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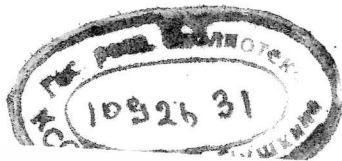
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Mukhtar AUEZOV

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Besides his widely-known works of fiction, the Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auevov (1897-1961) left many articles on the history of literature and literary criticism. We publish below an article from his collection Meditations.

National traditions are formed by the best work of many generations. Over the ages means of artistic representation of the world are polished into good literature and the arts, principles of appraising social environment and nature are handed down, and a wealth of artistic means of expression are accumulated. It is something like a relay, but a very special relay, in which at every new stage through which the arts pass, they all the while accumulate something new and become richer. Just as you cannot enter the same waters of a stream twice, so in literature there are no traditions without innovation.

As time passes, many features of national traditions die away through social transformations and the development of national character. Traditions are enriched every day by the writer's search for innovation. New traditions arise. We are witnessing a single dialectical process of the renovation of literature and the arts on their own soil.

At the same time, the evolving national traditions are bound to be affected by the interaction and mutual enrichment of the various national literatures. This is particularly evident from the experience of the literatures of our Central Asian republics since the Revolution. I make my references to the complex interaction of traditions and innovation in Kazakh Soviet literature for the simple reason that, as a Kazakh writer myself, I know more about it and also because its development is very indicative for those of our republics which had practically no written literature previously and hence owe a great deal to the October Revolution.

Folklore and Tradition

This by rights is the starting point in our deliberations on a number of problems of tradition and innovation chiefly because Kazakh Soviet literature has drawn its life sap from two equilateral sources: folklore and the written, professional literature. Granted that definite artistic customs have been historically formed in professional literature, but this is particularly so with the age-old, oral, poetical creation of the people.

Both these sources have merged in Kazakh literature and it is in this merged form that they coexist today. The most salient feature of their development and formation is their creative interaction and mutual enrichment. This process is natural.

The best traditions of Kazakh folklore—the great epic generalizations, portrayal of the people's heroism, the vivid poetic language—were bound to exert a favourable influence on classical Kazakh literature, whose father was our great poet Abai Kunanbayev. But we must not forget that though an expert in folklore Abai rejected a whole number of canonic forms of oral popular verse. He was an innovator, a master of new forms, previously unknown to Kazakh poetry.

These forms were the fruits of a thoroughgoing and creative study of the experience of world and, in particular, Russian literature. Written verse, which was beginning to come into its own in Abai's time also had an undoubted influence on oral literature. This influence of written, literary forms is especially typical of Soviet times. It would probably be hard to find greater evidence of this than in the vast talent of Djambul Djabayev who preserved the poetic popular traditions so well.

Inheriting all the best that has been created by popular poetic work (including the freedom-loving themes, civic spirit and vivid metaphors) Kazakh Soviet poetry has taken a great stride forward. It has adopted the best traditions of the past and, striking out along new paths, formed fresh traditions. To speak about them means to speak primarily of the development of realism in Kazakh literature. But this raises a whole lot of other questions.

One More Case of Mutual Enrichment

During Soviet times Kazakh literature has developed its own national style. This was not easy to attain. The young Kazakh Soviet literature had a number of tasks to resolve—the ideological struggle against nationalism in art, attainment of high standards, comprehension of Socialist realism, enrichment through new genres, and critical mastery of the cultural heritage.

When we say it did, in fact, resolve all these tasks we must remember that we were assisted on to the broad path of realist writing by Russian literature. This also has a direct bearing on the many-sided question of traditions.

Before the Revolution, Kazakh literature had developed mainly in a single literary form—poetry. A few elements of prose were only just being born. Play-writing and literary criticism were altogether absent. In poetry too, although it was reasonably advanced, not everything was acceptable to the new times.

Nowadays we regard as archaic the mystical and religious images and metaphors, the florid, rhetorical style and didacticism so typical of the old poetry. And yet these were also at one time a kind of traditional form of artistic vision of reality.

In Soviet times Kazakh poetry has attained realistic maturity because there has been a transformation in the poet's vision, his perception of the world, his outlook and attitude to life.

Forms of poetry have correspondingly been enriched, revised and to a large extent renovated. Today the exacting reader will find in Kazakh writing epic and philosophical poems with and without a plot, and lyric poetry written in the new realist traditions. This is especially true of the finest verses of Saken Seifullin, Ilias Djansugurov, Abdilda Tazhibayev, Tair Zharokov, Khamid Yergaliev and Khalizhan Bekhozhin.

There are, of course, also verses composed in the old but very best traditions of classical poetry of the East.

Kazakh writing has immensely gained in Soviet times from the addition of new literary genres—prose, playwriting and literary criticism. Prose, in particular, has done magnificently to create a firm realist tradition in less than fifty years. It has emerged in a variety of forms: gripping drama, the psychological short story, the historical, historico-revolutionary and autobiographical novel and topical essays. The original work of Beimet Mailin is a good example of the heights attained by the Kazakh short story. Saken Seifullin has done much in the field of the autobiographical novel with poignant political overtones. Vast prose canvases have been created by Sabit Mukanov in his *Botagoz*, Gabit Musrepov in his *Awakened Land* and by Gabiden Mustafin in his *Shiganak*. I mention these outstanding works because they have stood the test of time. There is neither sketchiness about them nor primitiveness in the treatment of the hero, nor naturalism—all of which are shortcomings natural in an immature literature at an early stage of its development.

Thus, a Kazakh national style of realistic prose has come into being. To be sure, although the national style is one it is not difficult to distinguish the creative individuality of the writers. So, for instance, Mailin's short stories, which are a chronicle of life in the Kazakh aul, have a vividly polished form about them. Mukanov's *Botagoz* is an original alloy of lyricism, drama and vividness in description of events with a great historic and social moral—the lives and movements of the people on the eve and shortly after the Revolution. Musrepov's forte is the keenness of his satirical pen and his tremendous concern for language.

All the same, a single national prose style does exist and has certain typical, general forms. These are the forms of the new realist tradition, a tradition that was born on our own national soil, but which has been influenced by the stronger, tested realist trends in Russian literature. The more profoundly our writers have begun to understand these trends the closer our Kazakh literature has come to resolving its great artistic task—that of depicting the contemporary national character of the Kazakh people.

What Do We Discard?

Nowadays when we speak of traditions, we turn to our present-day treasury of literary forms. We speak of the triumph of the realist principle of recreating reality, of the birth of new genres, of the renovation of old ones, of the mutual enrichment of the written and oral works of art, of the reflection of reality in its revolutionary development. We know that all these vital processes in the organism

of our literature are stimulated by the functioning of its great heart—fidelity to the spirit of the Communist Party, ideological content and closeness to the people.

But there have been and still are other traditions which we discard.

Here is one which is in my opinion one of the most important. Not because we now have a great deal of trouble in overcoming it but because it is tied up with the question of the possible paths of further cultural development confronting formerly underdeveloped nationalities.

We are well familiar with Lenin's idea that backward nations can by-pass capitalism on their way to Communism. We almost always think only of the economic, socio-historic, material and everyday aspects of this idea. But we ought to give some thought to its application to the literature of previously backward countries and nationalities.

By the example of Kazakh literature we can discern clearly enough the path discarded by the October Revolution and how the Revolution saved the culture of the Kazakh people.

We now pay tribute to the invaluable part played by Chokan Valikhanov, Abai Kunanbayev and Ibrai Altynsarin in the Kazakh people's history. They were enlightened democrats who understood and fruitfully used the best aspects and traditions of world, and particularly, Russian culture. They called for enlightenment and the development of the sciences, for people to master all the attainments of the human mind so as to utilize them for the people's prosperity. But there were poets who popularized religious dogmas, cultivated themes of "pure art," decadence, symbolism; reactionary divorce from reality, estrangement from the people and from life.

We do not have to prove that literature backed by those ideas brings tremendous harm to the interests of the working people, to their correct artistic education. Nor need we say that this type of tradition is alien and hostile to us. The whole path of development of Kazakh Soviet literature has been accompanied by a struggle against such ideas and those who hold them—bourgeois nationalists, pan-Islamists or glorifiers of the *khans'* and *bais'* world of the past. Our literature has overcome and discarded these reactionary, imitative elements and has been directed into the beneficial, optimistic stream of realist literature. And we owe this monumental cultural triumph entirely to the October Revolution.

We Kazakh writers may be justifiably proud when we look back at the path we have traversed and may be assured of the future of our literature whose healthy traditions rest on the best attainments of the culture of the past and on its writers' creative and innovatory search today.