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NOTES ON THE NOVEL

Mukhtar Aueзов, a distinguished Kazakh writer and literary critic, is the author of a number of dramatic works and several major researches in the history of Kazakh letters and folklore. His novel Abai, about the great 19th-century Kazakh enlightener and poet, won him wide popularity and merited a Stalin Prize for 1949.

The following article is a contribution to the discussion now going on among Soviet writers on the subject of literary craftsmanship.

The problem of the national form of Socialist culture is a problem of signal importance, particularly in view of the great diversity of Soviet multi-national culture. In the present article I should like on the basis of concrete material to set down a few observations concerning national form and literary tradition. I propose to deal with six novels by authors of different nationalities—novels which I have read in the original: *Honour* by G. Bashirov, in the Tatar language; *Wind From the Golden Valley* by Aibek, in the Uzbek language; *The Millionaire*¹ by G. Mustafin in Kazakh; *People of Our Days* by T. Sydykbekov, in Kirghiz, and—in connection with a number of questions of form—*Cavalier of the Gold Star*² and *Light Over the Earth*³ by S. Babayevsky.

All of these books appeared at about the same time in 1948-49 and share a common theme: life in the Socialist countryside during the Great Patriotic War (*Honour, People of Our Days*) and the first postwar years (*Cavalier of the Gold Star, Light Over the Earth, The Millionaire, Wind From the Golden Valley*).

These six novels came into being independently of one another, each springing from its own soil. Nevertheless there is a remarkable inner, ideological connection between them. The emotions, the thoughts, the struggle and the destiny of the characters are similar. And this is as it should be. For in the great family of Soviet nations, nurtured by the beneficent sun of Lenin-Stalin friendship among peoples, strivings, achievements, ideals and historical perspectives are harmoniously fused.

As we read these novels we seem to be hearkening to a hymn of praise to the happy Motherland, to the Stalin epoch, sung in mighty chorus in Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Tatar and Kirghiz languages. Age-old barriers raised by the backwardness and mutual alienation of peoples in the past have been swept away, such concepts as the individual, the family and the state have broadened and changed. Sergei Tutarinov and Kondratyev of

1, 2, 3, published in *Soviet Literature* Nos. 4, (1950), 12, (1948) and 8, (1950) respectively.

the Kuban are blood brothers of Mansurov, Haidar and Nafiseh from the Chulpan Collective Farm in the Tatar republic; of Uktam, Mirhaidar and Kamilia from the Uzbek Kakhraman and Elabad farms; of Jomart and Janat from the Kazakh Amangeldi Farm; of Chargyn and Akie, from Kirghizia.

The heroes of these books love their boundless country and its people with a profound, sincere, filial love. These are S o v i e t people, each with his own clearly-defined individuality, yet all endowed alike with spiritual nobility, lofty ideals, staunchness of purpose and indomitable optimism.

This is the common Socialist content that sets these novels, and all Soviet literature for that matter, apart from the rest of world literature. At the same time, each of these books has its own national form. Comrade Stalin has said that "national language is a form of national culture. . . ." The principal and most distinct attribute of national form in the novels under review is the language in which they are written.

Their authors have drawn on all the achievements of the national language culture as expressed in poetry—oral and written—and in the vernacular. At the same time these books by writers belonging to the fraternal peoples of the U.S.S.R. bear traces of the influence of the finest traditions of Russian and world classical writing, not to speak of leading contemporary Russian letters. This is evident in the enriched vocabulary and the enhanced expressive media of the given language in the advent of new word forms, compound sentences, periods, etc.

The new stylistic elements take different forms in each case, depending upon the specific peculiarities of the language and the level of development of the language culture of the given people.

For example, I would say that the language of Babayevsky's novels has two marked peculiarities. To begin with it has almost none of the elements of provincial dialect, local expressions and sayings which were to be found in such abundance in so many pre-revolutionary Russian books about village life, as also in some novels written in the early post-revolutionary period, viz., *Andron, the Good-for-Nothing*, by A. Neverov in which even the author's narrative was stylized to conform to peasant dialect.

Babayevsky's avoidance of what one might term "Kuban-isms" is explained by the author's striving to express the thoughts and emotions of his characters through the medium of the rich modern Russian literary language, the language understood by all readers. Nor do we find in Babayevsky's books any trace of the studied "peasant speech" which marked Russian prose in the early years following the Revolution. There is no appreciable difference between the speech of old Tutarinov and that of his son Sergei or say, Kondratyev, the Secretary of the District Committee of the Party, although the mentality of the elder Tutarinov is hardly the same as that of the men and women of the new generation. Here we have an instance of the influence of content on form. It is not the old-time village that is depicted in Babayevsky's novel; he writes about the Kuban of today, a region with the developed Socialist industry and agriculture, about the labour of men moved by the common striving to alter the face of their land, to mechanize labour and build up a rich material and spiritual culture. And hence it is but natural that in the speech of his characters the author should seek to emphasize those elements that testify to the elimination of the distinction between town and village, between mental and manual

labour, and not the reverse. The tendency to unify and elevate the speech of the characters is perfectly legitimate, although in some cases, when a sense of proportion is lacking, it is apt to lead to an impoverishment of language.

The language peculiarities in the other four novels are of a somewhat different nature. Mustafin's *The Millionaire* and Sydykbekov's *People of Our Days* have many linguistic features in common. While both authors have unquestionably enriched their vocabularies with concepts, terms, words and idioms borrowed from Russian literature, as well as new forms in the Kazakh and Kirghiz languages, they have drawn principally upon the spoken languages of their respective peoples.

The reason for this will be clear if it is remembered that the literature of both the Kazakh and Kirghiz peoples is young and its national tradition is in large measure based on folklore. The language of these two novels is rich, colourful and perfectly comprehensible to the mass reader who speaks a language in which there is as yet no sharp division between the spoken and the written word. There is nevertheless a difference between these two authors: whereas Sydykbekov uses proverbs, sayings and traditional expressions almost unchanged, Mustafin frequently creates his own aphorisms, fresh and pungent expressions.

"Cold water tempers steel, a cold word chills the heart," says Mustafin describing the feelings of his hero when spurned by the girl he loves. This aphorism is Mustafin's, yet its folk roots are clearly visible. This is an instance of creative development of national lingual forms. The speech of both Sydykbekov's and Mustafin's characters bears the imprint of national tradition. Yet it is interesting to note that in either case the most picturesque language is spoken by characters belonging to the older generation. This is a survival of an outworn custom according to which eloquence was the prerogative of the elders, while it behooved the young folk to listen in respectful silence.

As distinct from the above two authors, Bashirov, author of *Honour* and Aibek, author of *Wind From the Golden Valley* draw their expressive media not so much from folklore and colloquial language as from literature. This is not some abstract, "bookish" language, but the language accepted and used by the major part of the population. It is after all a well-known fact that in the case of nations with a literary tradition dating back many centuries, numerous expressions used originally in books only have become common usage. Thus, there is nothing artificial in the somewhat elaborate speech used by Aibek's characters among themselves, inasmuch as that is common usage. Thus, some aged collective farmer in the Ferghana Valley actually does use the second person plural in addressing his three-year old granddaughter. At the same time in *Wind From the Golden Valley*, which is a realistic picture of the life and relationships of contemporary Soviet people, Aibek who draws on the national language tradition with discrimination has avoided that mannerism and obsequious politeness of speech used by the characters in his novel *Nava'i* in which people frequently call themselves "keminengiz" (your slave). Aibek's book, however, is marred by a certain dryness of language which could have been avoided had the author paid more attention to the rich contemporary living language of his people. The novel suffers likewise from an over-abundance of difficult expressions and heavyweight phrases, although Aibek must be given credit for trying to develop the syntax of Uzbek prose.

Bashirov achieves a high degree of expressiveness without detracting from the crystal purity of his writing. He has succeeded in combining the best literary tradition with the rich and virile language of the Tatar collective farmers.

The new language culture of the fraternal Soviet peoples is one of the most important problems of national form and ought to be made the subject of wide discussion on the basis of an analysis of concrete works. It is a problem in which there is room for a great deal of further research.

The novel, and prose writing in general, were genres utterly unknown to the Uzbek, Kazakh and Kirghiz reader prior to the Revolution. It came into being and developed under the direct influence of Russian literature. It goes without saying that the development of this genre in our time is founded on a critical absorption of national features of the past forms. It should be noted moreover that while some of these features contribute to the emergence of the novel, others retard the process.

A most important question that arises in this connection is that of the portrayal of the leading character and his environment. Socialist life begets new traits in men and women who are conscious builders of Communism. It is highly symptomatic, for example, that a prominent place in the novels by Aibek, Bashirov and Mustafin is occupied by the emancipated woman of the Soviet East.

In all three novels women patriots appear as the equals of men. Such is the Tatar woman Nafiseh, the Uzbek Kamilia, the Kirghiz Akia, the Kazakh Janat, and others. And this fact is indubitable evidence of the enrichment of national literary tradition with Socialist content.

Nearly all the novels under review, in conformity with the national tradition, contain moving and powerfully drawn portraits of mothers, women of the older generation. The noble feeling of motherhood, love and care for children are described in the Uzbek, in the Tatar, in the Kirghiz and in the Kazakh novels. And at the same time the authors, in their faithful adherence to real life, show the younger women as the more active and advanced.

It should be noted, however, that in some instances these novels fail to give a clear picture of the work and public activity of some of the characters. Both Jomart (*The Millionaire*) and Uktam (*Wind From the Golden Valley*) are presented as leading spirits in the community, as initiators of all the new bold undertakings in the collective farms. Yet nowhere in either book do we actually witness the labour exploits of these two men. In neither book do we find a concrete, graphic presentation of creative labour in its dynamic development with the result that the leading characters remain to the end of the novel to all intents and purposes the same as they were in the beginning. In Mustafin's novel Jomart, the new chairman of the Amangeldi Farm, performs miracles in the brief space of ten months. Everything happens as if at the wave of a magic wand. We do not see him labouring to surmount the difficulties that must naturally have arisen in his path. The author merely describes the conception of the idea and its ultimate realization. Here the influence of the antiquated folklore tradition makes itself felt; the folk-tale hero too takes seas of fire and impenetrable forests in his stride, sweeping over the earth and the seven seas on the wings of the enchanted bird Semurgh.

Uktam in Aibek's novel seems to benefit but little from his contact with the progressive phenomena in the life around him. Take his trip to Tashkent

for example. During his sojourn in that city the author speaks of the university and the handsome Nava'i Avenue, Besh-Agach and Comsomol Lake. In conversations between Uktam and other characters in the novel the names of Gorky, Mayakovsky and Tolstoy are frequently mentioned; various people read Russian novels, including *The Young Guard*. But all these are merely mentioned in passing as bare facts. How all this is reflected in the minds and hearts of the characters we are not told. The phenomena, books and names are given very casually. This skimming over the surface of things, this flitting from one person to another, from one dialogue to the next in haphazard fashion is at the root of the unsuccessful portrayal of Sairamov, the Secretary of the Party District Committee, in *Wind From the Golden Valley*. One cannot but recall what Belinsky said on this score: "The historical facts contained in the sources of reference are no more than stones and bricks; only the artist can build a beautiful edifice out of this material." It must be admitted that in depicting the labour of their heroes Mustafin and Aibek often give us the raw material rather than the "beautiful edifice." This is due in large measure to the fact that the authors have not made a concrete study of the labour of their heroes and do not themselves clearly perceive the grandeur of their deeds.

Bashirov's characters are more skillfully and convincingly drawn. We see them engrossed in heroic, persistent labour. The struggle of the collective farm labour force headed by Nafiseh is historically factual—it takes place in the same summer and autumn when the heroic Battle of Stalingrad was being fought and like that epic combat, it occurs on the banks of the Volga. With their selfless labour the collective farmers fight for Stalingrad. Bashirov's novel shows that its author has concentrated his attention on the concrete presentation of the labour of his heroes.

A splendid example of truthful and thorough treatment of the labour theme, an example of realistic depiction of the process by which man achieves spiritual maturity in the struggle for the new is *Cavalier of the Gold Star* and *Light Over the Earth* by S. Babayevsky, two of the best Soviet novels about the collective farm village. The leading character Sergei Tutarinov grows in moral stature from the one book to the other, his personality is developed and enriched by his labour for the common good. The working community of which Tutarinov is a member gradually broadens out until it embraces not a single collective farm but an entire district.

As in life so in literature. The more our writers realize the responsibility they bear for the reality they describe, the more thoroughly they master the experience of Russian Soviet letters, the greater ideological and artistic depth their writing will attain.

The friendship of the peoples is a cardinal theme in Soviet art and letters today, and hence it is only natural that it should figure in many books by Soviet novelists. In the novels *People of Our Days*, *Wind From the Golden Valley* and *Honour* this theme is embodied in the relations between the leading characters and their Russian fellow-workers. It should be noted that a feeling of love and respect for the great Russian people and their culture is common to all these works.

On the basis of these ideological and artistic principles, each author endeavours to invest the Russians he describes with the most positive qualities in the Russian national character. At the same time, we are apt to find that the Russian has acquired all the national characteristics of the people among

whom he lives, such transformation being ascribed to his long residence in this particular part of the country and perfect knowledge of the language and customs of the locality. In this way the character in question is deprived of all his own national attributes—in his behaviour, his thinking and his speech he is no longer Russian but Uzbek, Kazakh or Kirghiz as the case may be. In Sydykbekov's novel *People of Our Days*, for example, the whole family of Dimitri the blacksmith, his wife Nadezhda Sergeevna, his son Sergei, his daughter Maria and Dimitri himself are to all intents and purposes Kirghiz. The author who employs this method evades the more difficult, but to my mind far more worthwhile task of depicting the Russian as a *Russian* with all the characteristics peculiar to his people. We must not forget that in the family of Soviet nations the Russian is the bearer of the most advanced culture and traditions, from which all the Socialist peoples might learn to their great benefit.

Mustafin's Russian hero Ivan in the novel *Shiganak Bersiev* is given similar treatment.

Aibek, and to some extent Bashirov as well, have chosen a more correct, although more difficult path. The Russian agricultural expert Akaskin also spent 14 years in Uzbekistan, and he too speaks the Uzbek language fluently. Yet while becoming the trusty councillor and friend of the foremost Uzbek collective farmers, he remains Russian in all his ways, appearance, and behaviour. And it is precisely as Russians that the collective farmers love and esteem the irrigation engineer Astakhov and his wife Galya.

The love theme runs through all the novels under review. In Babayevsky's book it is expressed in the relations between Sergei and Irina, in Aibek's between Uktam and Kamilia, in Bashirov's between Nafiseh and Haidar and in Sydykbekov's between Chargyn and Batysh. To this list must be added the peculiar "love triangle"—Jomart, Janat and Alma—in Mustafin's *The Millionaire*.

As a rule the love line is interwoven in the fabric of the whole novel from beginning to end. In some cases, (with Babayevsky and Aibek for example) the love angle is given rather artificial treatment in our opinion. I would say that this is the weakest point of Babayevsky's novel. The relations between Sergei and Irina are founded on a misunderstanding that could have been cleared up without difficulty had the matter been properly thrashed out between them. The conflict is false, it is based neither on a clash of characters nor on any concrete circumstance complicating their lives.

In Aibek's novel Uktam and Kamilia are at one in their thoughts and feelings throughout the book. There is no conflict between them and their environment. Nevertheless the author artificially drags out the denouement. This intimate "personal" element, deliberately slowed down with the result that it frequently overshadows the socially significant ideological concept of the novel, becomes an end in itself, an end, incidentally, that is entirely unjustified. And, what is most important, neither Uktam nor Kamilia are spiritually enriched thereby. True, Aibek does depart from the tradition of Uzbek classical poetry in which the woman was merely the object of struggle, and presents a lifelike portrait of a spiritually emancipated Soviet woman. Nevertheless he over-romanticizes her, shows her in non-typical situations.

Unjustified complication of the love between Nafiseh and Haidar detracts from the merits of Bashirov's novel as well. This method sometimes robs the character of its integrity. It is after all hard to believe that a strong-

minded, energetic young woman like Nafiseh would be so hesitant and sentimental in affairs of the heart as to resemble at times the enslaved Tatar woman of the past.

It must be said that the influence of two traditional features of pre-revolutionary Tatar literature is clearly evident in Bashirov's novel. I refer to the tendency to melodrama (the description of the death of the parents of Mansurov, the Secretary of the District Committee of the Party, a heroic theme which called for a far more realistic treatment), and secondly, the tendency to sentimental descriptions of the amorous affections of the leading characters. This was perfectly normal in the literature of the past, but in describing the spiritual world of a young person of Soviet society it is neither typical nor progressive.

Individual treatment of secondary characters is a novel phenomenon in the literature of the Soviet East. In Sydykbekov's book these characters are not sufficiently clearly delineated. All his collective farmers are schematically divided into two groups—old folk and young folk, but there is little distinction between the individuals within these two groups.

In Aibek's and Mustafin's books each of these secondary characters is more of a personality. But it is in Bashirov's novel that such characters are most vividly and clearly drawn. On the whole, however, all three writers have avoided the negative features of classical poetry in which secondary characters as a rule acted as mutes to fill in the background of the picture.

One positive feature shared by all the books under review is the beneficial influence of the realistic tradition in Russian classical literature.

Fruitful study of both classical and modern Russian authors makes itself strongly felt. It is evident in the construction of plot, in the realistic descriptions of nature, and in the contrasts drawn between everything radiant and exalted in the nature of the central characters and their new environment, on the one hand, and negative survivals of the past, on the other.

It must be said, however, that in turning to the artistic prose of the past our writers at times are not sufficiently discriminating, and use outworn methods long since discarded and forgotten. A case in point is the discovery of the lost diary in Mustafin's *The Millionaire*. Through this diary the author endeavours to unravel the tangled skein of relations between Jomart, Janat and Alma. That this method was antiquated as far back as Belinsky's time, is seen from the latter's criticism of Iskander (Herzen): "... The device of acquainting a reader with the heroines of novels through their diaries is out-of-date, worn threadbare and false—Lyubonka's diary entries smack somewhat of the spurious; at all events not everybody will believe that they were written by a woman." Belinsky's words apply in full measure to Mustafin who in the given instance borrowed not from the Russian classical tradition but from devices found in Western 18th-century literature which were sometimes (though rarely) employed by some Russian writers.

The above example, however, is by no means typical of our national literatures. Far more typical is the positive, progressive trail-blazing influence of Russian writers. Without hunting after thrilling plots in the manner of French adventure novels, Soviet writers of the fraternal nationalities reproduce with epic realism the typical characters in their true environment.

And at the same time, enriched by the lessons derived from Russian literature, the works of our best writers, Socialist in content, remain national in their form, likewise enriched by the creative inter-mingling of fraternal literatures.