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1988

Soviet Literature

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- **Mustai Karim.** Pardon
- **Bozor Sobir.** Selection of poems
- The Millennium of the Baptism of Russia



Bozor Sobir

THE POET OF PAIN AND HOPE

Like a tree, poetry is tied by a net of roots to its native land, to the soil which gave it birth and nurtured it. And because of these ties the poet's verse becomes understandable, dear and near to different peoples in different parts of the world.

Whenever I read Sobir's poetry I feel its inseparable unity with Tajikistan, the land of his ancestors.

The overall volume of Bozor Sobir's poetry written during the thirty years of his creative life (he was born in 1938) is not so great. He belongs to those writers who take pen in hand only when they feel that they have something essential to tell the people. So far he has published six collections of verse: *Union, The Tongues of Flame, The Eyelashes of Night, A Sprout of the Sun, A Sense of Touch, Thorn Blossoms*. But what is this I am talking about? Can one judge poetry by the number of books published? Certainly not. Two hundred of Omar Khayyam's rubaiyat stanzas which all together come up to eight hundred lines have enchanted the whole world, and Hafiz, the greatest lyric poet of all times, has left us only a single volume of his ghazals.

Sobir's poetry is charged with intense thought. Take such poems as *Life or Antigone*. *Antigone* was written after the poet had seen the

sculptured monument *Mother of Lithuania*, a memorial ensemble in Pirčipius dedicated to the victims of fascism who perished during the Second World War. The marble statue of Mother comes to life before Sobir's eyes. Bearing the blows of Fate, sobbing over the tragedy of the world, she demands justice of God. Let the Day of Judgement come! As long as Earth exists Mother will fight evil and defend justice.

*Harken, you ungrateful,
So long as you tread the road of violence,
Mother's wrath shall not abate,
Mother's call shall ever be heard.*

The flowers of his native Faisabad, one of the most picturesque settlements in the Ghissar Valley, impart to Sobir's poems their scent and freshness. His poems continue the tradition of Tajik-Persian poetry which is over three thousand years old.

Bozor has once said: "My poems are written by me and the wind in the nights of harvest-gathering." And I hear in his poems the trills of nightingales and the meditative songs of shepherds. When I read his poems I feel that I am ploughing the soil together with the hard-working peasants, my soul longs for the fairy-tale world of childhood, my heart bleeds for the tragic pages of my people's history; human baseness feeds my hatred, I crash down from the sky together with a shooting star, but then comfort myself with the thought that tomorrow will still come, that there are a lot of fine people in the world and because of them life is worth living. The poet calls us on to the right road—the road of life, truth and justice. His is a noble aim—to safeguard the best national traditions of our people and uphold the international forces of peace.

This year Bozor Sobir will mark his fiftieth birthday.

As I have already said Sobir's poems are firmly tied with the land of his ancestors, with his mother-tongue; and their subtle original characteristics, the wealth of meaning and stylistic nuances make their translation into other languages very difficult. In general, I am sceptical about the possibility of translating poetry because it properly exists only in the natural element of the language of its birth. Translation is always a loss. This, however, does not mean that we do not need translations. After all it is thanks to them that different peoples learn about each other and understand each other more fully. For example, no translation in any language of the world has done justice to Hafiz's delightful lyrics. However, despite the drawbacks of translation, that into German including, Goethe felt the greatness of Hafiz's poetry. He remained under its influence for a long time and finally wrote his famous *East-West Divan*.

I hope that the small selection of Bozor Sobir's poems in English translation offered below will stir the readers' interest in this Soviet Tajik poet.

SAFAR ABDULLO

THE HORSE

In a corner of my memory of life's long course,
Or in that land where I lost my father dear,
There gallops and gallops still a ghostly horse,
No more than a passing groan I seem to hear.

His legs are white, his breast and brow are white.
At times like the wind he flies, just a passing sound.
At times I hear from the distant road at night
The beat of hooves on the stones and on soft ground.

At times he goes flying and leaping over a stream,
Or sweats in the heat, with dust on his waving mane.
At times like an arrow above the green steppe he'll gleam,
And glance at the fresh spring grass again and again.

In childhood I heard what in memory has remained—
The beat of hooves, the neigh of that faithful steed.
As if from the past a warm voice had constrained
My soul to follow where fairy-tales may lead.

And in that voice I heard how still there sings
My motherland's song, as clear as clear can be,
As if by the door of father's house it rings—
There stands my childhood, waiting still for me.

It stands on the threshold, where in yesterday's voice
Was heard our laughter, and at times our tears,
Where over our lucky fortune we would rejoice,
Or wail over various woes, and bemoan our fears.

May your memory be sacred, my childhood sweet and pure,
May your memory be sacred, O home of my father dear!
He left us when he was much too young, I'm sure.
I wish that, a little older, he'd reappear.

Those silent distant hills with tracks o'ergrown,
Which heard the beat of the hooves of his racing steed,
Oh, may they one morning, from those times we've known,
Bring news to me of how he fares indeed. . .

In a corner of my memory of life's long course,
Or in that land where I lost my father dear,
There gallops and gallops still a ghostly horse,
No more than a passing groan I seem to hear.

A thousand roads known, but on memory's road alone,
O light-winged steed, have I caught a glimpse of you.
With your rider bold, say, whither have you flown,
And where did you leave your master, tell me true?

MY CHILDHOOD CRIES. . .

My children, to amuse themselves somehow,
Will sometimes playfully start to question me,
And in my childhood days, they want to know,
Did I not cry, perhaps, for lack of sweets?

Our thanks to blessed fate, they do not know
That in this world there are tears of bitterness shed,
That there are orphan's tears which flow and flow,
That there are hungry tears for a crust of bread.

O childhood, wandering childhood which I knew,
How rough your cradle,
And how tough your bed!
It seems but yesterday
War and hunger too
Bore on our shoulders, threatened overhead.

Upon each stone,
Upon each grain of sand,
Upon each thorn
My orphan childhood shows.
Upon each wind
Which wanders through our land,
A heavy sigh
Of orphan childhood blows.

Upon the streets of Faisabad I stand.
Down our old road at dawn's cool, chilling breath
My childhood cries, while in my orphaned hand
I hold the letter which tells of father's death.

LETTERS

Your letters I read aloud
And set them free on the breeze,
So that they became a spring cloud
Of memorable unease.
Above the hills let them weep,
As springs and streams let them weep,
No secrets of ours let them keep.

Last night I began to impart
News of you to the wandering breeze,
In your memory recited by heart
My lines, to the streams and the leas.

The breeze took the news to the plain,
The stream to the river told all. . .

Last night, 'neath the beating rain,
 All our roads I began to recall.
 In my dreams your plaits, in strands
 I wove in my loving hands,
 And kisses on lips unsown,
 On yours and on my own,
 On the wayside,
 By the brookside,
 I shed on the soil and the stone.
 So that vales which I passed through,
 On the wayside,
 By the brookside,
 Like dandelions kisses grew,
 Like fragrant mint leaves too. . .
 Yester-eve the rain poured and poured,
 The rivers their banks broke through.
 Yester-eve, by loneliness bored,
 My heart overflowed with you.

Yester-eve the springtime rain
 Washed your tracks from off the earth.
 But still dark spots remain
 In my heart, by your loss, brought to birth.
 Yester-eve I wandered the streets without aim,
 Like a hunter who's lost his game.

Yester-eve the whole world was wet,
 The heavens were wet—drip, drip, drip,
 The earth was flooded, and yet
 With your beloved name on my lip,
 I myself, as in time of drought,
 Burned with fire, which no rain put out.

THE DANCE

On the grass and clover my loved one dances with me,
 Joyfully, dress blowing free, my lovely girl.
 In the dance her plaits entwine so harmoniously,
 Like bindweed round her slender form they curl.

She whirls, my lovely girl, and herself astounds,
 She laughs and smiles, as she twirls her skirts fly free.
 In the hands of those watching, the toast to her goes round,
 And the heads and eyes of hundreds are turned to see.

Badakhshan starts to whirl,
 Zeravshan starts to whirl as well,
 Samarkand and Bukhara whirl,

Like this busy old world.
 In the dance my loved one whirls
 And her plaits come uncurled.
 What plaits? They are mountain waterfalls—how they swirl!
 On her maiden shoulders of marble
 They seem to break—
 In the play of her locks hidden music seems to speak,
 In that trembling melody even one's soul starts to shake,
 In that trembling movement the mountain rocks grow weak!

On the grass and clover, with flashing arms and feet,
 With her supple body swaying my loved one whirls,
 She clicks with her slender fingers, and glances sweet,
 And her laughter, like the rippling river, purls.

It fills me with gladness, yet somehow makes me sad,
 It thrills me with human power, and creative zest.
 At times she's so near to me, her loving lad,
 That it seems she will enter straight into my breast!

At times, like a springtime cloud, she seems to fly
 And hastens to take the horizon in her embrace.
 'Tis then I feel sad, as she flutters swiftly by,
 To the distant peaks, far from me in her race.

On the grass and clover my loved one dances with me,
 Joyfully, dress blowing free, my lovely girl.
 Look at her hair. Every strand is dancing, see!
 Maybe it's a long-tailed comet here a-whirl?

Translated by Walter May