

YAVUUHULAN'S ILLUMING MELODY

The mountain goat leaps and trips down over the rocky mountain, towards the west, and the desert hollows, scented with wormwood and wild onion, turn to skyblue. And on this distant skyblue edge, it seems as though the blue watery mountains cut straight across with their snowy white heads. This is the mountain of Hasag Jargalant. And it holds the gaze, this beautiful land where the shamanic spirits rise, where the rocky mountains are open to the sun, where the great poet Yavuuhulan took his birth in the nomadic winter encampment called Tasarhai. In his biography, he writes that he was born on 15 March 1929. If we think about this, as they were waiting in this winter encampment for their son's imminent arrival, he grasped at the bright days of the first month of spring. And where the group of three ger was sited is still as it was then. As soon as it becomes warmer, the families who have overwintered in the desert follow the fresh pastures and move up the Bogd river towards the eternal white peak of Otgontenger. Little Yavuu was cradled and lullabied in the nomadic way, by the growling of the mountain river, the white arcs shining over the snowy mountains and the ringing of the bells on the cattle who pulled the carts. As he himself might have said, it's "telling" that he was "born in the broad blue sky."

As soon as the freshness of autumn descends, the nomads who have passed the summer on the flowery blue hills, in the coolness of the eternal snow white peak of noble Otgontenger, move down from the mountain to the gurgling flow of the Bogd river and they spend the winter in great warmth on the edge of the desert. It was on this nomadic path around the four seasons that the future poet Yavuuhulan was formed.

The construction of the bright tone and melody of Yavuuhulan's fine work comes from the broad blue sky and billowing hoarfrost, from the collision of two distant stars, from the snow mountains traversed by the clouds, from the wide skyblue steppe of shimmering grey mirages, from the streams and rivers, floating with the shadows of the silver moon, from ambling horses, the tip of their topknot trembling, from the clear melodies of the long song and from the nomad's ger, like a dozing swan.

They moved, then, nomadically, from the winter encampment in the kidney-red and stony desert, where the piebald goat pauses to stand, to the flat summit of the mountain, where saussurea flowers grow in pairs, and, as Yavuuhuman journeyed from this, the land of his father, who hunted on the ridges of the mountain, to Ulaanbaatar, he was moving among the elders' tales and the long songs, and amidst the wonder of stories. In 1952, he finished school in Sanhüü and went to live in the capital. His father Begz, together with his two younger brothers, gathered a few cattle together and travelled to Ulaanbaatar, the many bells on their carts jangling. In 1949, as a student at the Financial Polytechnic, Yavuuhulan had assembled his first poems and these had been published as two books, *What We Desire* (1950) and *Under the Blue Sky* (1952). He went to Moscow to study at the famous A M Gorky University, which specialised in literature. The years 1954-1959, while Yavuuhulan was a student at this university, one of the principal schools of the arts in the world, resulted in a flowering of his poetic output. In 1959 his book *Lyrics* was published in Russia, and a second book, *The Sound of a Silver Bridle*, in Mongolian, and these announced the arrival on the poetry

scene of a special, lyrical, voice. And while this poet, who had tasted the essence of Mongolia's ancient epics, its long songs, stories and poetic tradition, was studying the finest literary traditions of the east, this was for him a great nomadic journey through poetry.

In Yavuuhulan's artistic work, the poetry of first love holds a special place:

I'm waiting for my lover to arrive,
the sound of horses' hooves pressed upon my heart.
Outside, the night is soundless, peaceful, and
the moon lights up the rafters.

Sleep has fled and, on my orphaned pillow,
I am snared by lovesickness.
And the dull sound of a silver bridle
brings happiness to my passionate heart.

In order properly to experience this poem, "The Sound of a Silver Bridle" (1959), we need to understand the nomadic lifestyle. In the poem, the night in the nomads' camp is completely silent. The felt roof-cover is drawn back. The moonrays have slipped in through this gap and shine between the rafters, and this is an indication of some kind of secret, hidden activity. We hear the horse's hooves approaching, the coming of the beloved made known outside by the sound of the silver bridle. The light glimmers through those rafters, and only the sound is heard, the watching eyes are not privy to the light which shines upon the silver bridle. The silver bridle in the moonlight, then, is a gift greatly honored by the men in nomadic society when they are in love. The silent night, the light of the unconquered moon, the horse's hooves, the sound of the bridle. And the waiting. How clear the night, how dear and beautiful the sound.

Yavuuhulan's poem "A Silver Autumn Morning" seems to be a direct continuation of "The Sound of a Silver Bridle:"

At the hitching-post,
my mount is trembling, neighing.
A brightness comes through the tentflap,
the whitening dawn approaches.

My love, *I'm going now*,
excites the horse's body.
In the clarity of a silver autumn
morning, *Let's gallop away*.

These are principally love poems and there are fundamental similarities in the way both pieces treat the action and the meaning.

In 1970, entranced by the beauty of Indian women, how their waists were exposed by their saris, Yavuuhulan wrote a poem. As soon as critics began to comment favorably upon it, he wrote another poem, "Mongolian Women," to assuage the complaints of Mongolian women. The lyricism of his love poems is poetry's red rose, honoring the beauty of women. Later, in 1979, in "Mongolian Verse," he summarized the history of lovesong:

Because a woman
is mother to man,
all human culture
values beauty.
And because woman
is the mother of beauty,
beauty, better than all else,
is gathered in ourselves.

All Yavuuhulan's love poetry appears to be the wonderful story of a man and a woman in love. A genuine poet's work is not a jumble of fragmented thoughts and actions, but it is meaningful, it is the story of refinement, an embodiment of melody.

Yavuuhulan was a poet who directly absorbed into his poetry a faithful love for nature, motherland, parents, the human world and the animals. In many of his poems – for example, "Where Was I Born?", "Telling it that I Was Born in the Colorful World" and "Taihar Rock" – there is an uprush of springwater, those tuneful melodies which drink from the mind, which fix themselves in the heart, which bring compassion and love. This is the pride which every Mongolian feels when singing in their heart the words of "Where Was I Born?"

I took my birth in the elegant melody of a song,
in a silver goblet wrapped in a blue offering scarf,
in a long song's fair and elegant melody.
And, in man's destiny of joy and misery,
I took my birth in the elegant melody of a song.

In 1973, Yavuuhulan planted a tree in a garden in Hovd. He wrote a lullaby for the tree which he had planted.

No matter about me, they will recall
how you came among passing people.
A lullaby for the tree of poetry,
a lullaby for the tree of Yavuuhulan!

This tree was later tall enough to support the sky. The tree became known as Yavuu's Tree, and in its shade young couples would meet, poets would gather to read their work, and glasses would be raised to Yavuuhulan. The poet's tree was writing its autobiography. The more people read Yavuuhulan's poems, the more the tree will spread its foliage and flowers.

Among Yavuuhulan's poetic legacy, his most powerful and most serious work is the story "Goat Peak." This piece, written in 1969, should take its place in the precious golden coffer, not only of Mongolian poetry, but also of humanity's poetry.

This piece presents a small section from the poet's own biography. The action develops in couplets. At first, the nomadic family shifts from the warmth of their winter encampment. And later, the male mountain goat moves, according to its nature, from the world. Each of these shows how the world behaves...

The way of animals is to die
once they are born!
A difficult mountain path
leaves their birthplace behind.

...and this is the way the world is eternally constructed. So far as the hunter is concerned, in order that the goat grow old, it had fallen at the beginning of its life onto the mountain where it was to be born, and his excitement, his tears are a suitable response to this. The goat looks for one last time at his destiny upon the living earth, at that life through which he had passed, and across the pastures which had watered him and, standing on the summit which is the way of the world, he is not simply a beast to be hunted, but he is one whose nature will continue to be the very expression of our common mother, the living earth. The world exists through the coming together and separation of an animal and its motherland. And one day, humans too, like the goat, will reach their final stopping-place. Looking through his binoculars at Goat Peak, the hunter spend the day in contemplation, his friends and family trust in the way of the world, they put off moving their encampment, fearful of scaring away the goat. The little boy, the poet as a child, expresses in his heart all this activity, the days and all their distress, he feels for the nomads' joy and sadness, for their motherland, for the ways in which all these things interact, and this could be to him like a shining book of precious moments in the world, and in its culture. On the morning after the goat, following the way of the world, had disappeared, they packed up and set off, and his father looked back towards Goat Peak and said to himself, "My homeland." And so, coming towards the end of the poem, anyone with a tender heart would have a knot in their throat and a dampness on their eyelids. Yavuuhulan is a masterful singer of his motherland and the natural world, a nightingale through which the world sings itself.

Yavuuhulan's drive to inspire others took up much of the latter part of his poetic life. Once he had graduated from Gorky University, he began to consider how he might create a university of literature, supporting organised readings of poetry and the translation of the very best of the world's verse. He translated the poems of Sergei Yesenin and Goethe, as well as *Omar Khayyam*, and he studied the oriental poetic tradition, making it widely available. He translated the Russian versions of Li Bai's poems and Japanese haiku, and wrote poems after these models, and in these ways he sought to educate people in poetry. He became close friends with Russian writers, and invited his teacher Lev Oshanin to Mongolia. He translated the work of Rimma Kazakava and Anatoly Sofronov and worked together with those who were actively involved at that time with literature in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries. Moreover, on his travels as a Goodwill Ambassador to India, Cuba and Ethiopia, he composed many beautiful poems.

Yavuuhulan liked to talk about how he advanced up the ladder of his poetic life in two stages. The first stage was "Telling it is that I was Born in the Colorful World:"

Telling it is that I was born on the mild earth:

watching my mother singing through her tears, and
knowing the power gathered in her song,
I want myself to make the song, to live with the song.
Telling it is that I was born on the mild earth.

This was his opening melody, which lasted until the close of the 1970s. His second stage began with “My Verse, My Horse,” which he wrote in 1977.

My verse, my horse, you and I
must sing until the flowers weep, glinting dew.
My verse, my horse, you and I
must sing until the moon, brimming tears, sleeps in open country!

In this poem, he clearly proclaims, “My horse, we need the field of the world!” And the reason was as follows. The years in which Yavuuhulan was writing were the period in Mongolia when socialism was at its zenith, these were the years when creative artists were required to praise in their work the Party, the October Revolution, Lenin, the Soviet Union and comradely friendship. Indeed, at this time, so as not to be persecuted, he followed the line in more than a few poems. However, beneath the parachute which these provided, he wrote lyrical poetry. Even artistic relations were restricted among the socialist countries and, at this time, when the majority of the world’s countries were ignorant of Mongolian literature, the declaration “My horse, we need the field of the world!” was a potent call of considerable genius. However, Yavuuhulan could never distance himself from oppressive ideology, jealousy, and poetic enmity, yet he managed to overcome all the difficulties and disasters of the literary scene. He looked at the peak which he had to climb. He was already aware of how the world measured poetry and he had a distant goal of bringing Mongolian poetry onto the world’s stage. In his final years, he headed the poets’ section of the Mongolian Writers’ Union and organised a club for young poetry, and we, who were enthusiastic for contemporary poetry, worshipped him, and formed a circle around our teacher Yavuu. And our teacher Yavuu said that we should create our poems with no more and no fewer words than necessary, that they should be neither more sparse nor more dense than necessary, and that they should have rhythm and music. And he said that the principal job of the poet was to try to represent the inner form of the heart. Because poetry was an artform, we should aim for a state in which it possesses all that it needs. The making of the poem I mentioned above, “Goat Peak” was an extraordinary masterclass in composition.

From the end of the 1950s until his final years, the poems and songs which Yavuuhulan wrote can be seen as the highest achievement of twentieth century Mongolian poetry. The teachers from whom he learnt were poets of the Mongolian people – Injinashi, Gulirans, Ravjaa and Natsagdorj. The very best of traditional Mongolian poetry, the gentle melody of the east and the free expression of poetry in the west were amazingly conducive to Yavuuhulan’s poetry and enriched its world. Following the impoverishment of Mongolian poetry and artistic thought from the end of the 1930s until the beginning of the 1950s, those who presented the poetry and philosophical tendencies of the new period were singers who emerged to hold sway over the age.

It was not so much that Yavuuhulan brought with him the poetic achievements of every previous era and the mastery of his own era, but rather that, in developing the poetic tradition which he had bequeathed them, the poets who showed the power of his influence, who would be at the center of poetry in Mongolia today, were to be his direct continuation.

The students of the late poets D Nyamsüren and O Dashbalbar, who wield the most influence in Mongolian poetry in the twenty-first century, have greatly benefitted through their link with Yavuuhulan.

Yavuuhulan's poetry is an important school of composition, a wonderful example of harmonious melody and the heart's bright and shining song. He is a craftsman with the wisdom to master the potential of poetic forms in the Mongolian language, a great creator of melody through verse.

In the winter of 1982, at the age of fifty-three, Yavuuhulan suffered a sudden heart attack, and the arts in Mongolia experienced a profound loss. On his gravestone in Altan Ölgii is carved, "Telling it is that I was born in the colorful world," but he entrusted his legacy, "My horse, we need the field of the world!" to those who were to come after him.

In 2006, the World Congress of Poets met in Mongolia and we were truly fortunate that some explanatory publications were written, concerning the promotion of Yavuuhulan's desire, that Mongolian poetry be placed upon the field of the world. We flourished the standard of the the World Congress of Poets at his birthplace, at Goat Peak, and in the skies of noble Otgontenger, and proclaimed with pride "My horse, we need the field of the world!"

Simon Wickham-Smith, the dear friend and talented translator of Mongolian poetry has, by translating the best of Yavuuhulan's poetry, not only done an important work for Mongolia, but has also made a valuable gift to cultured readers, artists and poets throughout the world. We can be sure that this translation will grant the great poet Yavuuhulan the chance to retain, through his poetry, his dominant place upon the field of the world.

At the turn of the twentieth century, in a poll carried out among the general public to determine the century's leading figures, the Mongolian people honored Yavuuhulan as the principal poet of the century. After his death, then, he was recognised by his people as the leading poet of the century and a great oriental poet. It was his fate that the fame which he had not found during his life came to him after he had passed away. Yavuuhulan conceived of poetry as "[a] horse...born, upright and slender, from...wisdom." What is beyond doubt is that the poet saddles this slender horse and rides off, across the centuries, and for a thousand years.

Yavuuhulan spent half his life in the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar. When he had access to a boat, this nomadic poet liked to go to the banks of the River Tuul and call to the shamanic spirits. And the waters would convey to him their feelings and their wise clarity. He sang to the Tuul in many poems, with the stars and the moon, and with the birds. And then, both the waters and the poem were clear. But now the waters are cloudy, and the poetry is also turbulent. Flowing now clear and now cloudy, this is the destiny of the waters. And so it is for poetry. In the time of Yavuuhulan's bright melody, it was the water, and poetry, and the hearts and the minds of people, which flowed through time, clear and pure.

WHEN THE RIVER FLOWS CLEAR

When birds are in the branches of the willows on the riverbank,
and leaves are bright in my hand,
then it is autumn, with waters pure and clear,
with poems sung about the falling Tuul.

I will take up my fine-tipped brush of silk
and sketch the river in the middle of autumn.
Yavuuhan's two shellducks are floating here,
they do not know the poet's gone.

A cart rises against the white curtain of mist,
over the hollows of the four hills.
Wise Yavuu's young leaves grow old,
but now the gracious Tuul is just as before.

I look upon the grasses, and sound has seven colors.
I gaze at the clouds, and the horses have a thousand shades.
I gulp down the waters of the Tuul, it floats with leaves of brass,
my dear body is cleansed of misery and mire.

I know the gentle poet Yavuu's every song,
and I know that the River Tuul has never sung.
Mongolia without Chingis is tired,
and poetry without you exhausted.

In autumn, the waters of the Tuul seem clear
and poetry is clear amid the current of time.
And the Tuul watches talented youth,
birthed into the sky of poetry.

Certainly the wise Tuul, with eyes and ears,
watches and records with love
the fragile leaves of autumn, they crackle
like the faded yellowed pages of ancient books.

In the future, poets will come directly here
and look upon the gentle moon, in the water, in the sky.
Yavuu saw the stars dive that year into the water
and in other years, they too will be amazed.

At evening, the red willow takes shelter,
and light, afeared, falls to the river's depths.
As everything grows dull and gloomy,
the Tuul grows ever brighter.

I swallow the waters of the Tuul, it flows with leaves of silver,
and a thousand years are clearer in its light.
Beneath this paradise of poetry, this river pure and clear,

to Yavuuhulan I give my poem, bright as flame.

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