

YAVUU'S LAST WORD G Mend-Ooyo

A poet's last words are meaningful and critical. When I was working for Mongolian TV, there was a program called *Artistic Soirée*, in which our famous artists, and in particular our writers, would come together and meet with their readers. This turned out to be a very popular program. Although the poet Yavuuhulan was several times invited, only once did he let himself get drawn in. There was a reason for this. Yavuu's name at that time was very well-known. He had won the State Prize and was a cultural personality, and he was also a deputy in the Great Hural. And word had it that his poem "Goat Peak" had on two occasions been put forward for the State Prize. Certainly at this time he was the focus of gossip and backbiting. Those who were envious of him disliked that, in the introduction to a book which had been published in Moscow, it was stated that "he is a famous personality and a great poet, whose work has appeared in sixty languages." He was forever being slandered by the Party, but he managed to rise above the gossip. There were no tabloids then like we have today, but there were letters written in secret, and the fact was that he was poisoned by the Party's sharp bullets of criticism. In this situation, then, Yavuu talked himself up and didn't let the disgust of these people get to him.

"You really shouldn't praise me." This was his message, delivered with care to a meeting of writers and readers at a TV recording on February 13 1982. This broadcast had been set up by the talented TV journalist Batin Dorj and it was to air a week later, on February 20, and be reported in the newspapers. It was a really special meeting. Yavuu was asked many interesting questions by his audience, to which he gave clear and direct answers, and he read aloud his famous poem "Where was I Born?" He also read poems such as "Winter Air," "The Portrait," "My Wife" and "Moscow," and Sh Gurbazar read "Goat Peak." Zangad and Tümemdemberel read "The Reeds of Blackwater Pond" and "My Song, My Song", there was a most wonderful and serene feeling that evening.

The host said, "Yavuuhulan, I have one final question that I would like to ask you. Is there one word of advice that you would like to offer to your thousands of readers?" This was a difficult question, but Yavuuhulan answered in one word.

"Patience. Patience is the finest and highest of human qualities. During the second world war, the Soviet people lost twenty million people and only through patience did they get through the war. We should love the Soviet people. A person is someone who needs to learn patience. People encounter happiness and joy, and they encounter sadness and misery. In all of this patience is necessary. It is necessary in order to win through..."

This then was what Yavuuhulan said at the end of this meeting with his beloved readers. These were the final words which he spoke to them..."It is necessary in order to win through." Four days after the program was broadcast, the telephone rang. It was Sürenjav.

"Prepare yourself, little brother," he said. "I've got some bad news. Our teacher Yavuu's died...". I tried to think that these words were a dream. I couldn't imagine how he might have gone, and soon Sürenjav, Dashbalbar and myself were sitting there, weeping, on Sü's sofa. We went to Yavuu's

house. Adiya told us what had happened...Right at the end he had been smoking, and he put his unfinished cigarette into the box of matches and looked at it. His library was as it always had been. There was an eight-line poem in the typewriter. He had ended by translating the first eight lines of a poem by Anatoli Sofronov, and had stood up from his writing-table...he had had some kind of heart attack. He had been lying face down, his breathing had stopped. Now, what were the lines which he left in his typewriter?

Whatever is thrown away or retained
I will surely pay for, when the time comes.
Debt, debt...this debt, like all embarrassment,
will surely come before me and increase.
This debt, accumulated over decades,
though it be an incalculable sum,
pains my brain, it cannot be paid
when I come to leave my place.

What does this mean? We should think about it. The final words of a poet are considered as being especially true. And these are the words which Yavuu spoke. Why, when he was suffering a heart attack, did this poet choose to translate this verse?!

News of Yavuu's death shocked the world no less than it did Mongolia. The Soviet newspaper Ogonyok wrote, in its February 19 1982 edition, "Brothers, there is bitter news from Mongolia. The heart of the outstanding genius, whose poetry remains indelibly upon the the art scene in the east no less than upon the Mongolian art scene."

Yavuu's dear companion in the arts, the great Russian poet Rimma Kazakova, wrote:

Gazing sadly from the calm skies,
my dear companion Yavuuhulan!
The earth will never forget you,
and no one can bear the slander.
Like a soldier, done for, fallen from the sun,
my fine and noble companion!
Why do you grieve, and gaze
with such honesty as we turn?
You are done for, like a soldier
who will not leave his post,
and the wide world will not turn away
from unerring destiny...

On February 21, flying in an AN-2 from Dariganga, D Nyamsüren wrote in a tearful letter, "Has he really passed away? How I hope not...how can it be? How can it be? He's Yavuuhulan, though, Yavuuhulan!!" And his tears fell like raindrops and moved like clouds across the blue ink.

That time was not like it is nowadays. Now television and information has reduced the Party a little. The audience who watched the February 20 1982 broadcast, the meeting during which Yavuuhulan had spoken, found itself deprived of his calm voice and shining presence. At that time, those final

words of the poet, the final bright presence would have been a great thing for the hearts of the Mongolian people. The Central Committee of the Party, however, was circumspect and delayed the broadcast.

The Russian poet had written the words “the great poet of the east” before she had written Yavuuhan’s name. She deliberately used these words while we held back and, although it was hard, it was the truth.

After about a year, as the echoes of Yavuu’s death subsided and the pain quietened in people’s hearts, it was agreed that the TV broadcast should be screened. At the beginning of the broadcast, the announcer’s clear voice read, “My verse, my horse, we both/need the field of the world,” which was an indication of the author’s mind, the great poet’s contract proclaimed to his people. That Yavuu, in this way, expressed himself clandestinely through the announcer reading this poem, is significant. Why had he said “patience” in response to the final question, why had he translated eight lines about the paying back of mental debts, why had he wanted clandestinely to read “My verse, my horse, we both/need the field of the world”? This, his final word, was the reason.