

Essays/Reviews

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Poetics of Home: Place and Identity

The idea of home and belongingness is often rooted in one's sense of place as much as identity. Personally, the notion of 'being home' is inextricably linked to 'being myself' and the search for 'self' is a kind of going home. One might be with or without a country to fall back on, but inside each one of us is a being trying to come to terms with oneself, desires to belong, be free, say *I am*. As one's idea of self keeps changing, home is no longer a place you come from, but where you are going. Poets, perhaps more than most writers, are outsiders. And one of the compensations of being an outsider is acquiring an angle of vision that encourages scrutiny of the 'self' along with the 'other'. Displacement offers a panoramic vision, enables one to see things differently, the view from any point of the circumference being no less precious than the one from the centre. Often marginalized, poets don't belong anywhere, striving always to find their niche in the world. Exploring my place in the world has taught me I belong in my 'creations'.

Ted Hughes once said: 'What's writing really about? It's about trying to take fuller possession of the reality of your life.' As our individual realities vary indiscriminately, even after we take fuller possession of the reality of our lives, we may fail to find our way home, not forgetting the violent ways in which writing has made its way in the world. And home is a concept that only the homeless, the uprooted and lost appreciate, unafraid as they are of being homesick, having no language to live in. When I first read Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* I could not help wondering why his protagonists were two tramps. Somewhere along the way I realized how important a message that was – though Beckett himself would not have limited his work to any one particular interpretation.

This process of self-definition is unceasing. That out-of-place feeling, if not of being officially 'homeless', has something to do with that special brand of 'loneliness' writers suffer from. Some call it the imposter syndrome. I too have learnt that 'loneliness can be an unnoticed cramping of the spirit for lack of companionship.' (Doris Lessing). It is not the kind, media-induced, of spending Christmas on your own, watching "Home Alone". I refer to loneliness that springs from a deep lack of understanding and appreciation of who you are. Negotiating your way in a world that does not recognise the values you live by is the hardest journey a human can make.

There are people and places that give you wings, others snuff the light out of you. In my poem, “Shringara” I attempt to deal with this many-layered realisation: ‘I travel towards what end I cannot say – // Along the way, those I meet and those I do not, / all the things that happen to me and those that do not / keep defining me in some inexplicable way.’ We are what others make of us as much as what we make of ourselves. The poetics of one’s inner life, of home, place and identity, especially ‘belongingness’ is elusive and complex. In her poem, “Home,” Elaine Feinstein asks: ‘Where is that I wonder?’ All exiles wonder as time and life keep chipping away at our beliefs and expectations. It is indeed like living in an alien country.

Today, ideas such as home, displacement and belongingness acquire universal significance as the numbers of displaced people keep growing – thanks to wars, persecution, the irresistible rise of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’, famines and floods, climate change, not to mention the unsustainable rise in the human population, and our inability or unwillingness to make a home of the world. Many of us today bear the burden of displacement. I am an exile, a choice I made decades ago – yet the longer I live here, the place I now call home, the less I belong here, or for that matter there, where I came from, which was once home. For a long time I thought of both places as home, it is difficult to be precise when that feeling of exile began to grow. The places we live in shape us, but the poetics of home, especially ‘belongingness’ is more complex.

Regardless of whether one is an expatriate, an exile, a migrant or refugee, our search for identity and belongingness is always personal, individual. We share a common humanity as we translate our experiences into ‘creations’ that explore identity, the struggle to ‘be’ oneself, our lives spent searching, exploring our way home through words. For Mimi Khalvati, ‘home was an empty space/ I sent words to. Mapped my world, tried to fix/ meanings to it.’ (“Writing Home”). In her poem, “The World Grows Blackthorn Walls”, Iranian born Sholeh Wolpé asks herself ‘is home my ghost?’ In his poem, “Outsider”, James Berry enumerates the psychological cost of an exile’s self-restoration, working from the external self, the false, imposed image, to the inner reality: ‘... I moved/ my circle from ruins/ and I search to remake it whole.’ For Vahni Capildeo, an expatriate, ‘Language is my home, I say; not one particular language.’ (*Measures of Expatriation*).

The value of poetry or any form of art is that it embodies representations of life for our contemplation, both for inner renewal and aesthetic pleasure. It is as much a means of spiritual expression as coming to terms with one’s specific life circumstances. The nature of exile may vary, but what matters is the freedom to discover oneself, to build a convincing architecture of the inward life, perhaps share that insight with another. Charles Simic once wrote: ‘A poem is a place where one invites someone in. You build a little house, fix it all up real nice. Inside, you’ve got some interesting things you want to show them.’ It is the sharing, the affirmation from another, that makes the difference. For Czeslaw Milosz: ‘The purpose of poetry is to remind us / how difficult it is to remain just one person, / for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors, / and invisible guests come in and out at will.’ To live in an open house is no mean feat, especially when words will not stay still, ‘leaving one with the intolerable struggle with words and meaning’ (T.S. Eliot).

There are times when one writes, keeps a diary, to hold oneself together, as a means of survival. There is no thought of the external world or recognition. I don’t mean prizes and awards, but recognition of a different order – the honour of connecting with another, perhaps a stranger who reads your work, maybe in a time of personal crisis, and finds a way back to life, knowing one is not alone. Miklós Radnóti’s *Bori Notesz* (*Camp Notebook*) comes to mind, or Emily Dickinson for whom home ‘seems a Home - / And Home is not -/ But what that Place could be - / Afflicts me – as a Setting Sun – where Dawn – knows how to be –.’ (944). Home maybe what we make of it, yet there’s no escaping the past, our conflicting

histories, our prejudices. Poetry becomes a means to a means to rescue oneself, literally keep body and soul together.

The capacity of poetry to create connections whereby the 'self' and 'the other' become interchangeable is widely recognised in various poetic traditions, and these traditions are alive today. Poetry represents a rising above oneself, a transcendence, that frees one to become another as much as oneself. It is a quality that people in exile, like actors (and imposters) seem to possess or acquire as a camouflage. This chameleon quality, the need to blend in, is a familiar impulse, though the struggle to retain one's identity is never relinquished. Keats referred to this quality of self-transcendence which enables one to step into the shoes of another as Negative Capability. For those in exile it is indispensable as breathing, without this 'connection' we remain alienated. No more 'unacknowledged legislators,' poets may have freed themselves to create without any limitations, but the challenge of self-definition is no less serious.

I grew up in an India that was in the process of discovering itself after a decade of independence. I have now lived in the United Kingdom (longer than I did in India), also in the process of rediscovering itself and its place in the world. Living in London, in one of the most cosmopolitan, diverse, multicultural cities of the world, it is essential to acquire a kind of 'negative capability'. While some aspire to change the world, it is hard enough to change myself. Being true to one self is not always easy as one grapples with competing views, perceptions, and possibilities. Discovering my 'self' in exile has been its own reward, though sometimes, being oneself does not 'come as naturally as leaves to a tree'. I cannot say it is better if it comes not at all. Facing all sorts of discrimination, I have learnt to stand on my own, think for myself, a reward hard-earned, not just 'a passport to a country of eternal regret / the Old Jerusalem, a forsaken garden/ where the sun is always about to set // on an empire laying down its burden.' (George Szirtes "Jerusalem").

It is harder still to face discrimination in your homeland, to have to begin at the beginning in the land of your birth, where you breathed in notions of everything only to discover nothing is the same any more. Vahni Capildeo describes her experience of such a diminution or distancing as: 'my Trinidad takes itself away, in reality, over time.' I find *my* India's transformation into an unfamiliar place truly unsettling. Having lived alone all these years, people (both in India and elsewhere) ask me if I am 'settled' in London, why don't I return home, especially after Brexit? How can I explain that having been 'nourished under alien skies,' one cannot go back 'looking for certainties, / a child alone woken by nightmares, / unable to drift back to a land of dreams' (I quote from my poem, "Return of the Exile"). Freedom is a state of mind that is hard-earned, how can one give it up? The freedoms that India had earned during its long fight for independence have been bartered away in the name of progress, development, modernization.

A first and last generation immigrant, having spent years as an expatriate, initially studying in Oxford and Harvard, later working in the City (of London), I was in self-exile. It was when I applied for British citizenship (my job as an investor at the time entailed a lot of travel, and my Indian passport sometimes made it difficult), and unwittingly lost my Indian citizenship (as India does not offer dual nationality) that the irony and tragedy of my dispossession hit me. It was also the time when I was a pioneer in directing Foreign Institutional Investments into India. In what universe would India that made me, nurtured me, valued me, render me homeless, even while I was paying my dues to my homeland, while Britain, where I was an immigrant, offer me shelter?

I am not even sure what the appropriate word is for such a condition. 'Afterwardsness' comes to mind – the Freudian concept that an earlier event in one's life can later acquire a meaning, the way we see the past through our understanding of the present. And when you stray from the well-trodden path, be prepared for 'black swans' to appear. In his book, *The*

Black Swan, Nassim Nicholas Taleb refers to an event with rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective predictability as a black swan. According to him, ‘a small number of Black Swans explain almost everything in our world, from the success of ideas and religions, to the dynamics of historical events, to elements of our own personal lives.’ The opposite is also true – black swans also explain the dramatic failures of great lives and ideas.

To be rendered homeless twice in a lifetime is not something one can prepare for. As we are all limited in our perception, one of the compensations of being an outsider is objectivity – displacement that lends us a larger horizon, frees us from tunnel vision. As long as we remain open to possibilities, not get too comfortable in our conception of our self that limits the other, there is hope. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: ‘People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.’ I have learnt that being an outsider is a gift, and belonging to oneself the essence of being home, though there are any numbers of things that could shatter that illusion. While silence is the last word, to live in the pages of a book is attaining a kind of immortality. Without wishing to idealize poetry, it can be said it offers multiple paths to understanding and self-discovery. To that extent poetry makes things happen simply by changing the way we perceive the world. Each one of us determines the limits of our engagement.

Historically, in Homer’s time, for example, the poet was seen as the ‘divine singer,’ the Romans called poets ‘vates’ or soothsayers. For Yeats ‘the true poet’ was a visionary. Influenced by German Romanticism, the Romantic poets subscribed to such a view. So did the American Transcendentalists. In the Sanskrit tradition, the poet was not only a seer (*rsi*), the poet was also regarded as one who ‘sees’ – the poet was both actor and spectator. Poetry was a form of knowledge (*vidyā*), in addition to its significance as an art (*kalā*), *alamkāra*, ornamentation, *shringara*, *riti*, style or *vakrokti*, (indirect or “crooked” speech), which reminds me of Emily Dickinson’s ‘Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –/ Success in Circuit lies/ Too bright for our infirm Delight/ The Truth’s superb surprise.’

Much of the poetry of witness today is also distinguished by its uncommon way of revealing the truth. If poetry is seen as only an art (*alamkāra*), it is deprived of its particular form of ‘knowing’ represented by emotional perception. At the same time, take away the joy of reading poetry and it loses its power to transform. The capacity of poetry to create connections whereby the ‘self’ and ‘the other’ become interchangeable is widely recognised in various poetic traditions. In Valmiki’s *Rāmāyana*, there is an episode of such identification when the sage/poet sees a pair of singing birds, the male of the pair (of sweet-voiced Krauncha birds) is struck down by a hunter. At that point in the text, two cries are uttered – the cry of the bird’s mate and the cry of the poet (*śloka* or verse) become one. The word *karunā* or compassion is used in the passage implying the act of entering into the feelings of another. This is perhaps among the earliest definition of what poetry is – the ability of the poet to be totally immersed in another. Poetry represents a selflessness, a negation of self, that frees the poet to become another.

In a letter to his brother in 1817, Keats refers to the quality that ‘went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – ‘I mean Negative Capability, that is, *when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.*’ Negative capability can be defined as a state of intentional open-mindedness. Poetry is not only self-definition, it enables us to connect with others. It is indispensable as breathing; without this connection we perish, especially those of us in exile. It is through poetry one lives, and in doing so we share a sense of belonging. Poetry is the means by which one explores fundamental questions like: *Who am I?*

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The World of Light

James Harpur: *The White Silhouette* (Carcenet Press, 2018)

The blurb to James Harpur's latest book, *The White Silhouette*, states that 'his poetry, always strongly imbued with a sense of the sacred, makes great play of light's spiritual resonance'. And I think, in the main, this is correct. The title (borrowed from a poem in the volume) is partly an oxymoron (although it is technically quite feasible to have a 'white silhouette', a silhouette is usually viewed as a shadow-outline filled in with black) but the emphasis on 'white' prepares the reader for the tone, and in some senses the subject matter, of the book. The background metaphor is, I think, the white world of the page which every writer has to confront or overcome to achieve the work of art, and in the case of this particular poet the necessity for meditation before putting pen to paper to surmount what he terms this 'dull, heavy world', its torpor and lethargy. In his poetry he traces 'the process of creation... the source of truth and beauty' through his 'praying disposition'. Throughout the book he praises the 'small miracles of life' – family picnics in the Pyrenées, journeys through the landscapes of Wiltshire, Tipperary and Patmos, pilgrimages, a meteor shower, mystical experiences, reactions to works of art – in a voice that is always intimate and human.

The world for Harpur is a place of 'broken light,/a great scriptorium' which needs interpretation, and so it is he blends an exploration of the natural world with that of art, and particularly the art of medieval Ireland as manifested in *The Book of Kells*, following in beautiful detail (in his sequence *Kells*) 'the concert of its patterns'. In this poem he sees 'the world of light' (one thinks surely, in this context, of Henry Vaughan's poem 'They are all gone into the world of light') limned as 'a different way of seeing' – 'redolent of the idea/that every letter must have beauty', 'each line of praise... trying to shape the perfect pattern', catching 'the ceaseless flow of light that moves':

My thoughts cleansed, my self destroyed
Within an uncanny infusing light
That seemed to deepen and unfold
More layers of radiance...

Transcendence is glimpsed then in light's 'effortless continuum' and in the visual arts' capacity to embody the 'confluence of lines of light', and poetry's 'flame, the flow/of images, words, ideas'. It is for this reason he writes a whole sequence of poems entitled 'Graven Images' dedicated to the contemplation of Christian art over the centuries. The whole book in fact carries the gravamen of Christianity with it, from its triadic structure to its emphasis on prayer and meditation – what he calls 'our heritage', 'a gentle communion', 'a specific redemptive end'. 'Graven Images' is both an appreciation of Christian works of art, including most notably Andrei Rublev's magnificent icons, and an attempt to perceive their essence translated from pictorial media into a written/spoken form (the most famous secular example of this genre I suppose is John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'). The 'translation' here, however, is more than merely ekphrastic (at least in Harpur's terms) for the act is nearer that of metamorphosis or transfiguration (in its theological sense). It is not merely a 'rendering' or a rhetorical exercise (the Greek word *ekphrasis* originally meant 'a work of art produced as a rhetorical exercise') but is crafted as the expression of a deep spiritual experience

‘embodying the life-stream/that issues from the source, the Fountain,/and which returns us home/to God’ (in the poem ‘Verbum’). In contemplating Christian statuary, stained glass, finial crosses, Annunciation friezes, retable fragments, and so on, Harpur establishes a continuing tradition in which ‘you may discern/the divine in everything you see’. His poetry (strangely enough as it happens) reminds me of the atheist Shelley’s, in its stress on light (‘Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass/Stains the white radiance of eternity’) but in Harpur’s case light is not interpreted Platonically (although there is a hint of that in ‘Goldsmith’) but rather in Christian terms (what he calls ‘Christlight’) – ‘to make ourselves a home/to welcome the holy spirit’ (in the words of the Seraphim of Sarov in the poem of that title), the whole tradition of the Christian vigil of worship.

For Harpur all great art transcends, or surmounts, ‘time’s erosion’ – ‘the teeth of mice,/or bite of swords’. It is the apprehension of the transient beauty of the world which he captures best, both in its secular sense (see his fine translations of Horace’s Odes, ‘Soracte’ and ‘Carpe Diem’) and in its mystical incarnations, especially in ‘The White Silhouette’, ‘Kells’ and ‘Graven Images’. His verse is very concrete, his images very precise – ‘three swans on Slatty Water; feathery ice,/The sun’s last x-ray radiates the trees’; ‘the sea leeching blue from the skies’; ‘daffodils tipped with snow,/skeletal scripts of trees’; ‘the evening anointed/by a shooting star’; ‘hawthorns stooped to pray’.

Harpur’s poetry has a penetrative, transfiguring power that would be hard to equal, and has (to borrow a phrase of A. C. Bradley’s) ‘an intuition of the unique power of love’. He is at his best when he is discovering relations and connections in language.

Although primarily attracted to the intensities of the mystic, Harpur writes several poems in the elegiac mode, the chief of which is a ‘Letter to Charles Harpur’, a homage to his ancestor who was Australia’s first significant poet. He returns to the theme of transience here, viewed in a secular context, translating his favourite lines from the *Iliad* (which also happened to be his ancestor’s too):

*The race of men is as the race of leaves:
some the winds shed upon the ground, while still
the fructifying boughs put others forth,
to flourish in their season. So of men
the generations die and are renewed.*

To my mind, James Harpur is to be read as that rare figure – a Christian mystic poet writing in what is supposedly a post-Christian era. It is a very bold move indeed, and one that must be applauded.

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Ilias Jansugurov

Kulager is the heartbreaking story of the poet Akan, whose beloved horse Kulager is killed in a race by a rival, envious of his reputation as the best in the steppe. Based on the actual biography of Akan (1843-1913), Ilias Jansugurov used this event to symbolize the destiny of many intellectuals in Kazakhstan, including his own tragic fate during Stalin's repressions in 1937-38. The narrative unfolds within an authentic and rich portrayal of the now lost Kazakh nomadic society with all its traditions of public events and everyday life in its mountains, lakes and steppe and their abundant overflowing of poetry and music.

See in our online pages the poet and translator's extracts from her version of the poem which is forthcoming with the Kazakh publisher: The National Bureau of Translation with beautiful pencil illustrations by Dauren Kastayev.

Translating *Kulager* – as Kazakhstan comes into its own.

The poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy in her poem *Valentine* describes her unconventional gift of an onion, as a 'moon wrapped in brown paper' – an image equally suited to the unassuming exterior, complex layers and ultimately wondrous surprise that western readers will find on encountering the Kazakh poem *Kulager*. The seemingly simple tale of a gifted horse's tragic fate, is in fact a gateway into Kazakh culture: the nomadic life style, love of

horses, glorious mountain landscape and high lakes, as well as the haunting music, its food and traditions, all speaking of an abundance and passion for life which is powerfully captured in this poem's descriptive passages. But beyond this, the fate of the horse Kulager, and his owner Akan-seri's inconsolable grief, combine as a metaphor for the repression of artists under Stalin and, in particular, that of the poem's author Ilias Jansugurov. Although Soviet people have long drawn on poetry to assist them in evading censorship, *Kulager's* meaning when published was all too clear and was thus to be a death warrant for its author whom Stalin had put to death in 1938. This is why translation of this poem is so important.

And it is particularly apt that it should happen just now when Kazakhstan is on the cusp of switching from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin, the final phase of their attempts to free themselves from the dictates of initially the Russian and subsequently Soviet empires. This change is all part of the passionate desire in Kazakhstan, post independence, to raise awareness of their culture abroad. The translation of this poem has been very much a collaborative process, translated as it was initially from the Kazakh rather than Russian into a line by line crib which has subsequently been conveyed into English poetry. As Russian has been the dominant language for such a long time, the reinstatement of Kazakh, since the demise of the Soviet Union, is not without its problems, due to the fact that not all Kazakhs are bi-lingual. Nevertheless, Russian and Kazakh speakers alike see Kazakh as central to re-establishing the Kazakh identity. Thus, the opportunity to be involved in translating a poem such as *Kulager* – a staple within schools in Kazakhstan whilst little-known abroad – is something that it is a personal delight to be involved in.

The two extracts below give a little taster of in 'Motherland' the mountain landscape of the poem and 'Lament for Kulager' Akan's grief over the fate of his horse.

Motherland

Born in the mountains among rocks,
with ice as my bed, and snow my battleground.
Shepherding lambs in Arshaly,
I grew up touching the clouds in the sky.

Glittering white jewel, Aktasty,
on the jagged heights of Jonke
eagles screaming in the skies beneath –
my motherland.

And so I am a Kazakh who loves mountains,
unable to endure the life of the plains.
My Almaty at the heart of Alatau,
blows a breeze of songs and kuis.

All my life I have praised these mountains:
the Himalayas, Caucasus, Jonke, Altai, Alai.
A medley of giants so much part of me,
how can I leave them out of my heart and songs?

My poem draws on these mountain peaks
enduring as a mountain spring,
save one mountain rich in stories,

a bubbling source as yet untapped.

O rich green forest, idyllic drowsiness...
this lake, a beauty's eyes, their snow-covered
glitter of gravel, coral, agate and pearl,
rustling there on the lake's shore.

The green ripening carpet is spellbound.
Green silk leaves are in full blossom.
White snow sugar pours from the sky –
straightaway honey springs carve through rocks.

Why look for beautiful mountains elsewhere,
when we have so many of our own?
I am always proud to praise them
but now is the time for Kokshetau.

Okjetpes rises glaringly before us,
a bulging breast swung up into the sky,
its high cliffs, rocky caves, and camel-sized rocks,
all carefully placed around the lake.

Kokshetau does not battle with the sky,
unlike the treacherous Caucasus:
Khantaniri, Altai and Jonke,
snow-blocked, impenetrable and pathless.

No, Kokshetau is paradise on earth,
nurturing its own beauty in this endless steppe.
This generous mountain is hospitable and gentle,
a healer curing all disease.

Lament for Kulager

The sun has set, the land of Arka covered with the shadow.
The evening breeze ruffled Kusak lake.
Akan grieved saying goodbye to Kulager,
while all the people looked on in sympathy.

...

He left quickly with the orphan boy.
They went at a steady, slow pace till sunrise.
The way was long, the stars were bright.
The summer night grieved when it heard his song *Kulager*.

His inner sorrow transformed to the song,
singing with a bitter voice.
His song became like flowing water,

though not enough to extinguish the blazing fire.

Bitter grief and heavy sorrow resounded.
Every time he sang *Kulager* it brought forth all his sadness.
He kept the sleepy hollow ridge from rest.
He made the blind night sigh.

The voice of sadness was resonated heavily across
the desolate steppe....at night on the steppe all listened.
The hare on the ridge, sheep in the fold all listened,
everyone, everywhere...horses out on the pasture felt sympathy.

The infant awoken from their cradle listened keenly.
This woeful voice deeply disturbed the old man and the old woman.
Girls and daughters-in-laws guarding sheep kept their dogs quiet.
All night the village listened to the sad song.

Singing, sobbing loudly the song
slowly worked on its listeners
as it flowed into the sky.
Hearing this bitter voice all mourned the dead horse.

The song *Kulager* resonated powerfully –
birds in the trees and horses,
shivering herdsmen leaning on their lasso poles.
All listened to the sad song *Kulager*.

They walked many places along the way,
but the horse carrying *Kulager*'s head did not turn back.
Deep night itself caused the vast steppe itself to resound.
It was singing the song *Kulager*.

Seeing Kokshetau caused him such deep with sadness,
as he recalled all the places he had walked with *Kulager*.
Leaving that night, he hugged the place where *Kulager* had lain.
He fell to the ground and wept.

Mountains and stones seemed to pine for the horse *Kulager*,
as the springs sent their water flowing to the lake.
The clean land, and pure wind blew warmly,
expressing their condolences for *Kulager*'s death.

...

The mountains and stones of Kokshetau were weeping,
ravines were dissolving into the lake shores....
Akan the horse lover, the owner of this home grown Kazakh horse,
endlessly mourned his horse.

Sometimes he cried like the pouring rain,
Sometimes like a blowing hurricane,

sometimes like a turbulent lake,
sometimes he lay down like a single tree.

Sometimes he sang, sometimes he was silent as a stone.
He made the birch his home, stone his bed.
He sighed and sighed, solitary
as the skull he'd hung upon the tree.

....

After his voice echoed in the rocks
and on the mountains, we miss seri's songs.
He was the horse-dream of the Kazakhs.
So we worry for Kulager.

Poor Akan cried and burned singing *Kulager*.
People loved to listen to it.
Whether he was seri or peri,
people loved Akan's song and his horse.

When he went back with his horse's head that night,
A lot of kazakhs sang the sad song.
Women who guarded cattle that night learnt it by heart.
The herdsmen sang among horses.

When there were races for the memory of ancestors,
when people cooked cattle meat in the hearth,
they sang of how poor Akan's horse was slaughtered,
for Sagynai's wake and he came back distraught.

People remembered the song *Kulager*.
for the dead horse in Ereimen.
In Alatau, all over the spacious steppe,
this same song spread in Arka.

His horse was dead. Akan came back tired from the wake.
His song was brought to his village by shepherds,
who gathered in Ereimen from different places.
They returned to their lands singing *Kulager*.

The people mourned the sudden death of this horse.
People's nightingales sang in so many places.
The dombra's string wailed,
as the singers sang *Kulager*....



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