

DASHBALBAR'S PRAYER OF LOVE

1

I am thinking about one roseate evening, in the final month of summer. Near the banks of the Selbi, seen at the eastern edge of Jigjed's summer pastures, there stood a wooden hovel. Where we were staying, the families of livestock farmers were passing the summer. The poet O Dashbalbar, who was from Sühbaatar aimag, had been writing poems on his own that summer. When he came back from work in the evening, he would lay out on the grass a quilted mat, and lie, face down, to write his poems. And the final rays of the sun on the cows' tethering line were joined with the blue smoke from a dungfire to create a haze of bluish rouge. A young calf's mooing, and the cheerful voices of children, rose into the sky. This is the poem which Dashbalbar wrote on this evening:

*My life is only in the windworn white grass.
My beautiful motherland...and so we begin.*

I think that these lines are a fine introduction to his work, they express its melodies. His first book, *The Melody of the Stars*, begins with these lines and, some ten books later, this poem again takes its place at the beginning.

There is white grass in the poem. This white grass is worn away by the wind. It has its roots and its respiration, and I feel how the body and mind of the poet dwells within the white grass. I feel, not the vast rippling pastures, but life in a single withering blade of grass, and I feel the lack of boundaries between human life and the life of the grass.

*Cleansing my mind, I will enlighten every blade of grass.
Happy in my thoughts, I am absorbed into the pure clarity of the waters.*

Joyfully absorbed into the poet's waters and into his plants, in the world of poetry there dwells eternal Heaven, the Mongolian sun is smiling, like Dashbalbar's son Gangabaatar. In the world of poetry, a lark is singing, the goddess of poetry, Yangchen Lhamo, is playing the golden zither, smoke is billowing from a dungfire, the sounds of sheep and goats and cows are heard, and the happy voices of children. In fact, the world of Mongolia lacks nothing, its body is created as a poem, it draws the image of Mongolia, it creates the melody of Mongolia. Looking at it in this way, an introduction to all the literature which came after Dashbalbar began with this poem, a distillation of such great love for the world and for the motherland, and it started from these images and from the grasses.

*The mind of the wind, perfumed with grasses,
absorbs into the silken air of evening...I know the stories...*

Long ago, the minds of poets mingled with the grass' perfume, the wind joined with their bodies and, absorbed into the silken air of evening, an unfamiliar "story" has begun. This "story", opened only by the secret key of the poet's mind, remains an extraordinary presentiment. But Dashbalbar was a poet

who said to us, "I know the story," and the secret future remained open within his world.

This poem, which Dashbalbar wrote in Jigjid's summer pastures on July 24th 1978, came to my attention and I typed out two copies of it onto paper. The original copy contained a dedication to me and, later on, neither of us thought to exchange this precious jewel, even for gold. But we certainly both felt the beginning of the unsolved story of time. In every work of genius, the experience of time, the domination of the stars and planets, the omens of thought, the lunar and solar coördinates, and the power of attraction and repulsion, become clearer in every way. In fact, through this force, this poem is the source of the great river Dashbalbar.

2

In 1978, Dashbalbar's literary output was marked by a special cycle of poems. Just one month after writing the poem about "the windworn white grass," he wrote a lucky, somewhat inspired, poem.

*We received our homeland from our ancestors,
we will pass it on to our descendants.
The standard and the spirits are fixed,
in the hearth, supported
by three stones in the brazier,
we received them from our ancestors!
We will pass it on to our descendants...*

I imagine that an omen is coming, it is like the Dashbalbar river, roaring through the mountain ravines. That autumn, we were amazed by the many poems he had written, such as "A Song for Dariganga," "I am a Guitar" and "Writing Poems," and a poem of extraordinary inspiration called "Waves of Heaven." The idea of his going to the Gorky School emerged from the flow of these autumn waters.

Before 1978, Dashbalbar was a naïve person, melancholy, honest and easygoing. At this time, then, aloof and naïve, he composed this verse:

*I met with love in ancient times,
a fledgling passing through his life.
I have squandered my whole life,
longing for those dear black eyes.*

We asked him how old he was. Confidently he told us that he was seventeen, and he was full of smiles as he wrote "I want to experience my entire life." In 1977, I spent the autumn in Baruun Urt, doing work placement to complete my teacher training studies, and we both set off to the northwest of the local town, sick with poems under the nighttime moon, to stay among the Dörvölj hills. On these bright moonlit evenings, in the middle month of autumn, we came back from our poetry walks, and Mr Ochirbat was waiting to warm the best of spirits to offer us. This was my birthday celebration. Even before we started to celebrate, we grabbed some paper and went inside. Dashbalbar straight

away wrote "For my Friend the Poet," and I wrote "Twenty-five Years," and we read them to one another. His poem begins with the words:

*An autumn night, and the rays of the moon strike the roofing,
wrapping around its white light, roping us together.*

And so we sheltered together under the white rays of the autumn night and, caught up in this white light, we were joined in the warm tradition of friendship. We were like Temüüjin and Jamuha exchanging shagai for sum, we were friends exchanging poems and, we placed our incense in the temple of poetry. Later, on Golden Hill, we cut our fingers and melded our power, becoming sworn brothers in the tradition of true Mongolian men. He was weeping, he said to me, "I've never had an elder brother, but now I do." Living his life in this world, he respected me as his elder brother, but in the world of poetry he was my sworn brother of literature.

3

How can I forget the bright memories of this autumn? Together with our dear friend in literature Yo Badarch, we made a fine group at Dörvölj. The sides of the stones shone white with our poems, D Nyamsüren's included, and our passionate minds showed that the footstep of that autumn's bright memory was once again placed firm on the path. In 1996, I went back to the local town and, on the top of Dörvölj, I wrote a poem.

*The scattered light from settlements on the steppe flash underfoot,
and even the light from the stars in the dark sky is weak,
and this one can only be drunk on the pungency of wild leek...
And after five years, they say, Mongolia will resound, and not the dogs.
The rash pandit has his shirt tails open,
they say the cold nights of autumn will grow warm.
On every stone on the mountain ridge, the bright stars sing,
every star singing into the eyes the melody of sparks.
The wind blows, as though tuning a fiddle, and
walking barefoot on the earth, stepping on the thorny caragana,
I am amazed by the softness of the carpet, like a stage,
like a wheel I have rolled, I have swaggered.
The river of Baruun Urt, I have seen, is longer than the Herlen,
I threw stones at the barking dogs of Baruun Urt,
I was the first flash of distant light,
found upon a lonely mountain, sparking like flint.
It's annoying to have puncture vine stuck to my worn clothing,
my happy times have flown so early...
Two birds brush past my ears, like things cast away -
to tell the truth, I really didn't notice them.
These fiery boys are said to be possessed by spirits,
they call upon the birds of night, with eyes like diamonds.
In space, where people and the stars look alike,
our famous Dashbalbar was twenty-nine years old.*

*The old moon shines like a candle on the edges of the steppe,
a flash of lightning absorbed into a book of poems.
The ancient tunes awake from fiddles and zithers,
but beauty is a measure of truth and lies.
The wind casts silver moonlight over the locks of my hair,
and curious dogs bark at the moon in the white night.
Standing with those lazy boys on the checkerboard steppe of flowers,
I saw the rays of Shambala touch down.*

4

In the autumn of 1979, almost every mail brought a letter from Dashbalbar, who was studying in the Gorky School of Literature. He grieved for his homeland, its waters and its landscape, his ger, his wife and his children, and for his friends, and although the heavy rhythm of foggy Moscow was not expressed in the language he used in his letters, its inspiration was awakened to forge beautiful poetry. One of these poems, written in 1980, was "Love One Another, My People!" In this poem, although it was in keeping with the broad sweep established by the great poets, who had studied the meaning of life, full of the bright wisdom of love, this poem was not favorably received. The people who read it received it in the assumption that it had been written by a poet who had already written such poems. This was unavoidable. He was barely twenty-three years old, this poet, his name unknown in literary circles, and this "admonishment" to his superiors should not have been in his mind at this time.

But Dashbalbar read this poem everywhere. When he met with academics at the universities, when he stayed with his family, he read the poem over and over until he was exhausted. One evening, as he was leaving our house, he wrote "Love One Another, My People!" in dark ink on a piece of paper provided by a friend.

He read "Love One Another, My People!" on stage at an important poetry competition, but the audience were expecting only a regular type of poem. He believed this poem to be his signature piece and, although he was the only one reading it, his delivery was unwavering. Remembering this, this poem has come flying from the poet's breast, flying back over twenty years with the birds in autumn. The poem is a bird. The poem-bird, flying from the poet's heart, flies around, confused, until it finds its place in the river of the reader's mind. A poem is a living world. The moment at which a poem is born is like that at which a child is given birth. The poet's wisdom, the poem which, at the most significant moment, exploded with the powerful trembling of the mind is, as B Yavuuhan said, "a stumpy horse, born from wisdom, born standing up." This winged horse is born again in the world of wisdom, in the space of the reader's mind, and it flies off to seek its fortune. "Love One Another, My People!" flew for twenty years until it reached the space of the people's mind.

5

Every poem waits for a time and a place to inhabit. In fact, who knows that such a time and place will appear for a poem twenty years after it was written? On October 17th 1999, a day of black sadness, the hearts of the talented children of Mongolia stood still, and the newspapers published what they had found without difficulty in Dashbalbar's poetry, lines which precisely suited the situation. This was the poem "Love One Another, My People!" which had flown off to seek its own time and space. Reading in books and newspapers that which I had previously heard from the poet's mouth, people would discover this poem without really noticing it.

*Love one another, my people, while you are alive.
Don't keep from others whatever you find beautiful.
Don't wound my heart with heedless barbs, and
don't push anyone into a dark hole.*

People set out to find this poem, they try to read it again. In this life full of shouting, the late departed silence was not Dashbalbar, but the voices of the people's hearts, and it was as though Dashbalbar was everywhere whispering, "Love one another, my people!" The poem's verses flew into the people's heads. It flew through the doors of the people's hearts and minds.

*Our lives are really similar,
our words constrict our throats the same way,
our tears drop onto our cheeks the same way –
things are much the same as we go along the road.*

The funeral procession of the people's son O Dashbalbar moved from the Palace of Culture, out through the doors of the University, emerged from behind Sansar and returned through the Tsaiz market, continuing on until Altan Ölgii. It was continually stopping, though no-one in the two lines of people along the route was holding it back, and in this way they bade farewell to their talented son.

Dashbalbar's poem was broadcast on Mongolian radio and television, and published in newspapers and magazines.

The poet was reading his poem.

*Today you're smiling, tomorrow you'll be crying.
Another day you're sad, and the next you'll be singing.
We all pass from the cradle to the grave -
if for no other reason, love one another!*

Twenty years after this poem was written, its true meaning has found its place. Nowadays, Mongolian manufacturers print the poem's title and verses on tea and milk products, on food and drink, they chisel them on walls in schools, hospitals and factories. The poem chose a destiny different from its master's, it occupies another time.

This was an interesting situation. At that time, among the literary friends of this wise and talented son and his oath-bound brothers, it was I who represented Mongolian culture and art on Dashbalbar's behalf, and I got the chance to have the final word.

In these words, spoken at Altan Ölgii, I attempted to clarify Dashbalbar's literary world, his place in the Heaven of the intellect. These words were never published anywhere. They were omitted from our own publication.

(The people were quite silent, the gods were absolutely quiet.)

We bade farewell to Ochirbatin Dashbalbar, this passionate son of the Mongolian people, this poet of genius, who made an outstanding effort for culture and society, as he travelled his final road.

From the intellectual treasury of humanity, the new army of great Mongolian literature, which brought forth the creators of the Secret History of the Mongols, and of the epics of Gesar and Jangar, who raised Noyon Hutagt Danzanravjaa, Injinashi, Natsagdorj and Yavuuhulan, were all gathered in grief before you.

You dedicated the bright years of your life to the great work of Mongolian literature, and, with your books of poetry, such as *The Melody of the Stars*, *The River Flows Gently*, *Shining Love*, *Silver Birds of Dreams*, *The Buddha's Eyes* and *Time's Sadness, or Forms in Space*, and with your poems, such as "Eastern Melody," "Dariganga Melody," "Love One Another, My People," "We Will Pass Our Homeland To Our Children," "My Ancestors" and "A Poem For My Young Brothers," you were able to contribute to the enjoyment of Mongolian literature, you are a superb craftsman of language, eternal in the hearts of your many readers.

Dashbalbar carried out the duties of a diplomat in Mongolian politics during the 1990s and, in a similar way, within the world of ideas he was an educator, a new bridge spanning east and west.

Dashbalbar's art of words split the darkness of ignorance like the sword of Buddha Manjusri, the melody beyond sounded like Yangchen Lhamo's zither, he was a divine and shining poet, a messenger of truth sent from the Buddha.

Dashbalbar generously dedicated his time and energy to promote poetic literature, to encourage and make known a new literary generation, he used his abilities as an innovator to guide the young generation and he set up his own school for creative work.

Dashbalbar wrote, at the end of the 1980s, patriotic texts such as "Works of Eternity on the Edge of Extinction" and "Tripping Over the Books," and so tore away the covering of a society which had previously restricted its freedom of expression. In these publications, he sought to protect, love and admire the fundamental cultural and historical heritage, and the Mongolian people will not forget his call.

Dashbalbar was a poet, a genuine patriot, who dedicated himself to protect independence, to protect of his native land, he expressed the concerns of regular people, his was the voice which inspired truth and justice.

You saw that a poet has to be a genuine patriot, like the Hungarian Petefi Sandor, the Tatar Musa Jalil and the Mongolian Tsogt Taij. And now the patriotic poets at the end of the twentieth century will add your name, in their admiration, to this list.

You have gifted ten published volumes to the heritage of literature. The works which you have left to your motherland, to your people and to your descendents will remain as precious jewels of Mongolian culture.

In the light of the new century, a reëvaluation of the melody of Dashbalbar's quartz crystal thought, the gentle feeling of good fortune, the melody of the stars in the boundless sky and the vast work of the mind, the time is coming when he will be famous and praised and anthologised, and not only among poets in the east.

My beloved Dashbalbar! May you rest eternally in the land of the motherland which you so loved and protected! May you return in body and soul to Mongolia, and may you occupy the land for centuries to come!

20 x 99
Altan-Ölgii

7

Dashbalbar's poems have bright melody, they soar through space, the broad and endless cosmos, they are full of the stars and the moon, of white clouds, of skyblue mountains, of rivers and streams and of the singing of birds. I understand that the quality of his poems is in their gentle melody, their lively and brilliant images, their inner flight, their boundless swimming through time. But, at the end of the 1990s, his poems were filled with expressions of the pain of dealing with these times of uncertainty, with the life of philistines, with people who love human wickedness, those who do not honor their motherland. They provided a harsh illustration of the character of those poets, who do not reject this as being simply ephemeral.

*Winter is everywhere long.
Once it has passed, it seems like it was short.
While a person lives, people everywhere speak evil of them.
When they're gone, everyone starts to praise them.*

Because he realised the nature of life, he walked with great pride into the constant spray of verbal bullets. He conceived of himself as "the blue wolf of the steppe" and, though he was forced into the dark power of the human world, he said that

*The wolf is treasured by none but the poets,
divine, it enters battle like a hero of our lineage.
The wolf has dwelt with people on the golden earth and,
like poets, it has sensed the noble truth of struggle.*

He was the wolf, he hardened himself to the natural male will. Both his character and his poetry were sharpened by the attitude of rejecting his own times. Sharp tongues twined around him, they gnawed away at his life, and at all that was beautiful.

While my fine, golden body has been pained

*by trickery, slander and cunning,
my focussed mind, free from error,
trusts in the people and worships the Buddha.*

What remains for me now...? he wrote without ceasing, in barely lit loneliness, amid the echoing noise of a firestorm and the black smoke of slander. "Though we change our behavior when we are somewhere else, we do not deviate from the law of karma," he said, hardening himself in the face of death.

It could be said that the language of his poetry was rather harsh, or maybe that it was rebellious. It did not shun the elegant melodies of poetry but its wall of hard and truthful language stood before the great love which protected beauty and creativity, the motherland and its people.

The hospital tests diagnosed Dashbalbar as suffering from an acute case of liver poisoning. However, although his liver had been affected by some kind of food poison, in the end, his brute power had been poisoned by what is usually known as "nitrate". It was said that, in the deep suffering of his sickness, his heart had exploded. In reality, though, he was finally scattered with the bullets of whispering curses. It is a shame that diagnostic wisdom cannot nowadays heal verbal wounds, and verbal poisoning.

Dashbalbar's death was a shining teaching, which saved him through the loving admiration, protection, pride, and truth of the people. Was not his legacy to us, still living immaturely this side of death, "Love One Another, My People!?" These words, in fact, were Dashbalbar's prayer of love.

8

He wrote, "The vigor of the mountains was slowly absorbed into me, it was as though, with every passing year, my delicate heart was joining with the mountains." Slowly and deliberately, he was being absorbed into the mountains of Altai, Hangai, Hentii, and into the dark mountains of Dariganga. He was never bored by his life. He had a limitless love for people, for life and for even the blades of white grass, he "hurried to say that he would watch slowly the blue of the sky, would listen slowly to the whispering of the river, would live slowly among people. How should I live slowly among you in the world of people, sunbirds, beautiful trees and stories?" When he thought about his own life, he knew that it was not the doors of Hell that invited him, but the doors of Paradise. The final words of a poetic genius are extremely meaningful. His final poem was called "Love The Moment When You Help Someone." He wrote, in Hospital Number Two,

*I have dark thoughts
of the days when I did not help people.
I have thoughts of an empty desert, of extreme cold.*

*Oh, my Buddha!
Love the only moment when you help someone!*

He didn't ask for a life of riches, but he cared for people and searched for the moment when he could be of help to someone. To say that he would be of help to someone was the realisation of his love for people. His was a wisdom which loved life. In fact, his manner was filled with the great love which dwelt in poetry. Nowadays, people lack love, they stab one another, not with bright words of mutual respect, but with the poisonous words of anger and greed. And, although the number of people who recite prayers for the benefit of all creatures is decreasing, they are educating themselves in black magic, by which they curse the monks. Poets who experience this certainly feel that, because the path is invisible, by which, with the greatest determination, they extend the words of their heart to such people, it is like reciting prayers.

Dashbalbar said, "I have become established as a poet, I have opened myself up with poetry. As a poet, whose words, spoken to my many readers, to my people, will not remain in the future, I am finished." Though this was his experience during his life, his poetry is collected in print in the beautiful songs which make up "I Am Living Slowly in the Perfect World." In order to understand Dashbalbar's battle for his country, we need to understand how to love "the windworn white grass," and how to live amidst it. It must be realised that the fundamental message, which struggles for that true understanding, and which is the voice of Dashbalbar's motherland and people, is the prayer of love that is found in "Love One Another, My People!" Continually thinking of this *prayer* of Dashbalbar, like a powerful string which joins together his poems, from first to last, we may now come to penetrate his poetic world.

G Mend-Ooyo

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