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EROTIC LITERATURE IN UZBEKISTAN

I would like to speak briefly about erotic literature and its destiny in Uzbek literature.

Generally speaking, erotic literature is not published in Uzbekistan, as it is illegal to do so. But the present generation of the youth is satisfying its need for erotic literature by means of digital technologies, the internet, and erotic books and journals delivered from Russia and Kazakhstan.

Originally, the peoples of Central Asia got their insights from books like the Kama Sutra and A Thousand and One Nights. In the middle ages, Khans had four official wives to satisfy their sexual needs, as well as hundreds of beautiful girls and boys who were kept in the Khans' Palaces. In Bukhara, Khiva and Qoqand, special positions were set up to find beautiful girls and boys for the Khans from among the different tribes. There were special sex bedrooms in the khan's palace. A khan of Bukhara had a pool for his mistresses to swim in, and excite the khan's erotic desire. When the khan wanted sex he chose a girl by throwing an apple to her. In order to aid the khan's erotic desire, palace cooks followed a special menu, preparing meals for him of birds, birds' eggs, and sheep genitals.

As Islamic laws opposed such conduct, all of this was carried out in secret. The khans' sexual lives are not reflected in creative literature; only some stories carry a little information about them.

In fact, a hundred years ago, an attempt was made to kidnap my great-grand mother Shukurjon, and make her a mistress of the Khan Isfandiyar of Khiva. The Khan of Khiva was famous for his womanizing, but he also loved literature and music. He continued his pleasures with women even during his state visits. During a visit to Russia, the intelligence service infected him with syphilis. As other khans lived like simple people, they supported the rules of Islam.

The beautiful girls –or boys--who resisted the khans were punished or killed. They were thrown from minarets, or beaten, or dropped into boiling water. These minarets and sex rooms are now in museums. During the Soviet era, open displays of sex were also officially prohibited. However, behind closed doors, similar patterns of extravagant sexuality remained.

Despite this long history of prohibition of public display of erotic pleasure, my own work, especially my novel *An Empire of Mystery*, is concerned, among other things, with eroticism. I write about women, whose perspective has been under-represented in Uzbek literature. My work also deals with tradition, philosophy, psychology, mysticism, and regional history.

The book is generally thought to be the first novel in Uzbekistan written by a woman. The plot centers on Amazon women who must defend their motherland. These are warriors who have

removed one of their breasts in order to fight, but are also looking for love and sex. In my novel, women instigate and actively pursue sex. Yet, because open descriptions of sex are considered immoral in Uzbekistan, *An Empire of Mystery* faced opposition because of my freedom of thinking, and the erotic topics I depict in the novel. The erotic sense in my work is of sex **as art**, unlike cheap films about sex and prostitution.

Let me give you an example:

She drank from a silver bowl the juice kept in the huge jugs for three -four years, which we now call wine. Her eyes narrowed but gleamed. In the light of a black lamp the Princess's eyes were sparkling with strange rays. In succession she threw four-five handfuls of canopy seeds into the fire. White smoke rose, making dense circles.

—Enough! — either pillars or walls dared to speak to the Princess.

—Who is it? — asked the Princess, raising her red face up staring at the dark side of the fortress.

—Hey, is it you, God damn it?

— My Princess! Aren't you ashamed now?

— Isn't the Princess a woman? Shut it, it is not enough.

The Princess laughed.

— All of us are Amaz..... — said the darkness speaking out.

— Don't speak of your Amazons! Four-five handfuls of canopy would do nothing serious to the woman who seized the enormous world with battles, said the Princess, looking up at the roof and stretching her legs high.

She felt her entire body move like a swing, her fragile inner feelings on the verge of ecstasy.

The walls and columns became silent again, the canopy smoke grew denser, the fire blazed, burning like a huge flame. The Princess untied the leather belt from her waist, stripped off the decorations from her neck with a rattling sound. In the light of the fire her brown shining skin and her single hanging breast were seen, her black hair spreading, her eyes sparkling.

The Princess Falestriya with her sharp eyesight was staring at the half-naked door-guard, a spear in his hand, his thigh muscles shivering. He was an un-castrated slave brought from a hot country. He stared at the woman, his reddening eyes filled with blood. In the glare of the guard there seemed a resoluteness, strictness, and preparedness for action. It was unlike his first meeting with the Princess.

— Oh! — the Princess trembled like a worm in the light. — Look, keep looking I want to see your eyes. Want me to...? Feel like doing eh...?. She would glare at him, opening her eyes wide to check the patience of the human. The guard, the slave, stood still as he grew used to an order.

— Have you any desire like mine? Do you long for sex, lust for it, does your body and your veins harden up? Does your maleness desire me? Want me?

The eyes of the guard burned with temptation and unconsciously he set his spear at the wall.

— Come, come on now, oh, quick.

Closing her eyes the Princess lay on her back.

The slave flew like a wind, covered the castle with the shadow of his huge body. Maybe he could leave the meaningless, boring days of his life for these minutes, these pleasures. The fire would burn, cracking, the huge shadow would go up and down as far as the roof. The Princess's heated words, "my darling, my dear, my Heracles", could be heard from afar. Watching this scene the fire would burn, producing higher and higher flames with unbearable cracks and rattles.

The novel became known among university students, as it was on a historical topic. In six months, it sold out in bookshops. Generally, books do not sell well in Uzbekistan; as in other countries under the global crisis, the book business has suffered. Faced with this proof of the book's popular value, the Writers' Association gave *An Empire of Mystery* the award for best novel of 2006.