, do not combine.
But, I regret to say that worries no one.
You seldom meet unselfish friendship in our time.

"Purchasing friends is filthy and dishonest.
If we don't pay them well, they pounce upon us
And call us curs, so both at last prove dogs—
Recipients of bribes as well as donors.

"But if I eat the red one, loved I'll be,
My conscience clear, my breast of worries free.
And who would not be glad to have as friends
The better half of all humanity?

"It is quite clear that every person ought to
Have somebody—a mother, wife or daughter,

And one of them is sure to take my side
Against ill-wishers, tsars or simple mortals.

"The world is full of enmity and strife;
Feuds and dissension poison people's life.
If any man should plot to ruin me
I'd be defended by his daughter or his wife.

"And so I choose the fruit with the red rind;
I'll take it, if you have not changed your mind.
Now you can see my choice is not haphazard;
I think my reason's well enough defined."

"Take it, my son, your choice is not amiss.
I see you're wise and wealthy as it is.
And may it profit you!" the old man blessed
Mas'hood,
Well satisfied by every word of his.

No common mortal was that man so shrewd and
kind,
But Great Kydyr, the patron of mankind,
Who gave his blessing to the bold *jigit* Mas'hood,
Pleased with his noble deed and sober mind.

As legend and tradition still maintain,
The old man's blessings weren't bestowed in vain.
Mas'hood became known as *Shamsi Zhikhan*,
Of all men most omniscient and humane.

But *ápropos*, as rumour has it, those
Who wrought disharmony and filled the world
with woes,
Perverting spirits or obtaining wealth by stealth,
Used women, too, as instruments, God knows.

'Twas so before; then should we feel surprise
Now, when there's neither honest men nor wise.
If this were not my native soil with cherished
graves,
I'd flee from here and break off all my ties.

'Tis also said Mas'hood was made vizier
And ruled a Caliphate with conscience clear
Until one night he slept and had a dream
In which he saw again the Great Kydyr.

"On such and such a day," he said, "my lad,
There will be rain with water foul and bad.
So poisonous indeed that for a week
Whoever drinks it will go raving mad.

"It will befoul all rivers, wells and streams
Throughout the country, to its furthermost
extremes.

No remedy is there against that rain
But to store up fresh water ere it comes."

Mas'hood told the Caliph what he had heard
By which his Majesty was grievously disturbed.
So on the eve of the expected shower
Mas'hood bade water for the palace to be stored.

Then came the day of which the wise old man
had warned.
The people lost their reason; quarrels stormed.
It seemed as if all hell had broken loose;
Nobody ate or drank, by hatred burned.

One day the rabid mob with senseless cries
Came to the court. The Khan's and Vizier's eyes
Beheld an extraordinary sight:
A frenzied crowd of most uncommon size.

Then to the people the Caliph came out
And made a speech while they went on to shout.
"O my poor people, you have fallen mad.
Go home and sleep, and it will pass, no doubt."

The crowd surged back with shout and curse and
oath,
And so it went until somebody quoth:
"The Khan and his Vizier are surely mad.
Before there's mischief done, let's kill them both."

Deciding thus, the noisy crowd returned.
When the Caliph about their verdict learned
He realised the danger that he faced
And to his Chief Vizier for counsel turned.

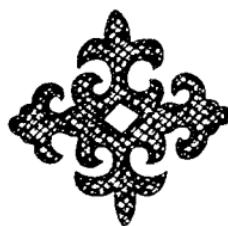
“There is no way out of the situation
But to share the plight of our demented nation.
Or else the crazy crowd who think us mad
Will kill us,” said Mas’hood on meditation.

And forthwith, drinking the foul water, they
 appeared
Before the mob and with it raved and jeered.
Now all the crowd fell on their knees before
 their sire
And begged forgiveness, after which all cheered.

Little by little now the crowd dispersed
And to their homes at last their steps reversed,
And so it happened that a senseless crowd
Drove mad two men who had been sane at first.

And so it is with mobs until this day.
Beware, O you who in this world hold sway:
Unenviable is the fate of those
Who leave a crazy mob to have its way.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send your comments to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, U.S.S.R.