

Bakhtiyar Vahabzade

Time on My Mind

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Bakhtiyar Mahmud oghlu Vahabzade was born in August 16, 1925, in Nukha (now Shaki). He is a member of Azerbaijan's Parliament (Milli Majlis).

Vahabzade has published more than 40 books in Azeri, 12 in Russian, two in Armenian, two in Uzbek, three in Turkish and one in German. He has a doctor degree in philology (1964) and has been an Associate Member of the Academy of Sciences (1980).

His awards include: Honored Art Worker (1974), State Award of Azerbaijan USSR (1976) and USSR (1984), People's Artist (1984). He was awarded for "his Service for the Literature of the Turkic World" (in Turkey) and was one of the first Azerbaijani writers to be awarded the Istiglal order of Independent Azerbaijan.

Vahabzade has authored the following books: "My Friends" (Manim Dostlarim, 1949), "Eternal Statue" (Abadi Heykal, 1953), "Deer" (Jeyran, 1957), "Man and Time" (Insan va Zaman, 1964), "RootsBranches" (KoklarBudaglar, 1968), "Dawn" (Dan Yeri, 1973), "Greatness in Simplicity" (Sadalikda Boyukluk, 1978), "Autumn Thoughts" (Payiz Dushunjalari, 1981), "Talk to Myself" (Ozumla Sobot, 1985), "Ordinary People", "Four Seasons In One Heart", "Greetings to Coming Mornings", "Selected Works".

Life is as Short as an Inch (2003)

Life is as short as an inch, they say
Sometimes Death brings tragedy to 100 families.
By God, in a blink of an eye,
Death is there waiting for you.

What was it like to live?
I never knew.
What is your measurement to assess life?
I've witnessed those who have lived for a century, 150 years,
And still left the world with empty heart and brain.
Do not measure life by its length,
Measure it by its depth.

There are those who confuse their right with their left,
Being respected by both,
Seeking superficial feelings.

To live a life full of meaning.
Isn't Honor what you should build your life upon?
No matter what it takes,
Or else one is really dead while being alive.

If we could live
Each day to its fullest,
We should be thankful for our fate,
And shouldn't complain about the passing of time.

I've witnessed those who lived a century, 150 years,
And still left the world with empty heart and brain
Don't measure life by its length,
Measure it by its depth.

My Mother (1967)

She is illiterate.
She cannot write her name-my mother.

But she taught me how to count.
She taught me the names
of the months and years,
And most importantly,
She taught me language-my mother.

I tasted joy
And unhappiness
With this language.
And I created every poem
Of mine
And every melody
With this language.

Without it
I am nobody;
I am a lie.
The creator of my work,
In all its volumes and volumes,
Is my mother!

I Love (1979)

Overcast weather I love;
It shall give birth to the sun,
The sun for sure!

Harsh winter I love;
It shall give birth to hot summer,
Hot summer for sure!

Hatred's climax I love;
It shall give birth to love,
Love for sure!

Tyranny's pain I love;
It shall give birth to justice,
Justice for sure!

Two Blind Men (1968)

There's a blind man I know: His eyes are sightless,

But he is not blind.
Though he sometimes gets scorched
in the fire of sorrows,
He does not turn a cold shoulder to his passion
And his mind.
He reads and writes day and night,
In his mind's eye he sees, feels, knows.

But there is someone else
Although he is not blind,
Nonetheless, he cannot see,
His bosom friend may die
In front of his eyes-
"I saw nothing," he says.
Whatever is good he claims as his;
He fails to see the bad.
He looks at the clock,
But can't tell what time it is.
Nothing noble
Visits his thoughts and feelings;
Often he denies he saw something,
Though he really has.

A sightless man need not be blind;
Blind is he who does not want to see.
To such an ignorant fool,
Life itself is a grave,
If you ask me.

The Earth's Boundaries (1964)

From the beginning we daubed colors on the map
To divide the world into many countries.
The earth is one color everywhere-and yet
Why did we break it into a hundred pieces?

Every kind declared: "The world belongs to me."
Over and over again, we split the land;
But the earth was never girdled;
It never shrank nor did it ever expand.

Knock the Fences Down (1965)

Everyone puts up a fence
around his own field
Saying, "On this side of the fence,
this is mine."
Come, tear the fences down,
demolish the ramparts
So that our eyes
can gaze at distant parts.
How can rooms contain the heart
that must live free:
It should leap over hill and vale,
on and on.
For so long as my eyes can see,
I shall keep scanning
the widening horizon.
Never hinder the growth of flowers,

of the roses,
Never wound their hearts to die.
Nature is free:
Never hold
It inside the fortresses,
in captivity.
We must refuse to play
a game of backgammon,
Confined to squares inlaid with gold.
Our hearts should keep
growing and soaring, on and on
Like the ever-widening, endless horizon.
Come, tear the fences down,
demolish the ramparts
So that our eyes can gaze
at all the distant parts.

Speed (1963)

Time was, we would sit
in the compartment of a train
Three days and three nights
Counting the miles
Baku-Moscow
For lack of anything else to do.

Then, eight hours by plane,
Baku-Moscow,
And now just three hours,
Still sorry,
Bored stiff.

We want to fly
With the speed of light,
But even the speed of light
Is too slow to catch
The flight of our thoughts.

I am the son of modern times.
Give me now
The speed of my mind
The speed of my thoughts,
Not to worry me,
Not to bore me to death.
Just now,
Match the swiftness of my mind,
Move now!

Fear (1966)

In my left hand there's an old wound - A legacy from my childhood,
Unaware that wood burns, I seared my hand on a piece of charcoal.
A warning hissed at me,
The sound of flesh singeing,
But I wasn't afraid,
I felt fear only when I burned my hand.

The real experience of life began with that fire.
Colorful flames from the embers

caressed my childish eyes.
I don't know why everything
I've touched since birth has burned me.
I wasn't afraid until I was burned;
I didn't know fear until I left my childish ways.
Since being burned, I'm careful when playing with fire,
And so life begins, and continues as a habit.

"Life is Short" was translated by Aynura Huseinova and edited by Betty Blair. The remaining poems come from "Bakhtiyar Vahabzade. Poems, Short Stories and a Play", edited by Hadi Sultan-Qurraie, and translated by Talat Sait Halman. Indiana University Turkish Studies Publications: Bloomington, Indiana, 1998.

More Works:

(1) "[Profile of a Dissident-Bakhtiyar Vahabzade](#)" by Jean Patterson. Azerbaijan International, AI 7.1 (Spring 1999), pp 65-69 .

(2) "[Poetic Justice](#): Memoirs of Poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzade" in AI 10.3 (Autumn 2002), pp 52-55.

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