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## ATTITUDES

TOWARDS THE AZERBAIJANI LITERARY PROCESS IN LITERARY STUDIES OF THE PERIOD 1920s-30s

### ACTITUDES HACIA EL PROCESO LITERARIO DE AZERBAIYÁN EN LOS ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS DEL PERÍODO 1920-30

Nurana Asadullayeva Firidun qizi<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [x\\_nura\\_x@list.ru](mailto:x_nura_x@list.ru)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2234-7956>

<sup>1</sup> National Museum of Azerbaijan Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi. Azerbaijan.

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#### ABSTRACT

The introduction of socialist ideology exerted a profound influence on Azerbaijani literature from 1920 to 1930. This ideological shift significantly shaped the literary landscape by steering writers toward themes aligned with socialist principles. As part of ideological domination authors were urged to craft narratives that underscored the triumphs of the working class, the resistance against oppression, and the tenets of socialism. These themes were skillfully interwoven with the historical struggles of the Azerbaijani people, portraying their collective aspirations for a brighter future. However, the various literary trends that emerged in the 1920s and 30s in Azerbaijan also created diversity in the views of proletarian literature, but the tendency to adapt to a single model became stronger. Any dissenting opinion that did not conform to the dominant Marxist-Leninist theory was immediately declared an enemy position and considered ideologically invalid. At a time when everything was focused on proletarian literature and proletarian art, theoretical thought also acted accordingly, and theoretical ideas from political administrations were applied to literature and art.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijani literature, 1920-30s, ideology, literary criticism, Bekir Chobanzade.

#### RESUMEN

La introducción de la ideología socialista ejerció una profunda influencia en la literatura azerbaiyana de 1920 a 1930. Este cambio ideológico moldeó significativamente el panorama literario al orientar a los escritores hacia temas alineados con los principios socialistas. Como parte de la dominación ideológica, se instó a los autores a elaborar narrativas que subrayaran los triunfos de la clase trabajadora, la resistencia contra la opresión y los principios del socialismo. Estos temas se entrelazaron hábilmente con las luchas históricas del pueblo azerbaiyano, retratando sus aspiraciones colectivas de un futuro mejor. Sin embargo, las diversas corrientes literarias que surgieron en los años 1920 y 1930 en Azerbaiyán también crearon diversidad en las opiniones de la literatura proletaria, pero la tendencia a adaptarse a un solo modelo se hizo más fuerte. Cualquier opinión disidente que no se ajustara a la teoría marxista-leninista dominante era inmediatamente declarada posición enemiga y considerada ideológicamente inválida. En una época en la que todo se centraba en la literatura y el arte proletarios, el pensamiento teórico también actuó en consecuencia y las ideas teóricas de las administraciones políticas se aplicaron a la literatura y al arte.

**Palabras clave:** Literatura azerbaiyana, años 1920-30, ideología, crítica literaria, Bekir Chobanzade.

## INTRODUCTION

As a repository of national identity, literature constitutes an integral cultural heritage for any nation owing to its unparalleled ability to encapsulate and safeguard the essence of a people. Through chronicling narratives steeped in societal histories, conventions, and cherished ideals, literary works hold up a mirror to the richness of a culture. Literature facilitates the transmission of allegories, folktales, and enduring accounts across generations that shape collective identity. In this sense, by exploring both universal motifs and locally relevant subjects, literature also constructs bridges spanning disparate cultures, thereby furthering appreciation for our shared humanity. Furthermore, its power to spur introspection and ignite innovation contributes significantly to the scholarly and emotional growth of individuals, highlighting literature as a cornerstone of cultural legacy that greatly enhances lives and histories (de Cillia et al., 1999; König, 2023; Rexroth, 2023).

Azerbaijani literature plays a significant role among Azerbaijan's rich cultural and historical heritage. Indeed, it has contributed to national identity, and offering a window into the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the region. The literary tradition of Azerbaijan dates back centuries, and has evolved through various epochs, encompassing genres such as epic poetry, lyricism, and prose. Its richness is attributed to many factors but undoubtedly it is part because the influence of both Persian and Turkish sources. Renowned Azerbaijani authors such as Nizami Ganjavi have delved into themes ranging from cultural resilience to modernity, thereby enhancing the global understanding of Azerbaijan's history and culture. This way, Azerbaijani literature remains a crucial medium for preserving cultural identity and fostering appreciation for linguistic and literary diversity in the Caucasus region (Huseyinoglu, 2012; Rasulova, 2022).

As it is known from history, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was founded in 1918, and after a short period on April 28th, 1920, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was defeated by Bolsheviks, giving way to the proclamation of the Azerbaijan SSR (Bölükbaşı, 2014). Then, with the onset of the Soviet regime monumental political and social transformations were made in the country carried out by the Communist Party's. These changes as expected were a remarkable shift in the political and ideological landscape, and of course, art couldn't escape this voragine (Altstadt, 2016). Therefore, despite the artistic expression development during the founding of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, with various poetic styles and genres prevalent among literary figures, the inception of the Soviet regime substantially impeded the organic evolution

of Azerbaijani literature, diverting its ideological and topical trajectory. The political administration's crackdown compelled Azerbaijani poetry and writing to drastically shift course in terms of thematic concerns and creative content. Though poetry thrived previously in an environment of artistic freedom, the Soviet clampdown stifled natural literary progress, forcing poets and authors to realign with state-imposed expectations regarding subject matter and messages (Babayeva, 2019; Mammadli, 2022).

In the 1920s and 30s, as in all fields, in literary criticism and literary studies, various fronts of ideological struggle (right tendency, pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, Uklonists, Musavatists, opportunists, Pereverzevists, etc.) were formed. These fronts change from time to time and manifested in different forms. Critic Ali Nazim defended the position of bolshevizing literature and wrote: "In order to bolshevize our literature, to make it a real proletarian literature, we must wage a merciless, fierce, brutal struggle and fight on all these roads and fronts. The second congress should be a congress of Bolshevization of our literature" (Nazim, 1979, p. 100). On the other hand, in this period, the research of Ismayil Hikmet, Amin Abid, Hanafi Zeynalli, Ali Nazim, Bekir Chobanzade, Salman Mumtaz, Mustafa Guliyev, Atababa Musakhanli, Mammad Kazim Alakbarli and others appeared related to the theoretical and practical problems of literature. The ideological front was evident in the titles of Ali Nazim's "Against mechanism and liberal views in criticism of Marxism in Azerbaijan", "Against pan-Turkism and Kemalism in Turkish literature", Mustafa Guliyev's "Struggle on the literary front", Hidayat Efendiyev's "On Pereverzev and his literary system", etc.

Considering the above the objective of this article is to analyze the attitudes towards the Azerbaijan literary process in literary studies of the period 1920s-30s. To do this, in this work the object of research is analyzed from a historical-logical perspective, through the analysis of documents. It is important to notice that in this period, theoretical and practical issues of literature, as well as a new approach to modern literature, periodization of literature became the object of research by critics and literary scholars, but evaluations were mainly based on political realities. As examples of we highlight the opinions put forward by scientist Bekir Chobanzade in the book "A New Era of Azeri Literature: from Nationalism to Internationalism", the ideological trends (Pereverzevism, Voronskyism) that took place in Azerbaijani literary thought during this period, and critics by Hidayat Efendiyev based on the articles "On Pereverzev and his literary system", Mustafa Guliyev's "Struggle on the front of literature" (against Voronskyism), and Mehdi Huseyn's articles against Menshevik-mechanistic literary studies.

## DEVELOPMENT

### **Bekir Chobanzade's attitude to the periodization of literary history.**

In the book "From Nationalism to Internationalism", by B. Chobanzadeh, the approach to modern literature is based on ideology. The researcher extends the new era of Azerbaijani literature to the period after the revolution of 1905 and prefers to evaluate the subsequent literature entirely by ideological criteria. In the introduction of the work, the author highlighted the class nature of literature and wrote: "The class nature of the literary development in our period is already clear to us. During this period, Azeri literature is developing "from nationalism to internationalism". In other words, it ceases to be the literature of the bourgeoisie and becomes the literature that serves the proletarian ideology (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 6). B. Chobanzade (1930, p. 29) analyzes the literature of the beginning of the 20th century, only twenty years before him, from the point of view of class, and declares a part of this period as "bourgeois literature" pointing that "At this time, the literary organ of the Azerbaijani Turkish bourgeoisie is the collection "Fyuuzat" and the representatives of the bourgeois ideology gathered around this collection", he calls the literature published here bourgeois literature.

If we take into account that during the Soviet period, the government consisted of the union of the working-peasant classes, and the bourgeoisie not only had no place here, but was even declared an enemy class, then the picture becomes completely clear. Although "Fyuuzat" had been published for only a year, and the social and political conditions in Russia at that time were completely different from today's, and there was still more than ten years before the Republic was established, however, evaluating this magazine by linking it to the "bek", "khan", "bourgeois" classes was based on the ideological criteria of the time.

B. Chobanzadeh also wrote: "In this way, Ali Bey Huseynzade takes on the role of ideologue-secretary of millionaires. It can be said that "Fyuuzat" was a result of the independent work of the bankrupt gentleman and the new subsidiary "state". For this reason, "Fyuuzat" served the state class and the bourgeoisie from the very first copy and did not hold back from resembling the remnants of feudalism in the country. If we want to definitively define the dominant Turkish literature of this period, we should say: "Literature of the feudal-oriented bourgeoisie" (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 29). This approach, which was the first attitude of literary studies towards "Fyuuzat" magazine, had its influence on subsequent literary studies and this attitude did not change even until the 80s. However, if the correct approach to this periodical and romanticism

was exhibited at the time, literary studies could be freed from ideological and class evaluation.

B. Chobanzade approached the periodization of the literature of the recent period from an ideological point of view; divided the literature of this period into two parts: Musavat literature and October period literature. Apparently, such a division does not reflect the literature of the time as it is. By Musavat literature, the researcher meant the "Turkish bourgeoisie" who took a passive position until the Republic, "the tails that went to the lords, khans and landowners, and the other end to the bourgeoisie." Another ideological reason why the literature of that period was called "musavat literature" was that that party was only one of the parties that participated in the establishment of the Republic and represented the national thought. Calling that period "Musavat literature" came from the official ideology. Thus, the Bolshevik propaganda machine always called the government of the Republic "Musavat" or the government of "bey, khan" and thus carried out a smear campaign. Although the official name of the state was the Republic of Azerbaijan, the republic was the first of the leading state structures in the modern world. This approach of the official ideology was also manifested in literature and literary studies.

### **Ideological approach to the ideas of national independence.**

It is known that starting from the beginning of the 20th century, national thought came to the fore in our literature. The socio-political processes that took place in the region during the First World War made it possible for writers and poets to reconsider their subject and give special importance to national thought. In the period of the republic, the motives of national patriotism in literature became stronger. Themes such as the liberation of Azerbaijan from the Armenian-Bolshevik occupation by the Turkish army on September 15th, 1918, the transfer of the Republic from Ganja to Baku and maintaining its independence for 23 months found poetic expression in the works of A. Javad, J. Jabbarli, A. Muznib, A. Shaig, H. Javid and dozens of other poets and writers. B. Chobanzade was based on the works of Ahmad Javad and Huseyn Javad under the name of Musavat literature. A. Javad dedicated poems to the Azerbaijani flag, soldier, and Turkish army. National patriotic motifs prevailed in the work of poets such as J. Jabbarli, A. Shaig, S. Mumtaz, Davud, and Zulfugar Bey. All these gained a political meaning in later literary criticism and literary studies, and led to the evaluation of the literature of this period from an ideological point of view. Just to illustrate this, B. Chobanzade cited the verses of A. Javad *Türküstan* as an example and called him "a patent poet of Musavat" (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 31):

Hands and kiss your forehead.  
 He tells you his pain, my flag!  
 The reflection of the three colors from the raven sea.  
 You wound with a gift, my flag!"

The national poems written by poets like A. Muznib and Aliyusif in this period were also evaluated from the same ideological position, poems written about the Turanian lands and Turkestan were read with Bolshevik eyes. In Aliyusif's verses Musavatists were sharply criticized for saving the East and making it their own property. The same happened in the verses of A. Muznib.

"Yes, yes, let this country be a Kaaba to the East today.  
 One more day, the fire will burn.  
 The whole of Turan, the Oguz generation, maybe even the whole East  
 Again, he will consider it a holy shrine" (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 31).

"Azerbaijan: the garden of steel arms.  
 This country is happy for those who care!  
 Muhammadkhan, the settlement of Ahmadkhans  
 This country is the grave of Javadkhans" (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 32).

The literary critic who saw the ideas of pan-Turkism in these verses wrote: "When reading these poems of Musavatchi poets, one gets the impression that they want to turn Azerbaijan into the Walled China, the last prophet of the pan-Turkists, and live with all the medieval culture. Basically, "Goyalp Ziya-the last prophet of pan-Turkists", in his "letter" to the Turkic-Tatar nationalists in all of Russia, did not show that it is necessary to keep in mind the actions and deeds of the khans and khanates from Mata Khan to Teymur Lang as an example" (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 32).

B. Chobanzade calls H. Javid "the second bourgeois poet" and attacked his work "Abyss" and criticized the poet's desire to "become something like Abdulhaq Hamid". The basis of his criticism is H. Javid's description of Turanian, Crimean plateaus and Edil colors in his works. The author criticizes H. Javid's work "Sheyda" in the same way. The biggest criticism of the literary critic is related to the language of his works. Since only one poem was

published in "Füyuzat", the author calls him the "successor of Füyuzat" and writes: "Javid is a staunch supporter of the Ottoman trend and a strong educator of this trend to this day. This poet, who was severely reprimanded by the administration of the collective for using Azeri word images during the period of Fuyuzat, was the successor of Fuyuzat in language and literature, where he would approach the Azeri language like others, with the lessons he gave (Chobanzade, 1930, p. 34).

On the contrary, B. Chobanzade conducted extensive research on October literature; he tried to reveal his character, noting that he was formed after the "April Revolution". He praises the poems of poets like Ali Dai, Haji Salim Sayyah, Haji Karim Sanil, Suleyman Rustam, Nazim Hikmet, Azerbaijani lovers dedicated to the "October Revolution" and draws the model of new literature. In this model, the character of the new era, the theses of the Bolshevik ideology took the main place. It goes without saying that this book, written by Bekir Chobanzadeh was inspired by the political realities of the time, and the history of literature was investigated on the basis of socialist literary thought.

#### **Ideological trends in Azerbaijani literary and theoretical thought**

Many of the ideological positions were determined in the center-Moscow and transferred to the literary and theoretical arsenal of individual nations. One of such ideas belonged to Professor V.F. Pereverzev. Professor V.F. Pereverzev (1882-1968) himself was considered one of the Marxist literary critics, he was one of the prominent representatives of Marxist criticism and literary studies in Russia in the 20s. He was the author of such fundamental works as "The Works of Dostoevsky", "The Works of Gogol", "The History of Russian Novels", and even Marxist criticism was named after him. However, towards the end of the 1920s, a change and difference in his methodological views led to attacks against him, and a major campaign was launched under the name of "pereverzevshina". This campaign also spread to Azerbaijan, where pereverzevchik was also sought. In his article "On Pereverzev and his literary system", H. Efendiyev took preventive measures and conducted ideological work in order to prevent the current theory and position from reaching the national literary level. It is known that the existing political system appreciated proletarian literature and called the forces against it opportunistic elements. Those who opposed this literature were always branded from the point of view of class struggle, and this position was evaluated as a denial of the Marxist revolution. Professor V. F. Pereverzev, while analyzing the works of F. Dostoyevsky and Gogol, did not take a revolutionary, ideological approach. In fact,

accepting criticism of classical literature from the platform of Marxist criticism was nothing but schematism.

He understood literary studies as artistically evaluating any work, determining its objective existence and justifying his opinion on theoretical grounds. In his opinion, it is not correct to evaluate the writer's work from the point of view of class, sectarianism, and partisanship. A critic and a literary critic should analyze and evaluate the artistic material not from a class point of view, but from a scientific-theoretical point of view. Being a registrar is not enough for a Soviet writer, each class approaches literature and art from the point of view of its own worldview. A representative of any class can only be interested in works and images that meet his inner desires, meet his life goals and goals, and satisfy him.

Since this position of his was not compatible with the proletarian way of thinking, the struggle against "pereverzevism" was also carried out. Critic H. Efendiyev strongly disagreed with the views of the researcher, "The creator always does his work himself, he does not order it to others" (Pereverzev, 1931, p. 5). Because the proletarian literature was the literature written to order. A critic who did not agree with this theoretical system of V.F. Pereverzev wrote: "However, we cannot believe the noise of this word, which is trying to appear revolutionary on the surface, but which is very far from Marxism in essence, because if we come to many counter-revolutionary writers with the command theory; we demand the destruction of some of their writings. But at the same time, we demand from many angry bourgeois writers to change their psychology" (Pereverzev, 1931, p. 5). Such ideas prevented the introduction of ideas different from the proletarian theory into the national literary process, and allowed the analysis of literature from a Marxist critical point of view. When we say Marxist, ideological and class approaches to everything are taken as the basis.

Critic Mustafa Guliyev's article "Struggle on the Literary Front" (against Voronskyism) also shows the ideological approach to literary studies. Although Voronskyism, like Pereverzevism, is not a national ideological trend, it is a problem of Russian literary studies, but it was also expressed here. The main reason why the critic wrote such an article against Voronskyism was to prevent this and other "isms" (Pereverzevism, Pixanovism, Kubikovism, etc.) that are considered ideological tendencies to enter the national literature. According to the critic, the addition of these "isms" to the ranks of bourgeois-golchomacks, right-wing intellectuals, nepmans and opportunists on the front of literature has had its effect on the field of literature and art. M. Guliyev claims that the opportunistic tendency of A. K. Voronsky (1884-1937) had its influence

on Turkish literature as well, and concludes that some of them actively propagated his ideas at the congresses of Azerbaijani proletarian writers.

Although A.K. Voronsky was a revolutionary communist, he did not believe in the future of proletarian literature and was known for his dissenting views. He denied the existence of proletarian literature and considered it only a literary product of the transitional period. The literary critic stated that the main task of the day is not to create proletarian art, but perhaps to create transitional art that helps the proletariat win over the bourgeoisie. He defended the idea that it was wrong to oppose bourgeois art and culture to proletarian art. He firmly stated that not only proletarian literature, but even the proletarian revolution itself was temporary, he refused to publish the ideological works of proletarian writers even when he became the editor of the magazine "Krasnaya Nov". All this led to the strengthening of Voronskyism. A.K. Voronsky attributed everything to the subconscious, argued that the intellect does not play such a fundamental role in the creativity of the artist. He did not want to accept the class nature of creativity and the creative process.

M. Guliyev gave an ideological direction to this literary tendency from Russia, and wanted it not to have a place in the national literature and sharply criticized it: "Turkish Voronskyists said that there was a crisis in proletarian literature, ridiculed proletarian writers, referred to revolutionaries and bourgeois specialists in literature. The right-wing uklonists quickly adopted Voronsky's ideology and were looking for a way to hold a right-wing opportunist and kolchomak front in Turkish literature. Therefore, we need to clarify Voronsky's concept of idealism and kolchomok. We must expose Voronskyism and banish it from Turkish literature and declare war on idealism" (Guliyev, 1931, p. 22). Although M. Guliyev expressed ideas such as "expelling Voronskyism from Turkish literature", "sweeping Voronskyism from Turkish literature", "purifying and exposing right-wing extremists who tend to repeat Voronsky's ideas in Turkish literature", he cannot even mention the name of a single Voronskyist throughout the article. It seems that the critic wrote this article in order to prevent this trend existing in the Russian literary environment from transferring to the national literature.

Mehdi Huseyin's article "Against Menshevik-Mechanist Literary Studies" also analyzes the possibility of the transfer of ideological tendencies in the Russian literary process to the national literary environment. The young critic expresses the attitude of the communists, armed with the revolutionary theory of Marxism, to the alien class tendencies in the society. One of these tendencies was pereverzevism. According to the critic, Pereverzev, who was

once known as a Marxist literary critic and fought against formalism and eclecticism, hid himself under the mask of Marxism. Pereverzev's recent studies of separating literature from science both in terms of content and form, taking the image as both "image" and "content", did not satisfy the critic. Pereverzev did not accept Plekhanov's opposition to Plekhanov's opinion that "Art begins when a person returns to himself the thoughts and feelings that he has checked under the influence of a being that expresses a person, and a person gives it a certain image expression". He wrote: "As it is clear, Pereverzev's literature is different in terms of content. Taking an opposite direction against those who want to equate it with science, he tried to take the right path when trying to explain the specificity of fiction, but he opposed Plekhanov when he explained fiction" (Huseyn, 1931, p. 23).

Finally, in addition to looking for this in Pereverzev's recent works, the critic is also busy looking for local supporters of Pereverzevism and finds it. Although the critic mentions A. Musakhanli as a supporter of Pereverzevism in Azerbaijan, "His last articles are nothing but a repetition of Professor Pereverzev in the crudest way" (Huseyn, 1931, p. 27), and more ideologically in A. Musakhanli's "Workbook from Literature" when he was looking for trends.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the 1920-1930 period in Azerbaijan, the principles of the socialist realism method impacted not only in the field of artistic creativity, but also in literary criticism. Critics and literary scholars were tasked with identifying and exposing works that violated the requirements of the socialist realism method, as well as positions that were considered harmful to the literary process wanted by Socialists. For this reason, the literary criticism that follows the literary process approached both the analysis of the works and the issues related to the history and theory of literature from an ideological position under the dictates of the ruling ideology. Consequently, the role of writers underwent a significant transformation under the sway of socialist ideology. The state assumed a substantial degree of control, dictating that literary works align with its cosmivision and contribute to the construction of a socialist society. Therefore, writers who adhered to the prescribed ideology received state support and resources, while dissenting voices faced censorship and potential repercussions.

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