

Ochirbatin Dashbalbar

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Translated from Mongolian by Simon Wickham-Smith

Ochirbatin Dashbalbar (1957-1999) was one of the most prominent poets and political figures in post-Soviet Mongolia. A highly controversial and popular member of the People's Great Hural from 1994 until his death, he waged a constant campaign against what he perceived as the miscegenation of the Mongolian race and the destruction of the Mongolian homeland. Dashbalbar died in suspicious circumstances in October 1999.

These selections, from his last book of poems, Poetry of Spirit, show how Dashbalbar was, in his final years, as concerned with Mongolia as a spiritual entity, as he had been when he had begun to write during the late 1970s. He treats the themes of vision, landscape and family within a traditional schema, yet with striking originality of language, blending the personal and the societal with the flair which marked his political rhetoric and which rendered him so powerful a figure in the years leading up to his death.

1. Introduction

for Sh Sürenjav

I forgot the partial sadness of the world,
I abandoned my friends who had changed their ways,
I charged my cup of clear glass,
and overturned the shining wine.

While quickly I escape the gossip,
I ignore the world, I forget myself.
They mock me, they who watch the world, its
thousand plaits of pain and happiness, through a hole in a coin.

From time to time in my childhood, I heard
the melody of spring rain, the music of the wind.
But now my verse is suffering,
and all the words of my wild youth are sick.

I am envious of those who breathe
the fresh, clear air in the countryside.
I am envious of the lovely girls,
running barefoot among the flowers.

A horseman, trotting over the mountain passes,
and, far away, the skyblue mountains fading to white.
The low hills and rocks were paradise,
the Buddha's land—the countryside!

I tried to roll on the gravelly sand,
I was stung by the nettle's barbs.
The horses' hooves rattled over the wild steppe,
and the streams and rivers nourished the gazelles.

The suffering of this nasty world has slipped my mind,
and my laziness worries me.
The skyblue spring, the flowermeadows and the sweet girls
show white in the depths of my heart.

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2. Realizing the Truth to be Emptiness

Like a grey horse, whinnying, its mane skyblue,
in springtime, I will race back to my homeland.
Like a nightingale, singing in the flowermeadows,
its words of love melding with the milky rays of dawn.

Like a beggar, happy to have found a golden coin,
how great is my love for you, my life?
Like one again impoverished, it is easy to stop squandering,
how upset am I with you, my life?

Life scatters all which has value and,
as a child pains its father, it tortures us.
Life takes care of its tired and fading mother,
as a kindhearted girl offers support, it pleases us.

The sunstruck mountains, spread out like a wolf's head,
like a bitch, long ago howling in my mind.
The stars flash like wheatears, indistinct in the sky,
life long ago, dear to me like a wolfcub barking in my mind.

The yellow moon glitters among the stars like a fox's brush,
it starts to tell stories, when the tales are finished.
The ill-fated poet turns the wheels of his life and,
realizing the truth to be emptiness, clears away his sadness.

24.xii.1998

3. A Fragmented Mirage Among the Jagged Rocks
to the bright memory of my loving mother O Tsermaa

Every morning at the door of her ger, my mother
stood, shielding her eyes, looking towards the mountain pass.
When a horseman came across the pass, my mother
would sadly think, *That's not my Dashbalbar.*

Mother stayed behind on many an autumn morning, making offerings of the
choicest milk.

Mother stooped forward, shielding her eyes, raising the grey mists!
Mother made offerings for forty autumns of the choicest tea.
Mother grew old and grey, sprinkling my stirrups with milk.

Every evening at the door of her ger, my mother
stood, continually thinking about me, her son!
Feeling human pain on this ill-fated earth, my mother
wakes from her dreams in the light of dawn.

Standing in her faded summer gown, near to the tethering-line,
Mother waited for her son, shielding her eyes with her hand!
On a cool autumn evening, thinking sadly of her son,
Mother's mind ran, her hair turned grey.

And she remained there, at the door of her ger, stooping into the fluttering
breeze.

Now my mother is not there, a fragmented mirage among the jagged rocks.
Who will now offer milk, Dashbalbar, as you head off on your journey?
Who will wait for you now, shielding their eyes down the mountain pass?

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4. Everything Speaks of Heaven's Beauty
to the bright memory of my teacher I Batsüh

My special childhood friends are absent.
One evening, my deel faded in the autumn wind,
I would stand on an ovoo, watching the stars, talking.
I summon the spirits and serve out poetry.

I came home, tipsy, from the great earth's party,
but oh, my dear friends, you are not here, where have you gone?
I would walk with you on the withers of the Haan's throneland,
we should wander the edges of the firm, clear path.

You did not read my bright poems once again.
You did not gallop once again upon the flowery steppe.
You did not come again to the pale horse hills.
You were always sleeping in your cradle, on the Mongolian earth.

You did not splash again in the cool rains of autumn.
The lark, bright and cold, did not seek refuge on the branches of a tree.
The strong one took all that is precious in the mind, and slept.
The autumn wind, whistling, wanders the quiet steppe.

All who are born in the world will die, there is no other truth . . .
They slip from their cushioned seat, they leave no trace.
In this world, where the sun and moon take turns,
all the poor creatures are changed into cosmic dust.

The dear friends of my youth did not stand there,
dissolving in tears among the flowers of spring.
Even in the quiet winter snow, their blood was of no help to poets.
You were always sleeping, my friends, in the garden of precious memory,

The song of the lark is interrupted, who sings on the steppe of Dariganga.
I did not again hear that melody of secret melancholy.
No use in sadness when all has disappeared,
and everything speaks in life of Heaven's beauty!

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5. The Faraway Homeland is Broad . . .
for the women who sing

A dear woman is lovely, but a cold eye is chill.
A dear sharga is fast, but it doesn't gallop the ravines.
The women of my homeland are lovely, but a teary eye is chill.
The foal in the meadow is fast, but it doesn't gallop the mountains.

A southern woman is lovely, but the eye of winter is chill.
A heart is hard which sings no lullaby.
An eastern woman is lovely, but a mocking eye is chill.
An eyelash is vile which does not bristle with tears.

The mountain-pass is low, but going uphill is hard.
The pleasure of growing up is sweet, but getting old is hard.
The mountain-pass is short, but coming back is hard.
The pleasure of youth is delicious, but the winking eyes will pass . . .

The long song is elegant, but the eye which hasn't wept is chill.
The nearby homeland is broad, but the ignorant are hard pressed.
The people's song is elegant, but the bright eye is chill.
The faraway homeland is broad, but the mean are hard pressed.

A poor eye it is which mistakes the Altai for hills.
A poor character it is, which wrongly feels a friend to be an enemy.
Poor thing, who is unperturbed to think of Hentii's low hills.
Poor thing, who scorns the Herlen as a stream.

Poor things, those girls who think the Onon is a rivulet.
Poor things, those women who scorn the universal Heaven.
If the people are not widespread, who will hear the song?
If the days are not many, who will honor you?

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6. The Day Is Coming When Our Pure Mongolia Will Be Saved
for G Galina

Dogs were barking, children were crying, girls were smiling—
three bad omens, by the book.

Cows were neighing, horses were mooing, goats were bellowing—
not true, but hey, this is a story!

While the horses stay close to the cows' tethering-line,
every sterile beast tries to jump the mares.
Oh, bring stories to life in these chaotic times,
how this world is affected by bad actions!

I watched the noble ones licking the mire.
The minor ministers rode in the golden sedan.
The princes sat in the doorway, and
foreigners came and sat cross-legged in the place of honor.

While Chingis' Mongolia did not find its way,
what's in our ears and eyes are yours and mine.
While the noble ones' Mongolia did not find peace,
what comes from here and there are yours and mine.

While the mountains were high, they cast no shadows.
There are many wise people, but they are not old.
While the water was clear, there were no spots.
There are many meetings, but there is no support.

Wives and daughters had flawed characters.
Fathers and sons had flawed characters.
Though the majestic Altai rises up, will herds of men remain?
Though the Onon be milkwhite, will the ruined cities be left behind?

Though Mongolia has remained, still the wise have grown fewer.
With no thought for what will come, we have been affected by anger.
Though the people have remained, still the protectors have grown fewer.
With no thought for the distant future, we have sought bloodshed.

A lonely man ate up my people, and
now we despair, awaiting a prince to lead us.
The horse of Heaven creates Mongolia, whose fate is divine, and
we are tired of struggling, awaiting a master.

There is a bare mountain-pass, but will the day come to cross it?
Will the day come to meet with a high and noble lord?
There are high mountains to the north, but will the day come to climb them?
Will the day come to save our pure Mongolia?

Until our firm bones crumble, until our warm blood cease,
until we lose the life we love, we will struggle for all Mongolia!
Until the Haan's throne is taken, until Halh Mongolia is saved,
until the foreign enemy is crushed, we will stand like a firm fortress!

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7. A Word for My Son

for my son, D Gangabaatar

I have lived my life as though my prayers were curses,
I have walked like the loving Buddha among the flowers.
I have given my young life to beautiful girls and,
whispering with the streams in spring, I have sipped the waters.

I have made friends, not with humans, but with the hills.
I have watched the eagles soaring in the cold air.
I have caught the stars' secret, from the earth of my desires.
I have befriended, not the humans, but the grasses.

True friendship does not escape this side of death.
My only one, my eternal love—
a mind which believes in truth, which loves life,
vanishes away amid the days' billowing folds.

Girls' love is slight and, had I not been born in the world,
I would take someone else's arm and give birth to many children,
I would be another man, and their mother would be honorable and dignified.
I believe in people, but what they do is what I do not want.

The earth's love is slight, mind pities itself,
we think of ourselves when we quarrel together!
However close we are, I cannot feel hatred,
the more I understand this dirty life, the more I feel pity.

As the eagle has no fear of the lark, so I have no fear of life.
As the wolf has no fear of the sheep, so I have no fear of the earth.
As the lion has no fear of the gazelle, so I have no fear of death.
And, as a father has no fear of his son, so I have no fear of the truth!

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8. Every Poet Is an Unrecognized Buddha
for Ch Dashtseren

I have not written a single poem for fools.
I have tried to give them food and silk brocade.
Not a single verse have I written for the wise,
I did not want to be bored by knowledge.

I didn't love the poems which adorned my notebook.
I wanted to understand the sky, the earth, humanity and life.
Penetrating dreams, theories, mirages and secrets,
I heard in my heart the ringing of the Buddha's land.

I did not forge these gentle lines to kiss the girls,
I spent many sleepless nights in understanding the world.
A mirage is true, and truth accompanies the mirage,
and life grows old, this is the writing of the heart!

I have realized how dreams are true, how truth becomes a dream,
how east and west change places . . .
My poem is an inscription of illness and of theory and of loneliness.
My filter is the truth of instances and of freedom and of limits.

My verses are snowflakes, are autumn grass,
I do not think that eternity is special . . . a point . . . a beginning . . .
I love all that is unattainable . . .
I like all that is secret and unreachable . . .

I am greedy for all writings which I have not known.
I struggle with all insoluble riddles.
And, dissolved into emptiness which we have not known,
every poet is an unrecognized Buddha.

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9. Mind and Wisdom
for D Mönköndalai

A little mind understands the mind.
Chill autumn and cold winter are different!
A little wisdom understands wisdom.
The broad steppe and the mountainous Hangai are different!

The mind is warm, the mind is hot,
and mind controls awakening experience.
Wisdom is cold, wisdom is bitter,
and wisdom controls decline and error.

This wisdom suppresses the mind,
like a tight, constricted ravine.
This mind softens wisdom,
brings forth flawless, precious love.

In the battle of mind with wisdom,
I have seen one raised up and one in decline.
Though my brain loves no one,
my gentle heart takes pity on them all.

The cold gleam of wisdom passes through the window,
brings fear to beasts and men.
The warmth of a loving mind penetrates the walls,
its melody chases anxiety away.

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10. Victorious Mind
for my daughter D Dejidmaa

The lotus flower grows within the mud.
A white birch shines amid a dark wood.
A perfumed flower blooms in poisoned air.
The golden caragana gleams among the grasses on the rubbish pile.

The wise are clearly seen among the many fools.
Strong heroes are born in domed black ger.
It is pointless to bemoan the ways of the world.
The moon is gleaming through the grey mists.

The stars shine in the black night sky.
The snow lotus grows on the plateau of the Hangai.
They sway together, forever, away from the grasses,
and flash as they grow, in the chilly winds of eternity.

This good man is exhausted on the far road,
has distinguished the light from the black shapes of life.
This lucky man is fading on a distant journey,
has chosen the right road from the world's dear life.

In the darkness, it is said, a flame glows.
In the all, it is said, a holy man is seen.
A hero can cross the mountain-pass, however high!
A victor can cross the ocean, however wide!

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11. I Lost the Flow of the Time!

I loved the Buddha, I did not lack the Buddha's love.
I whispered, in my hidden experience, *Love other people!*
In my pure, clear life, I promised to the girls
the absolute truth, amazement!

This girl, in a thin white dress, did not understand me,
I was a simple young boy, I had lost the flow of time.
The eternal young girl changes into an elderly woman,
an eternal magic memory remains in my little mind.

I sit, shining in another's house, brewing tea.
I yearn for the Buddha's love, I know he remembers me.
The woman birthed the child she'd conceived, looked down on simple
love,
and my real father wickedly hid me from his friends.

Having found a magical love, eternal and loyal upon the earth,
is it easy to find the planets, to reach the planets?
Love is not true, is not a lie, it cannot join, it cannot separate,
and this is what happens beneath the moon, this is the fruit of actions!

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I lost the flow of time. I ransacked my untidy papers, my many dozens of notebooks and I produced an endless stream of poems.

They did not make it into a book. Nor were they published in newspapers or magazines. Though I could not, with them, repair the flow of time which I had lost, these poems have now made it into this book.

Thus, what I, the master, had written had been hidden from me and, in the various tightly packed notes of my jumbled documents, the master had come to a moment of discovery.

D Tsoodol wrote the poem "My Bad Friends," and this was the title he gave to his book. His friends were poets. But I thought that I would refer to these messy poems of mine as "my bad friends."

Whether in a time of wretched pain or joyful happiness, this bad poems of mine were my friends. And so they remain.