



ICAA

International Chyngyz Aitmatov Award

to

Friedrich Hitzer, Germany

for the best German translations
of Chyngyz Aitmatov's books

like "Der Richtplatz",

"Karawane des Gewissens",

"Begegnung am Fudschijama",

"Das Kassandramal",

"Akbara und andere Märchen",

"Kindheit in Kirgisien",

"Essays, Reden, Gespräche",

"Der Schneeopard"

Aitmatov Academy, London, UK
25th of November 2011

York House, Clarendon Hall
Richmond Road, Twickenham
TW1 3AA

Director:

Professor Dr. Rahima Abduvalieva

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INTERNATIONAL
CHYNGYZ AITMATOV
AWARD
CEREMONY
&
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CONCERT

Hosted by Professor Askar Akaev,
The first President
of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan

Friday, 25th November, 2011, 7pm

York House, Clarendon Hall
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Friedrich Hitzer

Chyngyz Aitmatov and his German-speaking readers

At first Chyngyz Aitmatov was just a Soviet writer. Later he became the Soviet envoy to Europe. Nowadays Aitmatov is a prominent representative of Republic Kyrgyzstan.

I remember the days when we were intensively touring across the whole of Germany, Austria and Switzerland to satisfy the public's overwhelming desire to meet the writer. Overall we were doing 4 tours per year, giving talks in these central-European countries. In every town we visited we were greeted by large numbers of men and women of different ages and social backgrounds who loved reading Aitmatov's books in German. The Swiss publishing house Unionsverlag based in Zurich, which already published all Aitmatov's books, was helping us in organizing meetings with the readers. Also Unionsverlag published his last book *"The Childhood in Kirgizia"* to commemorate the writer's 70th birthday.

This novel featured memories of Aitmatov's early childhood - happy and sad stories of his life as a teenager during WWII. The book depicted people he met in Sheker and during his studies in Jambul, and how Aitmatov decided to become a writer, the author who brought the world such wonderful books as *"Face to face"*, *"Jamilia"*, *"The Cranes fly early"*, *"The Mother*

Earth", *"Farewell, Gulsary!"*, *"The First Teacher"* and many others. All Aitmatov's books, from the very early to the most recent ones, were translated into German. A few of them such as *"Ascent to Mount Fuji"* and *"Cassandra's Brand"* I translated even before they were published in Russian - this was because of the domestic unpopularity of Soviet writers after the country's break-up and also due to Aitmatov's gesture of goodwill to his German readers.

Our talks took place in universities, in libraries, in churches, at schools, in public and in private premises which were able to accommodate an audience between 400 and 1200 people. In Leipzig for example, people were sitting on the floor, because all the seats were taken, in Kassel in the Anthroposophical Centre listeners were sitting on window sills and on the stairs. In 10 days our sessions were attended by 5000 people. Additionally, we had to give a media interview after each talk.

It all started in 1989 and soon we are going to celebrate the 10 years of our racing across Europe like "two horses in one harness" as Chyngyz described it. We gave talks in Germany's major cities and small towns. Among those is a National Theatre in Weimar, a monastery in Loccum and the famous universities of Marburg and Tuebingen.

We've been almost everywhere! Aitmatov was nearly worshiped by his German readers, who were prepared to queue for hours to get his book signed. I think no other reader could win the hearts and minds of the German public as Chyngyz Aitmatov did. No other Soviet writer had done this before. We have seen the same reaction virtually everywhere in Europe - in large towns as well as small. I witnessed readers approaching the writer with flowers, asking him for a photograph and thanking for his books which provided them with guidance and support in difficult moments. People were waiting for his new book with anticipation and this was a very unusual reaction of Germans to a foreign writer. I too wanted to solve the mystery of Aitmatov's great success in Germany.

Our cooperation started in 1985 when I translated the novel *"The Scaffold"* into German and then accompanied the writer in his tour to East Germany and my home West Germany.

Aitmatov himself was also puzzled by his overwhelming popularity in German-speaking communities. According to Chyngyz, after Perestroika and break-up of the Soviet Union, his German audience has become the main part of his career. This could partially be because of Aitmatov's depiction of war - it was not a victorious action, but a cause of the sufferings of thousands of orphaned children, prisoners of war, tears of mothers and widows. His view happened to come close to the hearts of the German nation: bent by the burden of blame for their war crimes, they saw in his books a call for forgiveness and reconciliation. And such understanding worked both ways.

However to me personally, the main reason lies in the experience of reading a book itself. Reading is such an intimate process; every new book brings new information and new emotions that urge a reader to do it over and over again. Such passion also transfers from generation to generation.

Words can hardly explain the power of love, but in all his

books, starting from *"Jamilia"* and to *"The White Cloud of Ghengis Khan"*, Aitmatov made a good attempt to express it in a very interesting manner, which in turn evoked readers' own experiences.

The author's skill to narrate on behalf of the main character is very appealing to his readers: he used it in his novel *"Jamila"* by writing on behalf of Seit, in *"The First Teacher"* on behalf of Altynai, and in *"To have and to lose"* on behalf of Ilyaz. Aitmatov inherited this narrative talent from his grandmother from Karagyz-ap and drew his work from folk tales, legends and poetry, so this brought his books close to the classical German literature, in particular from the Romantic period. This is why in 1992 Aitmatov won Friedrich Rueckert Prize, named after the great German poet, translator and philosopher, who in the 19th century introduced Oriental studies to the country. In his inaugural speech in Steinfurt Aitmatov said: "Europe is yet to discover the true power of Kyrgyz epos as well as the poetry of Central Asia".

In 1994 the writer was granted the Austrian State Award for his contribution to the development of European literature. (Aitmatov is regarded as European writer due to his excellent knowledge of Russian language.)

In June 1998, when he turned 70, Chyngyz Aitmatov received Alexander Men's prize established by the Russian Orthodox Church, administered by the Diocese of Stuttgart-Rottenburg, as a best bilingual writer. It looked so surreal - the Central Asian writer received the Orthodox award organised by Catholics, but once again Aitmatov's books connected East and West.

May-June 1998.

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