

THE EPIC OF 'ALPAMYSH' AND THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

BY VICTOR ZHIRMUNSKY

Corresponding Fellow of the Academy

I

THE tale of 'Alpamysh' is still current in Central Asia in the oral form of a heroic poem among the Uzbeks, the Kazakhs, and the Karakalpaks (the Kungrat version), and as an ancient heroic folk-tale among the Altaitsy, a small Turkic tribe in the mountains of the Altai (the Altai version). It is known also as a modern *pobyvalshchina* (an epic song turned into a popular fairy-tale) among the Bashkirs and the Kazan Tatars, between the Volga and the South Urals (the Kipchak versions). Already in the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries it was recorded in Azerbaidjan and Anatolia as 'The Story of Bamsi-Beyrek, Son of Kam-Bury', in a cycle of Oghuz epic narratives (mixed prose and verse), incorporated in written form in the famous 'Book of my Grandfather Korkut' (*Kitabi dedem Korkut*), and it is still current in Anatolia as a folk-tale written down several times from oral performance during the thirties of this century (the Oghuz version).

Consequently, many national versions and individual variants of this epic tale are current throughout the vast territory of the Turkic-speaking peoples from the Altai via Central Asia to the Volga, on the one hand, and to Asia Minor, on the other. At the same time it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of all the many epic narratives of these peoples.

To retrace the history of a folk-epic preserved in so rich and old an oral poetic tradition and to reconstruct the accumulated influences on its development of various peoples and centuries would require a study of all its available versions and variants. An historical comparison between them would resemble a collation of medieval manuscripts, but would be more difficult on account of the oral character of the tradition and the absence of many links. In my Russian book 'The epic legend of Alpamysh and the heroic folk-tale' (1960)¹ I tried to trace the outlines of such an undertaking with all its inevitable shortcomings.

Alpamysh is best known at present in the classical Uzbek variant recorded from Fazil Yuldashev, one of the best among the old generation of Uzbek epic singers. In the transcription preserved in the folklore archives of the Uzbek Academy of

Sciences this variant contains about 14,000 verses, which in the printed edition by the poet Hamid Alimjan (1939) have been reduced to 8,000.² It was translated into Russian under my editorship by the poet Lev Pen'kovskiy; the translation has been printed several times in Moscow since 1949.³ In the archives of the Uzbek Academy there are yet another twelve variants of the same poem recorded from different singers and varying in more or less essential details. The two other national versions of *Alpamysh*, the Kazakh⁴ and the Karakalpak,⁵ have also been written down several times from oral performance and differ rather substantially from the Uzbek version.

The main points of the plot (in the variant of Fazil) are as follows:

Alpamysh and Barchin are the children of two brothers, Baiburi and Baisary, chieftains of the Kungrat nomad tribe in the land of Baisun. Having been childless for a long time, the brothers prayed to God to give them children, and through the protection of their saint, Ali Shahimardan, their wish was fulfilled. Alpamysh, the son of Baiburi, and Barchin, the daughter of Baisary, following an ancient custom of their people, were betrothed in the cradle. Later on, however, Baisary quarrelled with his elder brother and departed for the land of the Kalmucks. Here the giant champions of the Kalmuck Shah Taicha-Khan fell in love with Barchin, who grew to be the fairest of her sex. To put off her importunate suitors, the young girl declared (according to an ancient custom) that she would marry the winner of three (in Fazil's version four) public contests: a horse-race (*baiga*), a contest in archery, and a wrestling-match. Barchin hopes that the winner will be her betrothed, the young hero Alpamysh, to whom she secretly sends messengers. To fetch the bride, Alpamysh must first obtain a war-horse from the old herdsman Kultai, his father's slave and servant. Three times does Alpamysh catch with his lasso an ugly-looking colt, which is in fact a *tulpar*, a winged horse destined for the hero. One of the Kalmuck champions, Karajan, who was at first defeated by Alpamysh in single combat, from being a rival and enemy becomes his friend and adopted brother, and serves as his helper (and matchmaker) in his heroic wooing. Mounted on Baichibar, Alpamysh's steed, Karajan outraces all Alpamysh's rivals, despite the knavery of the Kalmucks who bind their rival hand and foot and try to maim his horse. Karajan is also the first to enter into single combat with the Kalmuck champions, after which Alpamysh crowns their victory in a wrestling-

match with the strongest among them—Kokaldash, the eldest brother of Karajan.

Thus, Alpamysh wins all the contests and becomes Barchin's husband. Together with Karajan they journey back to Alpamysh's homeland. Only, Baisary still does not want to make peace with his elder brother, and remains with his family and clan in the land of the Kalmucks.

In the second part of the epic, Alpamysh with his forty warriors, having learned of the cruelties done to his father-in-law by Taicha-Khan, sets out once more for the land of the Kalmucks. In order to interrupt their progress, an old witch named Surkhail, the mother of the slain Kalmuck champions, comes to meet him at the head of forty beautiful maidens. After a feast the heroes fall into a drunken sleep and are all slain by the Kalmuck warriors, except Alpamysh, who is invulnerable. 'Spears cannot stab him, swords do not cut him, arrows rebound from his body' (a general formula for the magic invulnerability of most of the heroes in Turkic epic). In his magic sleep, which lasts seven (or forty) days, he is tied to the tail of his horse Baichibar and dragged to a deep underground dungeon or pit (*zindan*).

Alpamysh spends seven years in captivity in this dungeon of the Kalmuck Shah. Food is brought to him by the shepherd Kaikubad who accidentally learns of the place of his imprisonment. One day Alpamysh is able to send news of himself to the Kungrat tribe with the help of a wild goose, which, wounded by a hunter, had flown by chance into his dungeon. Alpamysh sends this goose back to his homeland with a letter written in the goose's blood. But when Karajan comes to rescue him, he refuses his friend's help at the last moment, not wishing to be indebted to anyone for his freedom.

Finally, the daughter of the Kalmuck Shah falls in love with the captive and helps him to flee, bringing him his horse. Liberated, Alpamysh defeats Taicha-Khan and all his host, and places on his throne the shepherd Kaikubad to whom he marries off the Kalmuck princess.

In the absence of the hero, Ultan-taz (Ultan the Bald), the younger brother of Alpamysh and son of Baiburi by a slave, usurps power over the Kungrat tribe. The new despot persecutes Alpamysh's relatives and friends, banishes Karajan, makes old Baiburi wait upon him, and sends Kaldyrgach, Alpamysh's sister, into the steppe to herd camels. He importunately sues for Barchin's hand and threatens to slay her infant son Yadgar,

the offspring of Alpamysh. Despite Barchin's persistent refusals, he makes preparations for the wedding-feast.

On his way back home, Alpamysh first meets a caravan from which he learns what is going on in Kungrat. He then encounters his sister Kaldyrgach tending a herd of camels and after that his old slave and mentor, the shepherd Kultai, who recognizes him by a birth-mark on his shoulder. Alpamysh puts on Kultai's shepherd clothes, and turns up in this disguise at the wedding-feast. He is not recognized, and witnesses all Ultan's insolence towards his relatives. He sees his mother bemoaning his death and his grey-haired father and defenceless son being humiliated; he also notes which of his servants have remained faithful to him and which have betrayed him. An archery contest takes place. Only the supposed beggar can draw the huge old bronze bow of Alpamysh, which his son Yadgar brings him. Still disguised as Kultai, Alpamysh takes part in the singing of *olans* (improvised quatrains) exchanging verses, first of a vindictive kind, with Ultan's old mother (who is now the hostess at the wedding-feast), and then of a lyrical nature, with his bride Barchin. He realizes that she has remained true to him and hints that he has come and will take vengeance. Finally, Kultai announces to the entire tribe that Alpamysh has returned. Together with his friends, the hero falls upon Ultan and his followers, slaying all and dooming Ultan himself to a lingering death. At the same time Baisary returns from the land of the Kalmucks.

The poem concludes with a feast lasting forty days and the reunification of the once disunited Kungrat tribe under the rule of the hero Alpamysh.

The historical and geographical localization of the plot can serve as a point of departure for dating the heroic epic *Alpamysh* in its three national versions—the Uzbek, the Kazakh, and the Karakalpak. The hero of these versions belongs to the tribe of Kungrat, whose pastures are in the land of Baisun (in the southern part of present-day Uzbekistan). The raids of the Kalmucks on the Turkic peoples of Central Asia took place from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century (in the times of the great Oirat kingdom of the Kalmucks). The name of Taicha-Khan, the Kalmuck Shah, corresponds to the historical title of the Oirat rulers, the Hun-Taichi. In Uzbek historical sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the locality north of the city of Termez (the 'Termez Vilayet' of Bukhara), which included the Baisun bekdome, was called the 'yurt' (i.e. the fief) of the Kungrat tribe. It came into their possession when the

conquered territory under the successors of Timur (Tamburlain), the Maverannahr, was divided among the Uzbek nomadic tribes, who, having come from the steppes near the Aral Sea, overran Central Asia with Sheibani-Khan (c. 1500).

These historical circumstances warrant our assigning the 'Kungrat' version of *Alpamysh*, localized in Baisun, to the times following the Sheibani conquest. In its Kungrat-Baisun version *Alpamysh* came into existence in the sixteenth century in southern Uzbekistan, whence it spread to other parts of Uzbekistan, to Karakalpakia, and to southern Kazakhstan. As the tribal epic of the Kungrats, *Alpamysh* was spread among the nomadic cattle-breeders of the steppes, whose mode of life was that of patriarchal clanship. The epic gives a striking picture of the nomadic period in the history of the Kungrat tribe. In Fazil's variant, Baisary and his clan, who did not know in their homeland what it was to till the earth, trampled down the crops of the hospitable Kalmucks, taking them for grazing lands. According to historical reports, conflicts of this kind were usual in the sixteenth century, when the nomadic Uzbeks of Sheibani-Khan first came in contact with the settled population of Maverannahr. ('Their settlement was followed by the trampling down of crops and the turning of cultivated land into grazing pastures.')

The historical localization of the Kungrat epic, being of later origin, is not found in the other 'pre-Kungrat' versions of *Alpamysh*. Nor shall we find in them the Kalmuck theme and other motifs related to it (the departure of Baisary as the reason for the hero's bridal quest, the part played by the Kalmuck champions, etc.). The plot of the epic tale follows the same general scheme (especially in the second part relating to the return of the husband to the bridal-feast of his wife), but with substantial divergences in subject.

In the Oghuz *Bamsi-Beyrek*, corresponding to the three traditional martial contests among the suitors there are the same competitions (horse-race, archery, and wrestling) between the hero and his bride, a warlike Amazon (seemingly a more archaic variant which is also to be found in the Bashkir folk-tale). The tale of *Bamsi-Beyrek*, in the written form of 'The Book of Korkut', forms part of a cycle of twelve epic tales about Salor-Kazan, the legendary chief of the Oghuz tribe, and the heroes of his 'table-round'.⁷

In the Altaic *Alyp-Manash*, the rival-pretender, unlike Ultan in *Alpamysh*, is not the son of a slave-woman, but a faithless

friend named Ak-Koben who, after going in search of his vanished blood-brother, brings back false news of his death, and, according to the custom of the levirate, on his return claims the hand of his brother's supposed widow. The false friend, as rival of the hero, plays the same prominent role in *Bamsi-Beyrek*, and even in some variants of *Alpamysh* (the story of Karajan's unlucky journey to the rescue of the hero), and also in some other versions of the return of the husband (Alyosha in the Russian *bylina*, Fickenhild in the Middle English romance of *King Horn*, etc.).

On the other hand, the pretender and rival in the Kipchak version (the Bashkir and Tatar folk-tales)⁸ is the old herdsman Koltaba (a name similar to that of the shepherd Kultai in *Alpamysh*), from whom the hero receives the wonderful steed needed for his wooing, promising him in return his own bride and half his kingdom. There is a trace of this motif in the *Alpamysh* of Fazil, where, in order to receive a steed from his herdsman Kultai, the young Alpamysh must first undergo a severe struggle with his old slave. The figure of a mighty, grey-bearded herdsman is very popular in Turkic and above all in Mongolian epic tales as a personification of the important social role played by such herdsman in nomadic tribes. The hero meets him with filial reverence, because without the help of such a steed he could not achieve his quest.⁹

Of especial interest from a genetic point of view is the Altaic heroic tale *Alyp-Manash* which, unfortunately, has been taken down only once so far, in a variant which apparently is incomplete. It was recorded from the late Nikolay Ulagashev, an eminent epic singer among the 'Altaitsy'.¹⁰ The epic legend in its archaic form here shows the character of a heroic folk-tale with ancient mythological features which are unmistakable.

The hero of this tale is a giant of fabulous stature and strength (an *Alp*). His wonderful horse is capable of magical transformations, it is endowed with superhuman wisdom and is the hero's only helper in his bridal quest. It saves him miraculously from captivity, getting for him the healing golden foam from one of the three lakes at the foot of the Golden Mountains. But the hero himself is also capable of magical transformations. At his wife's wedding-feast, by 'wriggling his entire body' he appears in the guise of a dirty, sore-ridden old man called Tas-Tarakai, while his horse after 'rolling on the ground' (a shamanistic practice) turns into a miserable jade. Alpamysh's disguise at the feast is a later, rationalized version of this magical transformation.

The hero's quest for his bride has likewise traits of a fairy-tale. Ayp-Manash learns the name of his destined bride from the 'Book of Wisdom'. Her land lies at the end of the world, 'where sky and earth draw together'; it is a land from which there is no return ('no traces lead back'). The way there lies across a broad river which 'neither a winged horse nor a seven-oared boat can cross'. Such images are unquestionably drawn from ancient mythological notions of the 'Other World', the kingdom of the dead, lying beyond an impassable river. The hero is taken across by an old ferryman in a bark coracle, which is as 'high as a cliff' and so long 'that on horseback no one will ride round it in a day'. The old ferryman reminds us of Charon in ancient myths and of other similar figures.

After crossing into this land the hero falls into a magic sleep lasting nine months. An enemy host attacks him while he is asleep, but cannot slay him. Arrows 'bend like grass' against his armour, scimitars of five cubits and long swords snap into ten pieces whilst Ayp-Manash continues to sleep. Then at the Khan's orders his servants spend nine days digging a pit ninety fathoms deep into which they throw the sleeping hero. The entire episode greatly resembles that of Alpamysh's captivity in the Uzbek epic. But in the latter, the magic sleep is rationalized as the result of drunkenness after a sumptuous feast.

The hero's enemies, the wicked Ak-Khan (who kills all his daughter's suitors), and, especially, the seven-headed Delbegen (a man-eating giant, mounted on a grey bull—in shamanist legend the main champion of the nether world and one of the principal servants of its ruler, the black god Erlik), are figures well known in popular tales. In many heroic narratives of this type, both Turkic, and especially Mongolian, the human hero is taken captive by his mythological enemies, the champions of the kingdom of Hell. The ninety-fathom pit, to which Ayp-Manash is confined (changed in *Alpamysh* to a *zindan*, the underground dungeon of feudal Uzbekistan), is a survival of these traditional images of the underworld.

As in all heroic tales (*Heldenmärchen*), the names of personages and places in the Altaic *Ayp-Manash*, in contrast with the Kungrat *Alpamysh*, possess no historical or geographical reality. There exists no state organization, the hero's only social connexions are with his kin and his tribe, and among the deeds he accomplishes the quest for a bride (in conditions of exogamy) takes a prominent place. In the heroic tales of the peoples of southern

Siberia it is mostly accompanied by bridal contests between the suitors (called *möröy* or *mörig*), generally three (horse-race, archery, and wrestling), which are viewed as an ancient custom and are appointed by the relatives or the guardians of the bride, or by the bride herself, to avoid bloodshed between the suitors.

Thus, the Altaic heroic tale *Alyp-Manash* may present some idea of the most archaic version of the epic legend of *Alpamysh*, with the essential reservation that Ulagashev's modern variant, as compared with the Oghuz or Kungrat epic poems, reveals in several points characteristic deviations of local provenance.

A comparison of all the known national versions of the tale of *Alpamysh* permits us to reconstruct the principal stages of its development and dissemination. In its most ancient form, as a heroic folk-tale (reflected in a contemporary version in *Alyp-Manash*), this epic tale existed probably in the foot-hills of the Altai as early as the sixth–eighth centuries at the time of the Turkic Kaghanate. From the Altai it was brought by the Oghuz tribes, no later than the tenth century, to their later seats at the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya, where it was developed independently, and entered into the cycle of Oghuz epic songs about Salor-Kazan and his heroes. From there it penetrated into Transcaucasia and Asia Minor under the Seljuks in the eleventh century. The 'Story of Bamsi-Beyrek' in the 'Book of Korkut', which can be confronted with the modern Anatolian folk-tales about Beyrek, is a late, strongly feudalized reflection of the same story in a literary transcript of the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries. In the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, with the movement of the Kipchak tribes, the tale, in still another version, penetrated into Bashkiria and the Volga region, where it exists nowadays in the strongly modernized form of a folk-tale. At the beginning of the sixteenth century it was carried by the nomadic Uzbek tribes of Sheibani-Khan into southern Uzbekistan (the bekdome of Baisun), where the epic poem *Alpamysh* was composed on the basis of a shorter heroic song or of a prosaic heroic tale intermixed with songs (as in the 'Book of Korkut'), and carried by the Kungrats from their pastures on the shores of the Aral Sea, whence the poem was later spread among the Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, and Kazakhs.

In this way, hand in hand with the social progress of the people themselves from a patriarchal tribal system to one of early feudalism, the heroic tale which told of a bridal quest into 'a land whence there is no return' was transformed into a heroic epic with a specific historic content: the hero's enemies

in the Central Asian epic became 'pagan' Kalmucks, in conformity with the historical situation of the Kalmuck wars (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries), and, in the Caucasus, the 'Giaours' (Christians) of Gurjistan (Georgia), and the Bek of the fortress Bayburd (in Asia Minor), who captures Beyrek and his forty war-companions by treachery.

This typological transformation of an ancient epic narrative from a heroic folk-tale (*Heldenmärchen*) into a long epic poem with an historical background is an example of general importance for the theory of the evolution of epic. We could cite Siegfried and the Nibelung legend as another example of such a transformation.

2

There are two principal versions of the story telling of the return of the husband from unknown lands after an absence of many years and of his appearance, unexpected and unrecognized, at the wedding-feast of his wife and a usurper (the 'Return of the Husband'). One of these versions (the Western) has a novelistic and romantic, the other (the Eastern one) a heroic character.

The first is widely current in the medieval literature and oral folklore of the European nations, but in a form largely modernized and devoid of the character of a heroic tale that is so apparent in *Alpamysh*. In all the variants the basic pattern of the plot in its Western version is as follows.

Soon after his wedding, the husband forsakes his young wife for a journey to distant lands (to take part in a crusade, in a war, in a pilgrimage, or by way of travel, and so on). Before leaving, he makes his wife promise to wait for him for a definite number of years (mostly seven, sometimes nine) and undertakes to return at the appointed time. While in foreign parts, he is detained for some reason or other (for instance, he is taken captive by enemies) or he himself forgets the appointed term. His wife receives false news of his death (sometimes she is deceived by the husband's rival, a faithless friend), and she is forced against her will to accept marriage again (by her kinsmen, her guardians, her friends, or by the usurper himself). The husband unexpectedly learns of his wife's approaching wedding either a few days before or on the eve of her marriage-feast and in some miraculous fashion returns home in a short space of time (during the night)

with the assistance of a magic helper (a protector-saint, the devil, a helpful demon, a magician, a wonderful horse, and so on). This is the only genuine fairy-tale motif preserved in the Western variant. Back home, the hero learns of the approaching wedding from the first person he chances to meet (a shepherd, a peasant, a wandering minstrel, or a wedding-guest). In some cases he returns changed and unrecognizable because of the privations he has experienced, but mostly he disguises himself (as a beggar, pilgrim, or minstrel), so as to gain access to the wedding-feast and in order not to be recognized there. In some variants his appearance at the feast is preceded by a meeting with relatives (his old mother, father, or sister) who also fail to recognize him at first. In disguise, the hero knocks at the door of the wedding house. Sometimes there is a clash between him and the door-keeper or the servants of the new master. Unrecognized, he is given a place among the servants or the beggars or the musicians. The form of recognition varies: it is mostly due to a ring which the hero drops into a goblet of wine, offered to him at his request by the bride herself (it can also be the half of a ring which the hero had broken into two when parting), or by means of a song which he chants as a minstrel at the feast, or, finally, thanks to some physical token (a birth-mark, the scar of an old wound, and so on). In rapture the wife returns to her former husband. If guilty, the rival is severely punished; if not, there is a reconciliation, with the latter's receiving a gift of money or marrying the sister of the returned husband (compare the catalogue of Aarne N 891, Bolte-Polivka, vol. ii, p. 318, N 92: in addition to which I have adduced some new material).¹¹

The 'Return of the Husband' in this Western version is known from numerous independent variants: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian, Russian and Slav, Hungarian, Rumanian, and modern Greek, and even as far in the Near East as Azerbaidjan and Turkmenia (the Tale of 'Ashik-Garib', translated for the first time by Lermontov in Tiflis in the year 1837). Among them all narrative genres of medieval literature and folklore are present: epic poems (Charlemagne in a French *chanson de geste*, the Middle English metrical romance *King Horn*, with its supposed French source, the Russian *bylina* 'Dobrynya and Alyosha', the south Slavonic songs about Marko Kraleovich, etc.); medieval romances of chivalry and chap-books related to them (the Russian chap-book about Bová Korolevich and about Brunswik, going back to West European

romances); old popular ballads; modern folk-songs (as, for instance, the French and German songs about the 'Return of the Soldier'); fairy-tales, including Russian tales ('The Soldier and the Devil'); numerous local legends, both clerical and secular; literary *novelle* ('short stories') from diverse oral and written sources (the thirteenth-century Latin story cited by Caesarius von Heisterbach and the fourteenth-century *novella* 'Messer Torello' in Boccaccio's *Decamerone*), and others.

Furthermore, the popular story has been intricately interwoven with many other romantic plots of medieval written and oral literature, as, for instance, Charlemagne's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the fabulous travels of Sultan Saladin in Europe (in *Messer Torello*), the adventures of the 'Knight with the Lion' (*Brunswick*), etc. It has been attached either to historical names (Charlemagne, Henry the Lion, the Duke of Brunswick, or Heinrich von Morungen, the German Minnesinger, the 'Noble Moringer' of the old German ballad); or to the names of famous epic and legendary heroes (Dobrynya Nikitich, Marko Kraleovich, Bová-Beuve d'Hanstone, and others); in the sixteenth century the Wolfenbüttel manuscript of the German *Volksbuch* of Dr. Faustus tells of the miraculous return of a captive nobleman effected by the help of this famous magician.

The oldest Western written record of this narrative dates back to the early eleventh century (the return of Raymond de Bosquet in the Latin 'Liber de Miraculis Sanctae Fides', between 1010 and 1026). The great popularity of the plot is due to its being connected with the time of the crusades, attended as they were with lengthy journeys of Christian knights, pilgrims, and merchants 'beyond the sea', to the East. It was precisely then (about the twelfth-thirteenth centuries) that this plot acquired in medieval romances, novels, and legends the stereotyped form and romantic flavour characteristic of most Western variants (the distant travels and adventures of the hero and the romantic conception of love and fidelity).

The similarity of the plot in its main episodes (in spite of partial differences) induces us to postulate one common source, and, at this, an appropriately ancient one, since the story finds its way into written literature in the first half of the eleventh century. The variability of the leading-motives already in the earliest written records prompts us to look for this source in oral folk tradition, although it has not been possible till now to determine the origin and the character of this tradition, let alone the centre and time of its diffusion.

The story of the 'Return of the Husband' in the Homeric *Odyssey*, the oldest extant version of this epic tale, shows a substantially different character, and it is precisely to this version, not with the European variants of medieval provenance, that the epic narrative of *Alpamysh* is most closely related. The central theme of the Greek epic, as well as of *Alpamysh*, is not the romantic motive of the hero's parting with his young wife and his subsequent recognition at her bridal feast by virtue of a ring or a song, but the heroic struggle of a king in exile against his enemies, who in his absence have taken his house and his wife and have usurped power in his homeland.

A large number of motives in *Alpamysh* remind one of the *Odyssey*. In both poems we have an old father living in poverty and degradation (Baiburi and Laertes), a juvenile son, himself a future hero, oppressed by enemies threatening his life (Yadgar and Telemachus), and an old shepherd, a herdsman and patriarchal slave in the role of the hero's nearest friend and helper (Kultai and the 'worthy swineherd' Eumaeus).

Noteworthy are some coincidences of details which can only in part spring from similarity of situation.

Odysseus asks his son to keep his return a secret so as to put the faithfulness of his slaves to the test ('to know who among them does respect and love thee and me, and who has forgotten us and doth insult thee, so worthy of honour', *Od.* xvi. 306 f.). Like Odysseus, Alpamysh conceals the fact of his return, to learn who among his people have remained faithful and who have turned against him ('with his own eyes did he see the enemies in the midst of the people, he came to spy out the people and the country'). This motive must be ancient, since it is repeated in the Karakalpak version and the Oghuz *Bamsi-Beyrek*.

Just as Eumaeus was deceived more than once by Odysseus' false friends, who lied so many times to him, saying that Odysseus had returned, with the result that now he cannot believe even Odysseus himself, so Kultai is given false hope by strangers who receive from him a reward for good news (*suyunchi*) and then mock at him, causing the old man to distrust Alpamysh until he recognizes him by a birth-mark on his shoulder (compare Euryclea, who recognizes her master by the scar of an old wound).

The episode in which Odysseus is feasted by the swineherd Eumaeus in his patriarchal abode (Books 14 and 15) resembles a similar episode in which Alpamysh is feasted by the herdsman Kultai (with Yadgar taking part in the Karakalpak version).

The vengeance which Odysseus wreaks on the beggar Irus (Book 18) bears some resemblance to the vengeance of Alpamysh on the cook at the wedding-feast of the usurper—an episode recorded repeatedly in both the Kungrat and Oghuz variants.

There is an analogy in *Alpamysh* with the touching episode at Odysseus' palace, when the old dog Argus, lying half dead and forsaken on a dung-hill before the house, recognizes his lost master in the old beggar, crawls towards him, and, exhausted, dies (Book 17). In *Alpamysh* an old camel from the herd of Kaldyrgach, which in the absence of its master had lain for seven years without movement on the ground, suddenly rises, scenting that its master is near, to welcome him home. This episode exists not only in several Kungrat variants of *Alpamysh*, but also in the Anatolian folk-tale of Beyrek, and can thus be considered as one of the oldest motifs in this narrative. A variant of this is a similar episode in the return of Alpamysh in which the old mare, the mother of the wonderful Baychibar, recognizes her offspring and begins to caper round him for joy. These favourite motifs can be multiplied. In one of the Anatolian folk-tales, Beyrek is recognized by his dog (as in the *Odyssey*) and by a colt, the brother of his steed.

In the *Odyssey* there is no contest in the singing of wedding-songs with the bride and her train, an episode which is characteristic of nearly all the national versions of the Asiatic narrative. In the Western variants, the returning husband often disguises himself as a wandering minstrel and is recognized by the songs which he sings at the wedding-feast (e.g. Dobrynya in the Russian *bylina* and many others).

It is only the *Odyssey* and the tale of *Alpamysh* in its various versions which have preserved the heroic dénouement of the 'Return of the Husband': the competition with the suitors and wedding-guests in shooting an arrow from a mighty bow, which only its owner, the returned hero, can wield.

In the *Odyssey* this wedding-game has the character of a genuine bridal contest among the suitors (seemingly repeating the heroic wooing); at the same time it is a means of recognition of the returned master and a test of his manly strength; and, lastly, in the hands of its owner the bow becomes an instrument of his vengeance on the suitors. In Fazil's poem the contest in archery is only a wedding-game, serving as a means of recognizing the rightful owner of Alpamysh's gigantic ancestral bow, not of punishing the usurper. However, a comparison with other variants and versions of the epic tale clearly

demonstrates its original role in a traditional martial contest between the suitors and in the vengeance of the returned hero. In the Oghuz *Bamsi-Beyrek* the husband on his return splits the ring of his rival (the 'false friend') with an arrow from his old bow during a contest with the wedding-guests—most probably a weakened variant of the motive of vengeance. The later omission of this motive in some Asiatic versions is probably due to the desire of singers to subject the pretender, in conformity with the customs of their day, to a protracted and more painful death (various tortures, quartering by wild horses, and similar forms of execution).

This traditional role played by the bow in marriage-tests reflects in poetic form the actual customs and notions of a war-like ('heroic') age. The acquisition of a bow, often of mighty size and fabulous weight, is proof of the strength and valour of the hero, or, more especially, it is a test of his maturity as a warrior. Hence, shooting with a bow is generally the first heroic deed of the future hero, as, for example, in the Uzbek *Alpamysh* of Fazil, and in many heroic folk-tales of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Central Asia. It is quite likely that the bow, as a token of manhood, played an especial role in the bridal rites of ancient peoples (compare, for instance, Herodotus i. 216 on the customs of the Massagetae). One may well suppose that the part played by the bow in the dénouement of the *Odyssey* and *Alpamysh* is connected with this ancient symbolism of bridal-tests.

Finally, despite a profound difference of culture, custom, and mode of life, *Alpamysh* (especially in the classic variant of Fazil Yuldashev) closely resembles the poem ascribed to Homer as a heroicized picture of patriarchal family life and of social life in general at the dawn of class society. In contrast with the medieval feudal variants of the epic narrative recorded at a later time in Europe, we find in both *Alpamysh* and the *Odyssey* a highly poetic representation of a much earlier phase of human society, which Karl Marx most rightly designated as 'the happy childhood of humanity'.

Some of the numerous scholars who have studied the history of the various versions of the 'Return of the Husband' have expressed the opinion that the medieval version of the plot may be traced back to the Homeric *Odyssey*, as chronologically the first record of this narrative set down in written form more than 1,500 years before the earliest of the other versions. But, when it is compared with them, it is precisely the *Odyssey* which

stands apart from the stereotyped 'Western version', diverging from it in a number of essential points. Another theory, announced by a Soviet scholar, the late Professor I. Tolstoy, seems more convincing to me. Tolstoy thought that both types of this epic tale originated in ancient folk-tales, and that each of them contained partly archaic traits and partly innovations.¹² This is true to an even greater degree of *Alpamysh*, which goes with the *Odyssey* against the 'Western version', but contains in a number of cases the same motifs in a typologically older form (compare, for example, the mythological traits of *Alyp-Manash*).

Consequently, the affinities between the narratives of the *Odyssey* and *Alpamysh* even in their most particular details cannot be interpreted as due to the literary 'influence' of the Homeric poem on the prototype of the Central Asian epic tale, even at the earliest stage of its development. Such an influence is historically and geographically inconceivable. The two epic narratives in their primary oral form most likely had a common source in an ancient heroic folk-tale, which was widely current in the folklore of many nations and in another later variant constituted the basis of the Western version.

There exists a whole group of fairy-tales (folk-tales) which have the same double plot as the tale of *Alpamysh*, containing as two successive parts of a single narrative the 'heroic wooing' (a quest for the bride) and the 'return of the husband' (catalogue of Aarne-Thompson, NN 301, 531, 555, a.o.). After several feats (combat with a dragon or other monsters, giants, etc.) the hero wins a beautiful bride together with untold treasures, or a miraculous horse, or a fire-bird, or regains his father's herds, which have been driven off into a kingdom of the nether world, and so on. On his way back, his companions (his elder brothers or friends), who had failed to accomplish the same feat, perfidiously try to get rid of the hero (by severely wounding him and throwing him into a deep underground dungeon), rob him of his bride and other trophies, and, returning home, take the credit for his exploits. The hero is saved (or cured) one way or another, and after long travels and new feats in the underworld, returns to the surface of the earth with the help of a gigantic fabulous bird (the Simurg or Alp-Kara-Kush; thus especially in N 301), and comes home in disguise on the day of his rival's wedding to the abducted bride. A contest in shooting with a bow becomes an instrument of recognition and vengeance in many of the tales of this group, especially in the East (the Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.).

One may assume that the roamings of the hero in the underworld form the groundwork for the story of the twenty years of Odysseus' wanderings in the Homeric poems and are connected with the notion of the hero's travels to the infernal regions, as well as Alpamysh's seven years' captivity in the ninety fathoms deep pit (later, in the underground dungeon, the *zindan*) of the Kalmuck Shah, or the Giaour Bek. In the Western version, the seven years' absence or captivity of the hero is motivated by different historical reasons (departure on a crusade or to some other war, travels abroad, etc.), and it springs finally from the same fabulous (we might say 'mythological') conception. But most of these versions have retained to the end the characteristic motive of a miraculous return from strange lands in the only night left before the wedding-feast with the aid of a magical helper—a demon, a saint, a wonderful horse, and so on. In the *Odyssey*, the hero's return at night during his sleep aboard the magic ship of the Phaeacians shows the same miraculous traits. In the oldest version of *Alpamysh* the hero is rescued from the underground pit by his wonderful horse (whose tail grows miraculously to the length of ninety fathoms); but later on the horse is replaced, in the manner of medieval romances, by the enemy's daughter who falls in love with the prisoner.

The general structure of the fairy-tales of this group, when confronted with *Alpamysh*, as well as with some other ancient heroic folk-tales of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Central Asia, has led me to conclude in my Russian book on this theme that there was an initial link between the 'heroic wooing' and the 'return of the husband', as between two parts of a single plot, and that they had by no means accidentally joined together in *Alpamysh*. The heroic quest for a bride, the captivity of the hero imprisoned by his enemies in the underworld, the abduction of the hero's wife by his rival, and, finally, the return of the hero with the usual recognition and with the punishment of the usurper, all form one single chain of a plot, in which the 'return of the husband' is only the second part of a narrative, whilst being closely connected with the first. The significance of the second part lies in the fact of the singer introducing his audience to a new series, to a 'second round', of adventures of the favourite hero, adventures similar to those with which the audience is already familiar. The singer of the tale again confronts the hero with obstacles and trials which the hero overcomes once more, but now once and for all. That is why the main episodes in the second part are usually a repetition of those

in the first: the meeting with herdsmen (or with a herdsman), the transformation of the hero's outer appearance (later on the disguise), the archery contest with the rival, and some others.

It is especially important to note in this context that there is a legend about the heroic wooing of Odysseus—a race with Penelope's suitors which was not included in the canon of Homer's epic (Apollodoros iii. 10, 9; Pausanias iii. 12, 2). Possibly the aligning of Odysseus' fabulous wanderings with the historical events of the Trojan War and with the *vóσtoι* of its heroes broke the initial link between the two parts of the epic legend and made a prelude to Odysseus' wooing unnecessary.

The Western variants of the 'Return of the Husband', as compared with *Alpamysh* and the *Odyssey*, are evidently an independent and much later reflection of the same tale, which at the time of the crusades under the social conditions and customs of feudal life, acquired the new character of a romantic adventure. But even here we have some cases of a heroic wooing as the prelude to the return (Dobrynya and Nastasya, the warrior-maiden, Charlemagne, the medieval romance of Beuve, *King Horn*, and others). It is, however, possible that in some cases this prelude is of secondary origin, being the result of incorporation within a tale of chivalric adventures or an epic poem.

In the second half of the twelfth century in the German minstrel poems (*Spielmannsepen*) we find repeatedly the story of a heroic wooing of a princess, mostly guarded by a jealous father, with the following second round of the narrative, consisting of the abduction of the bride by emissaries of the father or by a rival, a second quest, and vengeance wreaked on the abductor (*König Rother*, *Orendel*, *Wolfdietrich*, *Salomon und Salme*, and others). The quest in the second part of these poems usually shows traditional motifs of the return of the husband in unrecognizable disguise, sometimes of his presence at his wife's wedding with the rival, and of the vengeance wreaked on the abductor.¹⁴ We have here the result of the same tendency of the singer to introduce the audience to a new series of feats of a popular hero, using here, too, some motifs of the old epic tale.

Considering the *Odyssey* (together with *Alpamysh*) as a record of the oldest, heroic version of this tale, we think first of all of the Ionic colonies in Asia Minor which played an essential, if not decisive, role in the formation of the Homeric epics, notably the *Odyssey*. It is to Asia Minor that we should trace back both the

plot of Odysseus' return in its origins and the links between this plot and the Central Asiatic epic. Moreover, the affinity in a series of particular motifs between the *Odyssey* and *Alpamysh*, especially in its Kungrat variants, is so striking that one can hardly speak of a chance coincidence of motifs. Evidently both *Alpamysh* and the *Odyssey* have sprung from a common 'Eastern' (heroic) version of the tale. We have the *Odyssey* to date this Eastern version of the 'Return of the Husband' back at least to the seventh century B.C. (considering that the *Odyssey* was recorded in its final literary version about 600 B.C.). The oldest form of the Turkic poem, the Altaic *Alyp Manash*, we have dated as a heroic folk-tale back to the time of the Turkic Kaghannate in Central Asia, i.e. to the fifth-seventh centuries A.D. The routes by which the narrative travelled at this ancient period of the history of Asia Minor and of Central Asia are still vague. But in the light of the other analogous facts, this similarity between the *Odyssey* and *Alpamysh* raises once again the question of very ancient contacts between the Ancient World and the cultures of the Near and Middle East, or rather of Eastern influences on the culture of ancient Greece.*

SUPPLEMENT

In my Russian book on *Alpamysh*¹³ I tried to reconstruct the plot of this ancient heroic folk-tale (*Heldenmärchen*) as two successive parts of a single narrative, by comparing *Alpamysh* with popular fairy-tales of this type and with a series of Turkic and Mongolian heroic tales showing basic analogies with them in their construction and main motifs.

Preface. The hero is born in miraculous fashion (either of aged parents or, originally, of the divine ancestor of the clan). He is endowed with magic invulnerability and with a birth-mark as a sign of his descent, and this serves later as a means of recognition. He grows not daily, but hourly, and becomes a warrior at a fabulously early age. His first heroic feat consists in shooting an arrow from a wonderful bow. With the help of the ancestor of the clan, his protector, or by himself, he gains a wonderful steed destined for his quest, and marvellous arms. This beginning may be met with in heroic tales of diverse content.

Part I. The hero learns the name and whereabouts of his destined bride who lives in a far-off country 'over the sea' (a 'divine maiden' in

* With but few changes this paper was read to the London Seminar on Epic (Chairman, A. T. Hatto) at the Institute of Germanic Studies of the University of London, on Monday, 2 May 1966.

some tales which preserve this 'mythological' aspect). If she is a warrior-maiden he defeats her in a heroic contest, or usually defeats his rivals in similar martial competitions (generally three: the horse-race, archery, and wrestling). Originally his rivals are champions of the underworld, who seek to carry off the bride to their own domain by force. To deceive his enemies, the hero turns up at the bridal contest (which has all the character of a wedding-feast) in a humble disguise, transforming his horse likewise into a wretched nag (a little humpbacked colt). After his triumph he carries off the bride to his own country.

Part II. In the 'second round' of the narrative the hero is taken captive by his enemy or rivals during a magic sleep. For seven years he is held captive in the underworld (or in a deep underground dungeon). His wife is abducted by the rival (or rivals), who threatens to marry her by force. In due course the hero is miraculously freed by his wonder-horse or by some other magic helper (later on by the daughter of his keeper, who falls in love with him). He returns home on the day of his wife's wedding to his rival, and after his recognition punishes the usurper. The episodes of the 'Return' largely repeat those of the wooing (meeting with a herdsman, magic transformation or disguise, contest in shooting with the bow as the dénouement).

NOTES

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