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Parallels in Literature

In my speech at Gilmore Hall I said that Kyrgyz literature grew as a result of the major influence of Russian literature. At the same time, Kyrgyz literature also preserved its national originality and distinguishing features. It is a so-called formula, "Unity in diversity."

For example, the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, who died two years ago at the age of 79, was the most celebrated representative of Kyrgyzstan, a mountainous nation in the heart of Central Asia, which was a Soviet republic until 1991. The books of Aitmatov were translated into more than 150 languages. Described as a "magical socialist-realist" in the press, he was able to combine elements of Kyrgyz folk-tales and epics with formally traditional realism.

In my speech I also said that the literary process was directly connected to the method of socialist realism, but interpreted in an original manner. It was a kind of blooming in limited space. This schematic and dogmatic interpretation of socialist and realist literature created a great number of monotonous works which later became the ordinary scrawl of scribblers. In these works, reality was described in a unilateral manner and from an inflexible position. For example, the "theory of conflictlessness," which existed in literature for a long time, was based on the idea that confrontation could be the Soviet reality between the good and the better, and that life should be presented as a joy of perception of environment.

At that time, I wrote works that extolled song labor, peace and fraternity of peoples. In 1973-74, I wrote a cycle of poems about the events in Chile and was awarded prizes by the International Students' Union and the People of Chile signed by Ortencia Bussi de Aliende, the First Lady at that time. For a Soviet schoolboy, it was a great honor.

A little later that simplified outlook of artistic creation was replaced by a more subtle portrayal of human nature, its emotions and doubts, its signs and feeling. In certain cases this improved the quality of literature. Surely, this process did not evolve without inner contradictions, tensions, and conflicts. Thus, along with official laudatory works, another literature developed that was notable for its attention to an individual, to his inner life.

So I began to read international literature, most of it in the original, which required that I learn foreign languages. I translated into Kyrgyz Paul Verlaine and Guy de Maupassant from French, Federico Garcia Lorca from Spanish, Nazim Hikmet from Turkish, Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain, and other many books from Italian, Russian, and Old Turkic authors. Already during that time I had read *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* by James Joyce in English, *A la Recherche du Temp Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)* by Marcel Proust in French, even *The Master and Margaret* by Mikhail Bulgakov in Russian. All these books were prohibited in the Soviet Union.

When I once told this to Chingiz Aitmatov, he said to me, "How happy were you! I didn't learn foreign languages, because that time the KGB would've persecuted me". And it was true. If Kim Sa-in was thrice arrested, as he said, I was thrice invited to the KGB to work for them. I refused, and I was persecuted. I am persecuted now, too, because the KGB still exists today. This system in my country (as in all other post Soviet countries) still exists. Though it's called something different today. As a result, I cannot work where I want to work. I cannot be promoted. I have been unemployed since 1992.

I wasn't a political dissenter but I possessed an honest heart and desire to be free. I tried to describe the reality of our lives as truthfully as possible. I tried to portray the world as I saw it: full of bigotry, prejudice, cruelty, sexism, patriarchal brutality, and general lack of harmony in the way people treat each other.

These themes are present in my novels and tales, my stories and poetry. Now we are living under the sign of Change. It is a time of hope and of alarm. Life is becoming more complicated, the events changing quickly, the world tapered. Our national literature is surviving in a crisis of muteness, and it is at a standstill. But this is not stagnation for me. Now I'm writing some historical novels on the history of my people.

I am originally from the Kyrgyz tribe of Sayak. Other tribes call us "the Kyrgyz Hebrews". I've always wondered why. My tribe is descended from the ancient "Sak" tribes. Saks lived in Central Asia and then they were scattered throughout the world. In history books they are called "Scythians". Our epic hero Manas was also originally a Saks.

The Manas Epic embodies thousands of years of Kyrgyz history, development, culture, values, and worldviews. It's our Bible, our Koran and our Mecca where every Kyrgyz must go on a pilgrimage. Unfortunately, some narrow-minded people try to pit these three giants, the Manas Epic, the Bible and the Koran, against each other. But I try to research inter-relationships between these three great narratives.

Many of the parallels between them cannot be explained by mere archetypes. There must have been historical bonds. Kyrgyz and "lost" or scattered Semitic tribes may have been part of a united commonwealth that shared similar traditions, legends, and history for a period in their common living. Such a theory might explain similarities found between Kyrgyz and Jewish Ashkenazi DNA, between Kyrgyz and ancient Hebrew cultures, between Orkhon and Aramaic scripts, and affinities between many characters and events in the *Epic of Manas* and biblical stories.

Rural Kyrgyz have many traditions that seem biblical. Comparing the Kyrgyz national *Epic of Manas* to the Bible reinforces such bonds. Especially obvious are the similarities between a biblical elder, "Manasseh son of Jacob" and the great Kyrgyz hero "Manas son of Jakyb", his wife Rabiga and biblical Rebbeca, ten scattered sons of Orozdu and ten (neither more nor less) scattered sons of Israel. All of these events and others are told in my trilogy, *Dreams of Mind, or Collapse of One Empire,* as well as the novels *Phoenix* (which I read fragments from at Shambaugh House), *Blue Towns* and *When Satan was Fallen*.

But this is already another story.