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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/asiecentrale/2919>

ISSN: 2075-5325

Publisher

Éditions De Boccard

Printed version

Date of publication: 10 March 2015

Number of pages: 183-211

ISBN: 978-2-84743-112-4

ISSN: 1270-9247

Electronic reference

Ingeborg Baldauf, « Educating the Poets and Fostering Uzbek Poetry of the 1910s to Early 1930s », *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* [Online], 24 | 2015, Online since 10 March 2016, connection on 19 April 2019.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/asiecentrale/2919>

Educating the Poets and Fostering Uzbek Poetry of the 1910s to Early 1930s

Ingeborg BALDAUF*

Introduction

In Central Asia, like elsewhere on earth, there may have been thousands of poets about whom the world will never know, as the notion of *sandiq adabiyoti* [literature for the storage chest] indicates. These people just never made their marks as poets – by coincidence because they did not meet a suitable audience, out of shyness if they deemed their writings unworthy of seeing the light of day, or even because their efforts were turned down by elders of the writing establishment. The literary milieu itself was the incubator of poets, much like guilds which would raise their own future generations of craftsmen. The milieu provided guidance in shaping literary personalities, and in return the ‘corrective of the collective’ made sure that similar would replicate similar, while exceptional talents, or also simple outsiders like women or non-affiliates of the proper class, would hardly make it into the milieu, let alone to the top. Most of the literary life of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Turkestan followed this time-honoured mode of continuous self-reduplication of poets and poetry in

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circles gathering around acknowledged poets, court affiliates and other noblemen, and representatives of the Russian imperial administration.

Among the Turkestani literati, there was no clear divide between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘innovators;’ many poets would mingle within circles dominated by one or the other basic outlook (Hoji Muin, 1937, p. 6; Wennberg, 2002, pp. 6 ff.). Interestingly, many poets were much more conservative in style than in thought. While their repertoire of forms and styles remained bound by tradition, quite a few of their writings mirror social novelties like the advent of imperial rule, early capitalist economy and European-like lifestyles, and testifies to a high degree of political awareness. Although old-fashioned in style, poetry of this kind continued to appeal to the tastes of the audience, and was therefore considered suitable for modern times into the 1930s and later – under the condition that its contents conformed to the new ideological framework. On the other hand, post-classical-style lyrics that remained confined within old ways of thinking as well, would be denounced by early Soviet Uzbek critics as ‘*muwashshah adabiyoti*’¹ (Oybek, 1927). The negative connotations of this term appear to echo the overall Jadid Muslim reformist aversion to imitation and epigonism (*taqlid*), which casually merged into early Soviet revolutionary discourse.

New Options:

The periodical Press and Enlightenment Literary Circles

The emergence of the periodical press in early twentieth-century Turkestan offered poets a new forum in addition to the old one: The early editors were in need of poetry to fill the pages of their newspapers and journals and make their otherwise dry papers more attractive for an audience that was anyway reluctant to accept the new medium. They needed poetry first of all to help convey their ideological and political messages, but they would also publish some art for art’s sake, and, most importantly, the editors did not have excessively prescriptive ideas about literature. Thus they would give space for unexceptional poetry as well as genuinely poor epigonic writing, and along with that they were not shy of promoting indi-

¹ The term *muwashshah* denotes a strophic poem whose *bayt* initials would yield the name of a person. The original genre figured prominently in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century satirical poetry of Turkestan. By extension, the term came to characterise the totality of post-classical lyrics, and carried negative connotations in dominant early Soviet poetic and social discourse.

vidual creativity and innovation if this allowed them to attract like-minded writers and readers. From the mid-1910s to 1927, the Turkestani and then Uzbekistani press provided ample space for poets to display themselves and have their lyrics published. Whether or not a given poem would make its way onto the pages of a given journal or newspaper depended on the editors and editorial boards, who did not hesitate to publicly rebuke senders of pieces that were not to their liking. However, a state of anarchy in cultural matters, and the availability of a broad range of mutually independent organs, ensured that people who were genuinely determined to have their poems published would succeed in doing so. Editors would confine their input about literary quality to general remarks like “[Mister Such-and-such,] your piece is not good for publishing” while refraining from concrete advice on how to actually improve. Surprisingly, in some journals this unpedagogical mode of ‘dry exhortation’ persisted well into Soviet time.²

The press supplied a forum for the poets, but until the mid-1920s did not, as an institution of authority might have done, provide practical support to writers, nor discourage or fend them off. However, peer teaching/learning among the literati themselves, if we may call it such, did exist, and part of it has come down to us through the press itself. Fellow writers would react to specific poems in a poetic form, taking on modes of literary debate as practiced in conventional poets’ circles and in traditional poetry in general, for example, by writing poetic responses such as a *nazira*. In the second half of the 1920s this peer criticism developed into a tool of ideological controversy. However, it also brought up issues of poetic language, imagery, stylistics and genre, and thus contributed to the development of individual authors and of Uzbek poetry as such.

Poetry was much too important in Central Asian society for activists, ideologists and politicians to let it lie fallow or go unbridled. Many activists – evolutionists as well as revolutionaries – were at the same time literati, and most of them would privilege poetry over prose in their writing exercises. They aggregated around editors and journals, or got together in informal, self-organised associations similar to the literary circles of olden times. Conversation about lyrics merged with debates on political and

² The pedagogical magazine *Maorif va O’qitg’uchi* [Education and the Teacher] of all journals in 1927 publicly admonished young poet Uyg’un to “care for quality rather than quantity” (Anonymous, 1927a, p. 69).

societal issues. During the early 1920s associations of that kind existed in all major towns.

The circle which has come to be best-known was Tashkent-based *Chig'atoy Gurungi*,³ in which, from 1919 onwards, for roughly half a decade, men from all over Turkestan and Bukhara would get together and discuss what language to promote for the sake of modernisation, what politics to support for the good of the homeland, and not least, how to actively develop culture in general, and poetry in particular.⁴ The *Gurung* was an arena for intellectuals like its founding father, the famous scholar and writer Abdurrauf Fitrat (1886-1938), men with an outlook on the 'Orient' at large, and familiar with late Ottoman Turkish poets from romanticists to nationalists and social revolutionaries, but also with the Bengali rising star Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and other internationally renowned poets. The *Gurung* also accommodated men whose mental horizon in literature was the 'Russian East,' that is, the Azerbaijani Turkish and/or Tatar and Russian literary universe, and it was home to some extraordinary men like the poet Cho'lpon (1897-1938) and the young critic Vadud Mahmudiy (1898-1976),⁵ who combined those two worlds in their interests and ambitions. The *Gurung* brought together experienced literati and newcomers to the literary field, which made it a seminary that one way or another shaped most of Uzbek literary life for a decade to come, although as a legal organisation it was disbanded as early as 1922 (Allworth, 1964, p. 114, no source indicated).

The *Gurung* was a bottom-up venture "around which the literati (*qalam egalari*) would rally," as former *Gurung* member Botu (1904-1938) recalled in a critical essay of 1928 (Botu, 1928, pp. 3-4).⁶ Regardless of

³ Literally 'Chaghatay Circle,' a reunion of literati who cherished hopes that for a future literary language their contemporaries would primarily tap into the resources of the Chaghatay lingua franca and revitalize 'pure Turkic' vocabulary such as *Gurung* 'talk, chat, conversation circle.'

⁴ Edward Allworth in his pioneering 1964 book *Uzbek literary politics* (chapter on the *Gurung* pp. 109 ff.), due to the research conditions of his time, primarily relies on Russian-language pro- and anti-Soviet propagandist sources, which makes his picture of the *Gurung* appear more rigidly politicised than today's reading would necessitate.

⁵ Vadud Mahmudiy founded a Samarkand branch of the *Gurung* in 1921 or 1922 (Ahmad, 2008).

⁶ Botu's chronicle should be read with a grain of salt. In 1927 all senior members of the *Gurung* had come under severe political attack, some of them were put to trial. In 1928 Botu himself got involved in the so-called 'Narkompros affair' as accomplice in anti-Soviet

the progressive ideals all members shared, the group was still much of an old-style intellectual circle characterised by hierarchies of age and achievement, where experienced and honoured members would raise their junior fellows.⁷ As far as external links are concerned, the group made a point of being independent of governmental intervention, which in March 1925 finally caused the state authorities to set up an academic commission for cultural and educational issues in order to counter the *Gurung*'s continuous influence (Yoqubov, 1975, p. 362). However, some members of the previous *Gurung* actively cooperated with the People's Commissariat of Education, its Academic Commission and Academic Centre and its main journal *Maorif va O'qitg'uchi* [Education and the Teacher],⁸ which granted them continuous access to publishing facilities at times when the state started tightening its control of resources and outlets. By way of example, *Go'zal yozg'ichlar* [Beautiful Pens] a 1924 literary textbook for fourth grade pupils,⁹ authored by *Gurung* senior Elbek (1898-1939) under the auspices of the Uzbek Academic Commission (Elbek, 1924), reads like an almanac of early 1920s *Gurung* poetry.

Semi-Independent Literary Circles

As Soviet rule became consolidated by the mid-1920s, political authorities started to re-shape the cultural field (which by definition was part of the social superstructure) according to the needs and desires of the new ruling class. An important part of these initiatives was directed at the formation of actual and future writers. Literary-artistic circles (*adabiy-badiiy to'garaklar*) were called into being in many places. The balance of top-down and bottom-up elements in these initiatives is difficult to estimate today. Many of their initiators and senior members were in fact employees of the People's Commissariat of Education, but it seems that no strict control was exerted over them since, actually, there was no basis for such interference because the struggle for Party and state power and ideological

conspiracy, which was traced back to some of the *Gurung* members. He may thus have tried to talk down his own role, and overplay the role of *Gurung* seniors.

⁷ For an eyewitness report on a *Gurung* writing session under Fitrat's guidance, see Allworth, 1964, p. 112, fn. n° 4.

⁸ From 1925 to 1928, this journal included a voluminous literature section.

⁹ This 85-page textbook was printed by the state printing house Turkiston Davlat Nashriyoti in November 1924.

supremacy was itself an ongoing process until the end of the decade. In any case the circles were driven by a strong educational, paternalistic impetus: their major goal was to educate and guide (*tarbiya qil-*) the future poets.

An early enterprise of this kind, established in 1923-1924, was influenced by the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (*Vserossijskaâ Associaciâ Proletarskikh Pisatelej* – VAPP), and aimed at establishing a Tashkent branch of the VAPP, designed to absorb minor local cultural ventures. The initiative was primarily directed at Red Armists, members of toilers' clubs and students of (Russian-language) high schools. It failed to attract the Uzbek-language enthusiasts of literature, be it for organisational shortcomings or for a certain whiff of Russian elitism. Lack of professional unification and productivity, which VAPP-inspired people had earlier charged the Turkestani writers with (Oripov, 1978, pp. 34 ff.), was what finally led to the dissolution of their own association in 1927, while ironically members of the *Chig'atoy Gurungi* were still producing individual poetry books by the month, had as early as 1922 published a 104-page collective volume *O'zbek yosh shoirlari* [Young Uzbek Poets] that included poems by Fitrat, Cho'lpon, Botu and Elbek, and were featuring prominently on the literature pages of all journals and newspapers.

While the ideologically strict Proletarian Writers failed to marshal the growing up Uzbek literati into a central organisation, literary circles that conceded some indecision and doubt to adolescents were, in the early 1920s, thriving at many institutions of higher learning. Guided by local teachers, the circle members discussed the literary trends of the day and published their poems and critical essays about literature and culture on wall newspapers or in handwritten journals, or even in printed collective volumes. To culturally and politically *engagé* teachers (most of them employees of Soviet schools), elder students and local political activists, who were at the same time poets or playwrights of some literary renown, these circles offered an excellent forum not only for propagating a particular literary taste, but also for conveying political ideas to the youth.

Turkestani youth in the early 1920s were open to various ideologies, and so were the semi-independent circles. The '*Sharq*' [Orient] circle at the Third Tashkent Teachers Training College, which was guided by young poet Oybek (1904-1968), in its name bore the anti-imperialist imprint of

the early Comintern,¹⁰ while another circle, run by a teacher of the third Kokand boarding school, frequently hosted the anti-bourgeois activist, poet and playwright Hamza Hakimzoda (1889-1929) (Murodova, 1990). The principal orientation of a circle did not necessarily predetermine every single member's individual outlook, nor would each member's writings necessarily be ideologically consistent in themselves. A good example of this can be seen in the 1922 'one time only social, historical, academic, literary and scientific Uzbek journal' *Armug'on* which was, as its front page tells, a 'Gift'¹¹ from a literary circle of Uzbek students of various Tashkent secondary and high schools. In *Armug'on*, young Shokir Sulaymon (1900-1942), who had first emerged into the literary scene at the side of his senior Andijon compatriot Cho'lpon, with whom he shared anti-imperialist ideals in the early 1920s, published the prose poem *Parg'ona* [Ferghana], which owing to its "pessimistic attitude" and "failure to acknowledge the positive aspects" of the Red Army's victory in the civil war of his home region would cause him to be severely criticised once Soviet rule was firmly established in Uzbekistan (Shokir Sulaymon, 1922, p. 13).¹² In the same volume, however, was also published Shokir Sulaymon's poem *Revolution*, a piece that celebrated the overthrows in 1917, which was to earn him the approval of later Soviet literary scholarship and helped save his career and perhaps his life in the fiery 1930s. As the example shows, the poetic products of the semi-professional and semi-independent literary circles reflect the swayings and waverings of ideology and power in Turkestan through to 1924-1925.

Party-Guided Literary Circles and the Education of Poets

While students' circles not only did not follow strict ideological lines but may not even have been fully aware of the latest ideological and political developments, the leading figures of another emerging type of circle

¹⁰ The title of its one-time publication organ in 1925 was *Tong Yulduzi* [Morning Star], with Oybek as responsible editor. It echoed Fitrat's short-lived Tashkent journal, *Tong* [Dawn], and perhaps also alluded to Cho'lpon [Venus], the pen-name of Abdulhamid Sulaymon, the most prominent anti-imperialist poet of the Uzbek language.

¹¹ *Armug'on* [Gift] was offered to the deputies of the Second Uzbek Congress of Culture and Education with the support of the above mentioned Academic Commission, its editor was *Gurung* member Sayd Ahmad (*Armug'on*, 1922).

¹² The incriminated passage reads "mungli dardli baxtsiz Parg'ona" [grief-stricken, sorrowful, hapless Ferghana]. For a typical example of Soviet criticism of the poem, see Boboxo'jayev, 1979, p. 22.

were certainly well-informed: the directors of circles installed under the auspices of strictly Party-oriented newspapers. In Turkestan until 1924, and in Uzbekistan from 1925 to the early 1930s, all papers and journals published poetry as well as articles by literary critics, which implies that on their editorial boards there must have been connoisseurs or at least enthusiasts of literature. Some papers ran a literary circle headed by young Soviet-educated people.

The most prominent of these circles belonged to *Yosh Leninchi*, the Tashkent Komsomol newspaper that appeared as of 1925 (Baybulatov, 1967),¹³ whose first editor, Oltoy, was himself a poet (Oltoy, 1967, p. 10). After initial difficulties caused by the “lack of support and guidance [by the Party]” the circle then gathered momentum, and within a year its director as of 1927, the Komsomol activist¹⁴ and future literary critic Sotti Husayn (1906-1942), won high praise for the circle’s achievements (Turdiev, 1987, p. 4): “If everywhere we educate young enthusiastic writers that way, we will soon manage to produce brilliant guys to help us out in our fight for [the right] ideology and a new life” (Ramziy, 1928, p. 6), one colleague wrote, and another one remarked that texts submitted to the circle for criticism would “be given due advice” (‘Kitobxon,’ 1928, p. 14). These compliments indicate that the new literary circle aimed at educating its members with a clear emphasis on ideological soundness – which implied streamlining the proletarian consciousness of the poets – rather than on aesthetic values, whereas earlier circles had put the strongest emphasis on artistic refinement while accommodating ideological diversity to the point of breakup, as shows the example of *Chig’atoy Gurungi*, which in 1922 disintegrated, with some poets continuing to tread what came to be labelled the ‘nationalist’ path, and others turning to the ‘proletarian’ direction (Botu, 1928a, p. 3).

1925, the founding year of *Yosh Leninchi* and its circle¹⁵ in Tashkent, can be regarded as a turning point in Soviet literary politics, insofar as on

¹³ For a short period in 1929-1930 the paper was edited in Samarkand.

¹⁴ On Sotti Husayn’s Party background, and on his ways to guide the youth who rallied around *Yosh Leninchi*, see Mirtemir (1910-1978) who as a young man participated in the activities of the circle (Mirtemir, 1986: chapter ‘Pisatel’-kommunist’ [A Communist writer], pp. 369 ff.).

¹⁵ Karimov, 2008, p. 248, mentions only 1927 as the year when the circle was founded “on the initiative of *Yosh Leninchi*’s new editor Sotti Husayn,” but other evidence points to an earlier date (‘Kitobxon,’ 1928, p. 14).

the 18th June of that year the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution on the Party policy on the literary field (Oripov, 1978, p. 46), which to people receptive to the signs of the times clearly enough signalled a change of tunes. Purely aesthetic considerations were soon denounced as a socially irrelevant fuss about art for art's sake, and discussions on the nature of poets and the essence of poetry, in which the most prominent literati had been engaged for almost a decade by then, were cut short in the young Soviet Union after the untimely deaths of Russian lyrical poet Sergei Yesenin (December 28, 1925) and some further symbolists and Prometheic poets. Literature as a whole, and poetry as its still favourite branch in Uzbekistan, was now defined as a tool at the service of the proletariat; which was to say, it had to support policies of the Party and the socio-political campaigns of the day.

Local circles at schools and papers thus needed to be supplied with a comprehensive central association under the Party's close guidance. In August 1926, at Uzbekistan's new capital Samarkand, the Proletarian Writers' Association *Qizil Qalam* [Red Pen] was established under the auspices of People's Commissar of Education, Rahim In'omov, who delivered a speech explaining why it was essential to unite the "revolutionary writers" under a common roof.¹⁶ Actually, this call was indicative of the new ideological exclusiveness that would, a few months later, culminate in the so-called Cultural Revolution. Until recently, all literati who welcomed the downfall of the Russian Empire – including Fitrat, Cho'lpon, Elbek and many others – had been called *inqilobchilar* [revolutionary generation], while the young men who were only socialised in Bolshevik times would be called *oktyabrchilar* [children of October].¹⁷ At this particular moment, in mid-1926, the Party monopolised the term *inqilobchilar* for literati of its own liking, almost all of them being *oktyabrchilar* in the old terminology, while verbally reducing the others to the rank of 'national chauvinists' or 'poets of the bourgeoisie.' Out of roughly a dozen revolutionary literati according to new terminology, who were personally invited to the foundation meeting of *Qizil Qalam* on August 12, 1926,¹⁸ Shokir Sulaymon was

¹⁶ Speech cited by Shokir Sulaymon, 1929.

¹⁷ See an article by Gabdraxman Sagdi, a prominent Tatar pedagogue and literary scholar who had lived in Central Asia for many years (Sagdi, 1924, p. 51).

¹⁸ Call published as "Inqilobchi yozuvchilar diqqatiga!" [To the attention of revolutionary writers!] in the capital newspaper *Zarafshon* on August 8, 1926.

the only representative of the elder group of poets,¹⁹ while the other invitees were either young students from central educational institutions who cherished literary or scholarly ambitions (Hamid Olimjon, Sherbek; Naim Said, Otajon Hoshim), or outright politicians (Akmal Ikromov, Fayzulla Xo'jayev, Rahim In'omov, Anqaboy).

The new association was under pressure to produce tangible results. In December 1926 renowned writers, as well as newcomers, were invited to contribute a hitherto unpublished text to a collective volume to be compiled by the association. Rather than actively 'educating' its members, *Qizil Qalam* just strove for quick results, as it seems, which led one critic to write that "*Qizil Qalam* ought to be counted among the things whose name exists while itself does not" ('Kitobxon,' 1928, p. 14). The critic underlined that it was now for the circle at *Yosh Leninchi* to compensate for *Qizil Qalam*'s shortcomings. We may assume that there was some Tashkent-Samarkand rivalry in these remarks, too: the critical article was published in *Yer Yuzi*, a popular scholarly and artistic supplement of the central Party newspaper *Qizil O'zbekiston*, which, like *Yosh Leninchi*, was issued in Tashkent, while *Qizil Qalam*'s board was located at Samarkand, and branches of the association were readily opened in the Ferghana Valley, but not at Tashkent.

In February 1928 *Qizil Qalam* was reorganised so as to take a more systematic approach, and shortly after bureaus for organisation, methodology and criticism were opened, the association published a 103-page volume *Qizil Qalam Majmuasi I* (Otajon, 1928). The preface by young literary scholar Otajon Hoshim (1905-1938) was designed to explain the Party policy on the relation of proletarian literature and the literary heritage. Part one of the volume included articles on literary history by Fitrat and others, while part two presented pieces by poets of all age groups and ideological orientations. *Qizil Qalam*'s second collective volume, which came out in 1929, was even broader in scope. The theoretical chapter included

¹⁹ According to Karimov, 2009 (p. 247), Shokir Sulaymon directed the association while elder generation member Botu was also among the earliest activists. In a later book (Karimov, 2012, pp. 403 ff.), the scholar writes that Otajon Hoshim, who in 1926 had returned from the Moscow Institute of Red Professors without a degree and was on the spot appointed president of the State Academic Commission (*Davlat ilmiy kengash*), became founding member and president of *Qizil Qalam*. Actually, a short note in *Zarafshon* of December 8, 1926 mentioned Shokir Sulaymon as president, and Rahim Ali as secretary of the association. Allworth (1964, p. 118, no source indicated) assumes that Otajon Hoshim, Sotti Husayn and Ziyo Said were the "officers of Qizil Qalam."

the following: an article in praise of anti-bourgeois Hamza,²⁰ followed by another that criticised, but at the same time explained, Jadid literature and Cho'lpon's lyric poetry, and by a treatise on Chaghatay literature authored by Fitrat; the chapter was concluded by the text of a lecture on 'the essentials of the technique of literature' that had been read by one Popov to the members of *Qizil Qalam* – Cultural Revolution was under way and Russian model experts were now to be consulted for all purposes. The lyrics chapter of the volume featured rising stars like Oybek, Hamid Olimjon, Mirtemir, Uyg'un and poetess Oydin, but also people who were not going to make it into the hall of fame of Uzbek poetry (Ergash, Botir, Chig'ay, Davron, etc.). Today Otajon Hoshim's ability to bring together different generations and a variety of outlooks is being praised by Uzbek literary historians (Karimov, 2012, p. 404) in concert with contemporary voices from the conservative journal of the People's Commissariat of Education, *Maorif va O'qitg'uchi*.²¹ Soviet literary scholarship of the 1970s-1980s, on the other hand, considered the activities of *Qizil Qalam* a failure,²² thus echoing the predominant assessment by critics and politicians of its day.²³

Literary Criticism as a Weapon

Critics of the late 1920s and early 1930s untiringly pointed out that the primary duty of writers' circles on the ground, and associations on regional and state level, was to 'educate' the poets. However, starting from 1927-1928, when the Stalinist crackdown on political opponents of all sorts began, nothing was left of whatever pedagogical intentions may have existed before. Literary criticism was turned into a weapon of attack on literati and, consequently, of self-defence in a relentless fight that, from 1930 to 1938, would extinguish most of the Uzbek literary community,

²⁰ Hamza had just recently been killed by outraged followers of expropriated local landowners, whose complaints Cheka and Party officials had failed to respond to (Karimov, 2012, pp. 299 ff.). At its time, a myth of Hamza having fallen victim to a religious mob was promoted in the press (the myth is related by Allworth, 1964, p. 122) and Hamza was subsequently styled the 'founder of Uzbek modern theatre.'

²¹ See, for example, a welcoming article on the second volume by a certain Faxriy in n° 9-10 of 1929, pp. 12-13.

²² A typical example of this stance can be read in Oripov, 1978, pp. 20 ff.

²³ Allworth's assessment of the circle (1964, pp. 119 ff.) is a bit problematic since he follows authors like Zeki Velidi Togan and Baymirza Hayit who in their writings pursued a political or ideological agenda, respectively, rather than purely scholarly goals.

leaving alive only the most reckless ones and some lucky persons whom fate had spared.

A prelude was launched as early as March 1926 in the Party paper *Qizil O'zbekiston*, when a prominent observer of Uzbek literary life rebuffed a poet who was trying to rejoin Party-sponsored mainstream: "If that blind man [...] cannot find any more curse words and now tries to get on our bandwagon – can one think of a more perverse disgrace than that?!" (Ziyo Said, 1926). The actual play then started in the wake of the early 1927 'unmasking of the *Sultangalievshina*,²⁴ when Stalin rid himself of his major adversaries in matters of national culture and class ideology, and after half a decade's foreshadowing the Party launched a final attack on national elites of the revolutionary generation. In the Uzbekistani context this attack was directed on the *ziyolilar* [enlighteners, intellectuals] who had mostly emerged from the Jadid movement, and in the literary field its prime target was Cho'lpon, the exceptional poet who struck his fellow writers with awe and made many a versifier burst with envy.

The first stone was cast by 'Ayn,' who in *Qizil O'zbekiston* of February 14, 1927, published an article entitled "The Uzbek Poets. Cho'lpon" (Ayn, 1927).²⁵ Ayn underlined that Cho'lpon was a sublime stylist but at the same time the foremost poet of the "national chauvinist, escapist, and pessimist *ziyolilar*."²⁶ Each one of these attributes (*millatchi*, *xayolparast*, *badbin*) was a verdict in itself since they were the code words for, respectively, (1) hostility towards Stalin's national policy as issued in 1925, (2) adherence to religion (while the anti-religious campaign had been gaining momentum since 1926), and (3) distrust of the Party, i.e. aversion towards Stalin's clique who was now about to rule out all political competitors. While such allegations

²⁴ Sultangaliev's 'crime' consisted in postulating the total of the people of the Soviet East as a substitute proletariat and denying its class differentiation. His 'unmasking' in 1926-1927 was followed by a wholesale crackdown on the national elites, who had until Stalin's takeover in cultural politics (spring 1925) enjoyed the full support of the Party in "developing their national cultures," as it were. Any time after early 1927, all activities in line with the policy of *korenizaciâ* could be denounced as 'Sultangaliev-like national chauvinism.'

²⁵ For some information on Olim Sharafiddinov, the man behind the pen-name whose main contribution to criticism of contemporary literature was this lengthy article, see the anthology of Uzbek literary criticism, *Tanqid*, 2011, p. 32.

²⁶ In *Tanqid*, 2011 (p. 34) the passage is rendered as "*millatchi*, *vatanparast*, *badbin*," which would read as "nationalist, chauvinist and pessimist." The original paper is held at Moscow National Library.

would just have displeased sensitive minds before February 1927, from that time on they put writers in immediate danger: the law on censorship (issued on February 8, 1927) made “religious and national-chauvinist incitement of the masses” punishable, thus potentially criminalizing much of the current and earlier literature.²⁷

Contempt of the naïveté of the writers who reacted to Ayn’s article about Cho’lpon is inappropriate today as we know what followed. However, we must assume that most writers of the time were simply incapable of thinking in as evil ways as others were already intent to act. They seem to have believed that their discussion was about what is right and wrong in poetry, while in fact it was about who was welcome or unwelcome as a human being. The ensuing debate extended well into the fall of 1927 and involved, among others, Oybek (Oybek, 1927); many poets of lesser reputation more cautiously wagged their tongues by writing poetic replies (*nazira*) in disdain of some of Cho’lpon’s (actual or alleged) political claims. First Secretary Akmal Ikromov himself concluded the debate in a speech delivered in October 1927 to the Second Congress of the Uzbek Culture Workers, in which he admitted that he would not set himself up to judge Cho’lpon’s artistic merits, but that he doubtlessly supported Ayn’s and Oybek’s disapproval of the poet’s mindset.²⁸ While some literati may have been naïve throughout 1927, others immediately understood the signs of the times. Shokir Sulaymon was a poet who had been very close to Cho’lpon and the elder *ziyolilar*, but then shifted to the left, a change which manifested itself on the formal plane of his poems as well as in their content. Shokir Sulaymon stayed in Moscow in early 1927, and had obviously more insight into the brewing storm. He immediately submitted a volume of (partly revised) old and new poems for publication, saying: “The strange conglomerate of pieces I am putting together here comes from the borderline of two ages. In order to document my change of mind, and well aware that I may face severe criticism [...], I am fearlessly handing it in all the same” (Shokir Sulaymon, 1927, p. 6).

The assault on Cho’lpon corresponded to the ideologically and politically motivated degradation of major senior poets everywhere in the Soviet Union, which was part of the Cultural Revolution and ended in quite a few

²⁷ Decree n° 9 (issued as §§ 52 and 53 of *Digest* n° 10, 1927), see *Qonunlar*, 1930, p. 24.

²⁸ The text of Ikromov appeared in the Party paper *Qizil O‘zbekiston* of October 10, 1927.

suicidal tragedies. Cho'lpon in his turn, who had for some years polarised the community and had got used to denigrating poems directed at him, as well as extended hands that sought to help him back on the lost path, initially felt strong enough to resist.²⁹ Over the course of 1927, however, pressure on the *ziyolilar* increased and – again, as in other republics – Cho'lpon like many other writers took refuge to performing an act of contrition (*tavba*), hoping to get accepted, if not as a regular proletarian poet, then at least as a 'fellow traveller' in Trotsky's understanding of the word (uzb. *yo'lovchi* or *yo'lchi*). *Qizil O'zbekiston* triumphantly remarked in its issue of November 22, 1927: "Some *ziyolilar*, who in former times fought against our ideology, are now submitting petitions and confess their previous mistakes. They announce themselves as followers of the Soviet government" (Anonymous, 1927b).

On April 17, 1928, when the Uzbekistani newspaper readers were informed of what had happened at Shakhty,³⁰ *Qizil O'zbekiston* also informed them about the Cultural Revolution and the *ziyolilar* (P. Sh.³¹, 1928a, p. 2): The majority of intellectuals approved of the government because they were *taraqqiparvar* [progressive], the author wrote, capturing yet another key term of pre-Bolshevik intellectual life – *taraqqiparvar* had been the favourite self-designation of the Jadids. Those intellectuals who were opponents of state power and, like the Donbass engineers, needed to be taken under tight control, the author labelled as *alamzada* [grief-stricken], a term which was quickly appropriated by essayists and satirists, while in poetry the *yig'loqi* [sniveller], hitherto a well-established metaphor for Cho'lpon and his fellow romanticists, continued to prevail and henceforth connoted *alamzada*, too. Stalin himself, in a speech delivered to the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the Party, proposed the method which ought to be applied by trespassers: self-criticism (Stalin, 1928). In a follow-up on the *ziyolilar*, published only a few days later, a detailed outline was presented on how to "patiently raise their theoretical

²⁹ See, for example, his poem *Qaytish. Naziralarga nazira* [Return. A Nazira to the Naziras] published in *Yer Yuzi* of April 20, 1927.

³⁰ In the so-called Shakhty matter (russ. *šakhtinskoe delo*, uzb. *shaxtinskiy voqeasi*), a show trial in Shakhty (North Caucasus) following the decay of heavy industry in the late 1920s, Stalin's clique cracked down on engineers allegedly carrying on sabotage 'at the service of the bourgeoisie.' Information about the matter reached Uzbekistan one month after the actual events.

³¹ According to the initials, the author was most probably a non-Uzbek specialist.

standards” and check their national chauvinism (P. Sh., 1928b). In an article published in mid-1928, the poet Botu, who at that time worked as a publicist and high-ranking official of the Uzbekistani People’s Commissariat of Education,³² tried to translate these political guidelines into practical advice for the poets in a rather gentle tone (Botu, 1928b).

However, the heated atmosphere of the upcoming first five-year plan favoured a general rhetoric of struggle and acceleration, while the kulakisation and anti-religious, unveiling, and other campaigns that now culminated in the Cultural Revolution, promoted strife and combat (*kurash*) as adequate devices in the battlefield of ideology (*mafkura maydoni*). Needless to say, the fiery youth was ready to adopt this verbal radicalism rather than following some Party publicist’s call for patience, or imitating senior poet Botu’s gentleness, for that matter.

The Uzbek press of 1928 abounds in fierce articles whose authors pretend to fight for the cause of poetry, but all too often their writings just end up being personal insults and mutual allegations of unsound ideology. The poet Oltoy dared to finally urge sound criticism along with sound ideology, which earned him a valiant rebuff by Botir. Searching for meaning in Oltoy’s futuristic poems anyway amounted to no more than to go fishing in the desert, Botir wrote.³³ Moderate voices like Sotti Husayn, the successful leader of the *Yosh Leninchi* circle, who alerted his peers to the fact that literature could not be improved upon command (Sotti Husayn, 1929), were unable to stop the fighting of all against all. Meanwhile the attacks were no longer directed solely at Cho’lpon, on the *ziyolilar*, or on their immediate followers in age and merit (Oybek, Oltoy, etc.): Cultural Revolution transformed those of the ‘children of October’ (G’ayraty, Uyg’un, etc.), who had only just made a name at the expense of their elders, into targets as well.³⁴ By 1930 the denigration of poets went from bad to worse. Fitrat,

³² Botu had been on the editorial board of the journal *Alanga*, which was founded to promote the Latin alphabet and offered a platform for lyrics of a variety of stylistic and ideological orientations. By the end of 1929, Botu remained as *Alanga*’s sole editor. In mid-1930 he was put on trial under allegations of leading a “counterrevolutionary and chauvinist gang” in the Commissariat (Botu, 2004, p. 19).

³³ For the controversy that ran from August to October 1928 and involved critic K. Trigulov, poet Oltoy, and Botir, see Yoqubov, 1975, p. 359.

³⁴ Otajon Hoshim, in a bellicose article (1930), mentioned Cho’lpon (p. 31) like out of a sense of obligation, while he dealt the heaviest blows to Oltoy and Oybek and specified that G’ayraty’s poetry was generally overrated by critics.

Oltoy and others were accused of having “poisoned young people’s minds with feudal and clerical ideology” (Muhitdinov, 1930, p. 13), which sounds quite ridiculous since, of all intellectuals, it was exactly these men who had been most active in the anti-religious campaign of the last few years. Botu, who had been a leading figure of *Qizil Qalam* and the chief editor of the journal *Alanga* until its issue 6 of 1930 (Botu, 2004, p. 11), was in *Alanga* 7-8 (1930) together with Cho’lpon and Julqunboy denounced as “filth (*axlat*) that had been subverting the educational sector.” Along with senior educationist and publisher Ramziy and other poets and activists, Botu was put on trial later in 1930 in the so-called Narkompros affair, and was sentenced to many years in a labour camp, from where he never returned to peaceful life (*ibid.*, p. 15).

Streamlining the Poetic Voices

Surprisingly enough, in 1927-1929, regardless of arguments about the true nature of poetry, it was still possible for such an exceptional person as young critic Otajon Hoshim to put together the volumes *Qizil Qalam Majmuasi I* and *II*, which represented the total of contemporary Uzbek lyric writing from ‘romanticist’ to ‘revolutionary’ and ‘ultra-leftist’ (as later generations would label them). In 1930, then, with the political demotion of many prominent poets in the Narkompros affair, the stage was set for serious streamlining. Along with the persecution of some of its leading figures, the *Qizil Qalam* association as such was denounced and dissolved, and a Proletarian Writers’ Association was founded instead. However, this organisation did not last long,³⁵ and, in accordance with a decree issued by the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist(b) Party in April 1932, it was ‘reconstructed’ (*qayta quril-*) to become the Uzbekistan Union of Soviet Writers (*O‘zbekiston sho‘ro yozuvchilari soyuzi*), which sought to overcome the Proletarian Union’s exclusivity – which had led to the exclusion of most of the capable writers from official work and publishing –, and re-invited fellow travellers ready to accept the primacy of the Party, to actively participate in literary life (Yoqubov, 1975, p. 371; Allworth, 1964, pp. 134 ff.). The Proletarian Union had been supposed to bring together the ‘jewel talents’ (*gavhar talantlar*) from factories,

³⁵ On the UZAPP, whose activities have left only ephemeral traces in Uzbek poetry, see Allworth, 1964, pp. 127-133.

kolkhozes and sovkhoses, and organise them along strictly conformist lines (Anonymous, 1930). The collective volume *Almanax*, which the steering committee of the subsequent Soviet Writers' Association (which, together with its follow-up organisation, until today is simply called 'Soyuz') went on to publish in 1932, contains an article by Otajon Hoshim, who had miraculously survived the persecutions of 1930 while on an academic leave in Leningrad (Karimov, 2012, p. 404). In this article Otajon Hoshim, explains the new role of literature: while, in what he calls the first period of Soviet Uzbek literature, i.e. 1925-1929, writers had been observers (*kuzatuvchi*) only, they had, in its second period (1929-1932), become an active part of social production (*tuzuvchi*). Guidance of the poets had passed into the hands of the omniscient and well-wishing Party. Authors in their turn were expected to no longer "just observe nature or factories, Uzbek girls, and so on," but "boil in the cauldron of real life" and lay their experience down in concrete poetry (Otajon Hoshim, 1932, p. 37). For the first time in Uzbek literary criticism, the notion of *tip* – positively stereotyped characters and events –, which was to become the core principle of socialist realism, appeared in the *Almanax* (Almanax, p. 14).

The *Almanax* and other publications put forward by the Union from 1932 onwards are actually indicative of quite a few new trends in literary life. First of all, literature had become a battlefield where, along with long-term enemies such as the 'writers of the bourgeoisie' and 'ethnic chauvinists' (*burjuva-millatchi*), which refers to Cho'lpon and other members of the pre-1925 intelligentsia, alleged ultra-leftists and exclusivists (*so'lliq unsurlari*), i.e. the Proletarian writers who from the late 1920s onwards attempted to sideline many fellow travellers (*ibid.*, p. 17), now also came under attack and were found to be in need of re-education. Secondly, poetry was no longer acknowledged as the prime genre; dramas, novels, and short stories came to be considered more adequate than lyrics in highlighting "great enterprises such as the struggle for cotton and the uplifting of the country" (*ibid.*, p. 15). The jewel talents of poetry had to struggle to catch up as valid promoters of state policies, it seems. The volume *Yutuqlar* [Achievements] (1923), which is a typical product of the new period, consists of chapters like 'For State Reconstruction,' 'Fighting for Cotton Self-Sufficiency,' '*Zarbdorlar*,³⁶ 'In Defence of the Soviet State,' and 'We

³⁶ *Zarbdor* is the Uzbek rendering of shock worker (russ. *udarnik*), a favourite of the period

Are Tailoring the Shroud of the Bourgeoisie' (*Yutuqlar*, 1923). Yet another new feature of the cultural and literary field was the fading away of ethnic boundaries: poetry had been the hotbed and major vehicle of ethno-national pride and self-confidence throughout the 1920s, and Uzbek literary life was a self-contained social sphere, regardless of attempts during the 1928 Cultural Revolution to replace local cadres by allegedly better qualified people from central Russia.³⁷ With the 1932 foundation of the Uzbekistan Union of Soviet Writers, as the name suggests, 'Uzbekness' now yielded to 'Uzbekistaniness,' which in practice meant that ethnic Russians and Tatars – forerunners of ideological developments as compared to Uzbeks, as it were – moved into leading positions of the Union, and members of ethnic minorities such as Tajiks and local Jews caught up with members of the titular nation.³⁸

Uzbek poetry had in the pre-1917 period been a liberal occupation and hobby of intellectuals, with occasional extensions into the ruling elites, and was subsequently invaded by local enlighteners and individuals eager for 'Europeanisation.' From the early Soviet period on, it was turned into an educated-cum-educational tool and had finally, by 1932, achieved a totally new face. Although poetic language and stylistic beauty continued to be an issue for some poets, under the steadily growing influence of literary critics who prioritised ideological content over artistic refinement, political adequacy had become the main concern, while lyricism and the technical quality of poems were reduced to secondary importance.

Literary life, which was a self-sufficient social field in pre-Soviet times and well into the 1920s, was from 1927 to the mid-1930s turned into a dependent part of the political field, a battlefield where ideological conformism was urged upon the writers by outsiders like the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, with the support of critics working in the service of state cultural politics. Poets, who had until the early 1920s been independent

of the Accelerated Five-Year Plan (1929-1933).

³⁷ The only non-Uzbeks who played a significant role in Uzbek literary life before 1928 were a few Tatars like scholar and critic Gabdraxman Sagdi, and Zarif Bashiri, a journalist, writer and critic who at times held important positions in the Commissariat of Education; both men explicitly wrote on behalf of Uzbek, not Uzbekistani (or Uzbekistani Tatar, for that matter) literature.

³⁸ According to the publishing notice of *Yutuqlar*, 1932, the members of the Union's editorial board in 1932 were Boboev, Sadrullin, V. Serov, B. Ibrohimov, G'ani Abdulla and one single representative of the senior generation of ethnic Uzbek writers, namely Shokir Sulaymon.

members of self-organised circles, or even freelance writers without any affiliation at all, were by the mid-1920s rounded up in literary circles dependent on educational institutions, and, in the second half of the 1920s, in circles around Party-guided newspapers and journals which granted the writers education in poetic and ideological matters. After 1927, freelance writing became impossible as access to publishing facilities became strictly limited when Stalinist state power established itself and publishing houses, journals and newspapers came under close control. During the first half of the 1930s, literary life was turned into an allegedly inclusive, yet in fact monopolistic, state-controlled, centralised and Sovietized social phenomenon; or, to put it in ideological terms, it became part of the social superstructure which reflected the proletarian basis of social life.

Conclusion: The effects of ‘Education’

The ultimate question of whether or not the educational claim, which was raised first by self-employed enlighteners, then by state-sponsored critics, and finally by Party-dependent monopolists, has yielded as much elevation (*yuksalish*) of Uzbek poetry as promised, cannot be easily answered. The intimidating, sidelining, silencing and even killing of many exceptionally gifted poets, which started around 1922 and culminated in the years between 1930 and 1938, beheaded the Uzbek literary community and deprived it of the best of its ingenuity and creative potential. It is necessary to underline that although non-literati may have initiated many of the developments which began as verbal contest and ended up in lethal persecution, many writers, poets and certainly literary critics and scholars were in tune with the times – reluctantly in order to save their own career or skin, or voluntarily out of conviction, in search of personal advantage, or even out of grievances, envy and human baseness. The writer Abdulla Qahhor (himself a victim of persecution until way into post-WW2 times) has drawn a bitter image of those left behind: “[...] driven by the desire to rise high as the only one in literature, like the chimney of a burnt-down house, after finding a mistake in everyone else and having them all shot to death.”³⁹

In fact, there was not just one single chimney left after 1938, but a literary landscape scattered with a dozen chimneys of varying height. A

³⁹ From Qahhor’s notebook (quoted by Karimov, 2012, pp. 368 ff.). Naim Karimov remarks that quite a few literati of the 1930-50s might have been the ‘hero’ of that scenario.

benevolent literary scholar has recently underlined that “[...] in a short while after 1937 [...] a new generation entered our literature” (Karimov, 2012, p. 369). Actually, that generation of Oybek, G’afur G’ulom, Hamid Olimjon, Uyg’un, Mirtemir and others had been waiting on the threshold of Uzbek literature for roughly a decade, first admiring the great elders and then welcoming ‘Cultural Revolution,’ and tacitly or actively supporting the wiping-out of the elders which would promote them to the top. No matter how cautiously they trod their path as poets any time after 1933, many of them also fell victim of persecution until the early 1950s anyway (*idem*). Those who survived and were successful finally built a ‘national’ Soviet Uzbek poetry along the guidelines of socialist realism. However, most of the foundations that had been laid by their ‘educators’ and themselves in the 1920s to early 1930s, has been buried under the avalanches of Stalinist repression, and so has most of their lyric poetry of the pre-WW2 period (and the poetry of their surviving or non-surviving lesser gifted contemporaries who never made it to the Pantheon of Uzbek literature). Why is this so?

As far as poetic genres, fashionable art movements, stylistics, poetic language and many other aspects of form are concerned, Uzbek poetry of the 1920s and early 1930s – especially when compared with the streamlined poetry of later decades – appears amazingly diverse: from neo-classical *muwashshah* to free verse; from romanticism and folklorism to futurism and realism; from linguistic Ottomanism and Tatarism to Turkist purism and Uzbekist dialectism and so on, all kinds of -isms are reflected in the poems of the time (and were in due course discussed and criticised). However, when it comes to content, and especially to imagery, that same poetry is almost as coherent and intertextually interwoven as Islamic classic poetry had been. If one picks out a single metaphor or poetic image of one poem, a web of related poems will follow suit, poems that will in their turn refer back to more webs of related poems, all tied together through an ever-recurring imagery. In 1928, an annoyed critic urged the circle around *Yosh Leninchi* to help poets break loose from that web of ‘trifles,’ as he called them: “If through the influence of the circle (the poets were) guided to replace the boring abuse of moon and stars, horizon and dusk, soil and toil, females and slavery by the embellishment (of poems) with lists of facts, hope would arise that in our young literature, we might at last possess some works that are rich in meaning” (‘Kitobxon,’ 1928, p. 15).

The repetitious, allegedly meaningless standard metaphors were actually part and parcel of the literary discourse that lay behind many debates on cultural, societal and political issues. Indispensable for condensed insider communication, the metaphors served as codes to identify friend and foe; at the same time the poets could show extra skill and ingenuity when giving an otherwise familiar image an unexpected twist. In the 1920s, everybody would know that the 'sun' metaphor stood for the Revolution, while stars symbolised the unfulfilled hopes for national autonomy; a trembling leaf would allude to a hesitant fellow traveller, a falling leaf, to a seceder from the Bolshevik cause, and so forth. Some metaphors, symbols and images can be traced from early twentieth-century enlightenment poetry through the liberal and bellicose early 1920s until as late as the collectivisation and industrialisation of rural production, and of course their meaning and connotations unfolded and changed over the years.⁴⁰

Just as classic Islamic poetry makes little sense to an unfamiliar reader, in order to understand and appreciate the Uzbek poetry of the 1920s one needs to know the social and political context in which a given poem was created. That context, however, automatically brings back memories which after 1938 were tabooed, and many a metaphor would have brought back, in particular, the memory of persecuted and repressed poets. This is why together with the memory of a repressed generation of poets, most of the early lyric poetry of their surviving junior compatriots had to disappear from view. The educational efforts that had led the younger generation to many an achievement in poetry have thus gone to waste.

In conclusion, I wish to give one example for what I have just tried to explain: the poem *Qishda* [In Winter] by Mirtemir, first published in 1928, which to the best of my knowledge has not found its way into any later Soviet edition of Mirtemir's poetry, although it counts among the most beautiful and certainly wittiest Uzbek lyric pieces of the late 1920s.

⁴⁰ The changes of the wild tulip (*lola*) metaphor, for example, have been traced from classic poetry all the way down to the 1930s, in Baldauf, 2008, pp. 194 ff.

Oq guldan chaman –
dalada, qirda...
har yerda!
Qarg'a-zog' 'sayraydi'.
Mamnun.
Kun bulut... yulduzli,
oyli,
ziyoli,
oq tun; oppoq tun,
uyg'oq – tun! ...
Tumon bosadi...
Yuzlarni o'padi sovuq izg'irig

Tollarda oq barg.
Quyosh-da kulishni, guyo, etdi tark!
Bulutlar ortidan boqadi
goho;
oq gullar bag'rini yoqadi.
Tomchilar oqadi...
Turmush – uyg'oq;
haryon oq-oppoq!
Zavudlar hamon kuladi:
gurr... qoh, qoh,
qoh qoh ho!

Lawns of white flowers –
out there in the steppes...
everywhere!
Crows are 'singing'.
Happy they are.
The day is shrouded in clouds... yet starry,
moonlit,
bright,
white night; dazzlingly white night,
wide awake – night! ...
The fog is rising...
Chilly frost kisses the cheeks.

White leaves on willows.
Even the sun, though, has ceased from laughing!
Now and then
it looks out from behind the clouds;
setting on fire the white flowers' hearts.
Drops flow...
Life is awake;
white on all sides, shiny white!
The factories haven't stopped laughing:
zooom.....haha,
ha ... ha ... ha!

(Mirtemir, 1928, p. 4)

Early Soviet Uzbek poetry's favourite seasons were spring and summer, which connoted awakening, flourishing and thriving, maturing and bearing rich fruit. According to a rather simplistic ascription of meaning favoured by critics and thence by poets who strove to please them, autumn in its turn would evoke images of decay and despair, and winter signalled death and final loss, which would cause only ominous crows to rejoice. Although the frosty nights and sparkling snow of the Russian North, which many Uzbek poets experienced for the first time in the early 1920s, were a rich source of inspiration (without echoing the specifically nationalist overtones of Russian winter poetry, of course), starting from the mid-1920s poets preferred not to celebrate the winter (let alone autumn) so as to spare themselves the reproach of hopelessness and despair, from which was all too readily inferred their disbelief in the new social order and hence, enmity towards the Soviets.

Poets had by 1927-1928 learned to be cautious. Mirtemir's poetic image of the wide steppes shrouded in white is daring and novel – the regular image would have been the spring-like steppes covered with wild red tulips (*lolalar*) that had in Jadid times stood as the metaphor for the blood of

martyrs of colonial oppression (Saydahmadxo'ja Siddiqiy, 1914), and were consequently inverted to symbolise the red Soviet banner, the red necktie of pioneers, or the liberated Soviet Uzbek women/girls. White flakes on the other hand had not too long ago, in a 1924 poem *Qor* [Snow] by Fitrat, which featured in the widely used textbook *Go'zal yozg'ichlar*, stood as a metaphor for all the hearts that longed for autonomy; these flakes were during Fitrat's moment in time trodden into the dirt, but would according to the poet's hopes re-emerge when kissed by the sun, and would "dance again" some time (Fitrat, 1924). The white leaves, again, for any conscious listener of the time must have echoed Cho'lpon's famous little *Suhbat* [Conversation] published in 1925, in which a leaf, when questioned why it had thrown itself in the arms of the black soil, rebuffs the questioning 'smart slave' by referring to its ardent love of the native soil, and predicting that while killing it today, the soil would let it sprout again some day (Cho'lpon, 1925). The ultimate metaphor employed in Mirtemir's text, however, is the 'cloud.' When in 1923 Cho'lpon wrote his famous poem *Buzilgan o'lkaga* [To the Ruined Land], he metaphorised colonial rule (Soviet rule over Turkestan included) by a cloud that deprives his homeland of the sun (Cho'lpon, 1923, p. 5). At its time the poem caused an outrage from which Cho'lpon was never to recover; from 1924 until the early 1930s, any versifier who sought fame would write a disdainful *nazira* [poetic response] to that poem, or at least allude to the ominous cloud image in their writings – the colonial cloud had of course long since been removed by the sun of Revolution, as it were.⁴¹

Mirtemir had only one year before the publication of his winter poem reaped a harsh 'educative' remark for his former poems: "Try to write less but better," an anonymous critic told him on the 1927 pages of the teachers' journal *Maorif va O'qitg'uchi* (Anonymous, 1927a, p. 69). Mirtemir indeed seems within a few months to have learned a big lesson in poetics as well as ideology, most probably with the support of his mentor Sotti Husayn and the literary circle of *Yosh Leninchi*. He succeeded in inverting all the well-known poetic images: If the bright day, according to early Soviet imagery, stood for active socialist work and positive feelings, nights were by convention not bright but dark and stood for exactly the opposite. In the early 1920s, a poet's turning to the stars would imply his longing for outside support in his struggle for national autonomy.⁴² Mirtemir now turned the image

⁴¹ This author has traced part of the intertextual debate (Baldauf, 1991); however, the actual context is much wider than described there.

⁴² For example, Fitrat's *Mirrix yulduziga* [To Mercury] and Cho'lpon's *Yorug' yulduziga* [To

upside down and made the night the actual locus of socialist work and life. He mastered the classical device of deceived expectation when seemingly sketching a frosty *ziyoli*⁴³ night, then having the sun (of Revolution?!) causing pain and tears for the leaves and snowflakes [...] but letting it all end up in the triumphant laughter of incessant socialist labour.

Without its wealth of inverted and re-interpreted metaphors, allusions to recently written poems by friend and foe, and implicit references to his senior writer colleagues, Mirtemir's poem *In Winter* would perhaps still make some sense; its actual merits, however, can only be appreciated if its literary and societal background is revealed. But how could it have been revealed after 1938, since most of it directly concerns the greatest Uzbek poets and writers whose human existence had been extinguished, and their poetic oeuvre tabooed. If Mirtemir's *In Winter*, and many other early Uzbek poems of the 1920s and 1930s for that matter, had been re-published, questions would have arisen that might have caused unwelcome debates and also serious troubles for some of the survivors of the purges. The post-WW2 Soviet Uzbek literary community, wisely guided by its own mentors and educators, decided for the lesser evil: not to re-publish most of the early Soviet Uzbek poetry, not to have it studied, not to raise difficult questions. There is still a lot to be detected about it.

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the Bright Star], both published in *O'zbek Yosh Shoirlari*, 1922; in a similar vein, Botu's *Yetar endi!* [That's Enough!] from 1921, published in Elbek, 1924, p. 27.

⁴³ *Ziyoli* means 'bright,' but at the same time the codeword for the Jadid enlighteners, as we remember

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Abstract

Within three decades from the turn of the twentieth century, poetry in Central Asia turned from an intellectual hobby and liberal occupation shared within circles of enthusiasts, competing for stylistic perfection while encouraging the literary pursuits of juniors, into a weapon at the hands of ideologically determined versifiers of varying prowess. The paper traces the development of Uzbek poetry, initially guided into modernity by promoters of enlightenment, then diversified with autonomist and revolutionary impetus, and which finally ended up as a streamlined state-run profession, with many poets falling victim to oppression, and many works falling into the oblivion of taboo.

Keywords: Uzbek poetry, Soviet literary politics, early 20th century, enlightenment, national culture, prosecuted poets.

Résumé

L'éducation des poètes et la promotion de la poésie ouzbèke, des années 1910 au début des années 1930

En trois décennies, à partir du tournant du XX^e siècle, la poésie en Asie centrale, de passe-temps intellectuel et d'occupation libérale partagée au sein de cercles d'amateurs rivalisant pour la perfection stylistique tout en encourageant les aspirations littéraires des jeunes, s'est muée en une arme aux mains de versificateurs idéologiquement déterminés aux prouesses variables. L'article retrace le développement de la poésie ouzbèke, laquelle a été guidée en premier lieu dans la modernité par les promoteurs de l'instruction, puis s'est diversifiée du fait de l'élan autonomiste et révolutionnaire, pour aboutir en fin de compte à une profession uniforme et gérée par l'État, avec son lot de poètes devenus victimes de l'oppression, et d'œuvres tombées dans l'oubli du tabou.

Mots-clés: poésie ouzbèke, politique littéraire soviétique, début du XX^e siècle, instruction, culture nationale, poètes persécutés.

Аннотация к статье

Образование поэтов и продвижение узбекской поэзии с 1910-х годов до начала 1930-х годов

В течение трёх десятилетий с начала 20-го века поэзия в Средней Азии превратилась из интеллектуального хобби и либерального занятия, практикуемого среди энтузиастов, конкурирующих за стилистическое совершенство через поощрение литературных устремлений молодых людей, в оружие, используемое идеологически настроенными поэтами разных способностей. Данная статья прослеживает развитие узбекской поэзии,

которая изначально была привнесена в современность сторонниками просвещения, затем изменена автономными и революционными импульсами, и которая, в конце концов, превратилась в единообразную государственную профессию, когда многие поэты стали жертвами репрессий и многие запрещенные работы были позабыты.

Ключевые слова: узбекская поэзия, советская литературная политика, начало 20-го века, просвещение, национальная культура, репрессированные поэты.