

MIR JALAL: THE LIFE AND WORKS*

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Mir Jalal Ali oghlu Pashayev known simply by his pen name "Mir Jalal", was born on April 26, 1908, in the village of Ardabil, not far from Tabriz. It was a turbulent time in the history of both Azerbaijan and Iran, its southern neigh-bor, which had a significant Azerbaijani population. The Mozaffar al-Din Shah had just granted the Iranian Constitution in August 1906. Soon after his death, his despotic son, Mohammed Ali Shah, revo-ked the document, and with the help of a Russian brigade, bombarded the first Maj-lis [parliament] in Tehran in 1907.

A fierce struggle for freedom broke out. For several months, roya-lists and constitutionalists battled on the streets of Tabriz, as well as in some of Iran's other cities, until the Shah was finally ousted and fled to Russia. In this period, after the 1905 uprising in Russia, the Cau-casus was a hot bed of revolution. Its revolutionaries had close ties the activists in both Iran and Turkey. Even some militia groups from the north were fighting in Tabriz.

Political tension increased during World War I. After the demise of Czarist Russia in 1917, Baku was occupied first by the British, then by the Ottomans. Then the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was es-tablished. Short-lived, it only survived two years, from 1918 to 1920, until the Bolsheviks took over and effectively severed the close ties that had existed between Northern and Southern Azerbaijan.

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During World War I, Mir Jalal's family moved to Baku [Northern Azerbaijan], then part of the Soviet Union. Mir Jalal's father was amongst the nearly half a million people who, in the early decades of the century, left Iran in search of work and a better life in the oil fields of Baku.

Some years later his family decided to return to Iran. Mir Jalal was studying at a gymnasium (high school) in Ganja. As he was extremely bright, the principal encouraged his father to let him stay on and continue his studies. And thus, Mir Jalal became separated from his family for what would turn out to be decades. In 1928, at the age of 20, he graduated from the Teaching Training College in Ganja and soon became the principal of a school in the remote region of Gada-bey. Mir Jalal was very satisfied with his job at the school because teachers were in demand and well paid during the early period of the Soviet Union.

Two years later, he enrolled in the Ghazan University in Tatarstan (Russia), where Lenin had studied. Mir Jalal went on to the Institute of Higher Education of Baku where he managed to do research while writing for various newspapers such as " Genj Ishchi" (Young Worker), a publication to which many outstanding literary men of Azerbaijan contributed.

In 1933 Mir Jalal was involved with researching Azerbaijan's literary history at the State University. He wrote his Master's thesis on Fuzuli, the famous 15th century Azerbaijani poet, and it eventually was published. In 1947 he completed his doctoral dissertation on "Literary Schools in Azerbaijan." He placed special emphasis on the famous satirical journal, "Molla Nasreddin" (1906-1932) and its writers. That same year, he became a professor at the State University of Baku. He would go on to devote the rest of his life to teaching and writing.

It should be noted that drama and fiction were new literary genres in Azerbaijani literature at the time. Mirza Fath'ali Akhundzade (1812-

1878), influenced by Moliere, Shakespeare, Gogol and Griboedov, became an outspoken, and liberal reformer and wrote six comedies and a short story between 1850 and 1856. Akhonzade used satire to challenge superstition, hypocrisy despotism and fanaticism. He regar-

ded satire and humorous realism as the best means to awaken people who had grown accustomed to wrongdoing, repression and corruption.

It was this same tradition that Jalil Mammadgulizade (1866-1932), Sabir Tahirzade (1862-1911) and many other outstanding writers and poets would use in the journal "Molla Nasreddin," which gained considerable influence, not only in Azerbaijan, but also in Iran and Turkey during that period. Mammadgulizade, the editor, further expanded the horizons of realistic prose in the Azeri language with his fascinating short stories and novels. Sabir with subtle sarcasm, humanism and delightful satire set the stage for future writers including Mir Jalal.

The most famous of Mir Jalal's novels, "The Manifest of a Youth" (1938), has since been translated into many languages. Cast in the traditional genre of Soviet fiction that depicts class struggle, it describes the life of a mother and her two sons in the early 1920s in Baku. The repressive measures of a local landowner force the two brothers to flee their village. The older brother ends up with the early Bolshevik workers and becomes a heroic revolutionary while the younger, a boy of seven or eight years old, is thrown out by his employer and freezes to death during a severe winter. As the mother goes in search of her sons, she becomes involved in revolutionary activities. Apart from ideology the novel bears a striking resemblance to Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" and Gorky's "Mother."

His second novel "Achig Kitab" (The Open Book, 1941) created a sensation in Azerbaijan and was criticized by many Party members. It is very different in nature, as its characters look at society from the narrow perspective of their personal interests, never hesitating to sacrifice everything to achieve their private goals. Karim Galdiyeu works in the offices of wheat procurement. He steals and cheats and is "corruption incarnate" in Soviet officialdom. Then he gets transferred to Baku, where he prospers even further amidst the corrupt circles of the capital. In both his novels and short stories, Mir Jalal's prose is extremely lucid, simple and descriptive. As one of the most admired prose writers of Azerbaijan, he was part of a distinguished literary coterie, which included Mohammad Sayid Ordubadi (historical

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novelist), Husein Javid (playwright), Mikayil Mushvig (poet), Samad Vurgun (poet) and Husein Mehdi (writer). Both Javid and Mushvig would later be exiled by Stalin to Siberia, where they died.

In order to trace the background of Mir Jalal's fiction, especially his short stories, one has to look into the development of realistic fiction and satire in Azerbaijan. Mir Jalal did not indulge in Party politics in his short stories.

Akhundzade, with the exception of one dramatic piece, wrote short historical fiction taken from sixteenth century Iranian history. But it was Abdulrahim Hagverdiyev (1870-1933) who introduced the short story into Azerbaijani literature. Mir Jalal knew him personally and was a great admirer. Jalil Mammadgulizade also contributed greatly to the development of the short story in Azerbaijan. The Russian critic Belinsky once said that realistic fiction in Russian literature can be traced to Gogol's "Overcoat." Similarly Mir Jalal noted that, Azerbaijani realistic fiction builds upon the "Post Box" by Jalil Mammadgulizade.

This short story was published in "Molla Nasreddin." As the story goes, an Azerbaijani visits the khan, who gives him a letter to drop in the mailbox. But being from the village, he isn't sure whether to stand by the mailbox and guard the letter, or to leave. Just then a Russian mailman appears, opens the box and takes the letters out. Thinking the mailman is a robber the villager

attacks him and a fight breaks out. Only after the villager is taken to the police station does he realize how the postal system works.

With Sabir's many humorous and satirical stories, articles, and poems, and the excellent cartoons by Azim Azimzade and two German cartoonists Roemer and Schelling, "Molla Nasreddin" became one of the most influential periodicals throughout the Caucasus. It was in this context that Mir Jalal's satirical fiction developed.

In terms of fiction, Mir Jalal wrote two fairly distinct types of works. His novels are typical of works produced in the Soviet era. However, in his short stories he deals more with the personalities one encounters in every society rather than with ideology. Mir Jalal is always quick to satirize bureaucrats who are hopelessly out of touch with reality and who live in the world of officialdom and regulations.

In the story "Hey Ismayil, Make Him Understand", the sister of a dictator "buys" whatever she wants without paying money to anyone. It is said that the story is based on reality and that the dictator in question was Bagirov who, under Stalin, ruled Azerbaijan with an iron hand from 1928 until Stalin's death in 1953.

In "Used to Scolding", Mir Jalal analyzes the mentality of people who are used to being bullied. Such types not only seem to tolerate being abused but also consider something amiss if they are not ordered around.

In "Peaches," Mir Jalal criticizes excessive infatuation with everything Western. This is the beginning of what in the Middle East became criticism of "Westomania" or "gharabzadagi" as the Iranian writer Jalal Alahmad calls it in his book of the same name.

Very often, Mir Jalal's stories depict people we know in our own society with all of their idiosyncrasies, aspirations and shortcomings. At the same time, Mir Jalal provides a fascinating glimpse of Azerbaijani society under Soviet rule. As seen in "Rules of Etiquette for Modern Weddings," a society supposedly atheistic has not really lost its Islamic roots. In "Matishga" the Russian and Azerbaijani sides of society are compared, especially in terms of their attitudes towards women.

Apart from numerous works of literary criticism, Mir Jalal wrote more than a dozen novels and nearly 1,000 short stories, which have been collected in volumes such as "The Thief in the Garden" (1937), "Congratulations!" (Gozun Ayden, 1939), "Stories of My Country" (1942), "Life Stories" (1945) and "Simple Stories" (1955). Mir Jalal's canvas of subjects and characters is broad. More than complexity of plot, he concentrates on developing his characters. He has an incredible imagination, and the men and women of his stories come from every walk of life, providing a panoramic view of the society in which he lived. As an artist, Mir Jalal should be remembered for his originality, his depth of vision, his humanity and his keen sense of humor.

In this collection of short stories, which is being published to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Mir Jalal's birth, I have tried to

provide a representative sample of his shorter fiction. I hope this first book of Mir Jalal's work ever to be published in the English-speaking world will serve as a prelude for further volumes. I would especially like to thank Ambassador Hafiz Pashayev Mir Jalal's son, who has assisted me in many ways in the translation of these works and provided me valuable details about his father's life.

Xülasə

MİR CƏLAL: HƏYATI VƏ ƏSƏRLƏRİ

Həsən Cavadı (ABŞ)

Amerikada nəşr olunan "Azerbaijan International" dərgisinin baş redaktoru kimi tanınmış Mrs Betty Blair təşəbbüsü ilə ABŞ-da "Azərbaycanı görkəmli ədibləri" seriyasını nəşr etdirmək planlaşdırılmışdır. Həmin, seriyanın ilk nəşri bu il 90 illik yubileyi qeyd olunan görkəmli Azərbaycanlı yazıçısı Mir Cəlal Paşayevə həsr olunmuşdur. Bu məqalə həmin kitabı götürülmüşdür.

Məqalədə görkəmli ədibin həyat və yaradıcılığı əks etdirilmişdir. Orignal, geniş dünyagörümü, humanistliyi və dərin yumor hissi ilə seçilən Mir Cəlalin əsərlərindəki qadın və kişi obrazları təsvir etdiyi cəmiyyətin müxtəlif təbəqələrindən götürüldüyündən, müəllif bu cəmiyyətin geniş panoramını göstərməyə müvəffəq olmuşdur. Onun yadda qalan "Bir gəncin mənifesti" povesti V.Hüqonun "Səfillər", M.Qorkinin "Ana" əsərinin motivləri ilə səsləşir. Ədibin "Açıq kitab" əsəri baş qəhrəmanın öz şəxsi taralarını cəmiyyətin maraqlarından üstün tutan, istədiyinə çatmaq üçün tərəddüdsüz hər şeyi qurban verməyə hazır olan obrazına görə vaxtilə komünist partiyasının üzvləri tərəfindən kəskin tənqid edilmişdir.

Mir Cəlalin "Azərbaycan ədəbi məktəbləri" adlı doktorluq dissertasiyası təqdirəlayiqdir. O, xüsusilə, məşhur "Molla Nəsrəddin" jurnalı (1901-1932) və orada çalışan yazıçıların yaradıcılığını dərinlən öyrənmişdir.

Mir Cəlal - Məmməd Səid Ordubadi, Hüseyn Cavid, Mikail Müşfiq, Səməd Vurğun, Hüseyn Mehdi kimi görkəmli şair-yazıçıların yaratdığı Azərbaycan ədəbi məktəbinin nümayəndəsidir.

Çoxsaylı ədəbi-tənqidi əsərləri ilə yanaşı Mir Cəlal xeyli povestlər və 1000-ə yaxın qısa hekayələr müəllifidir.