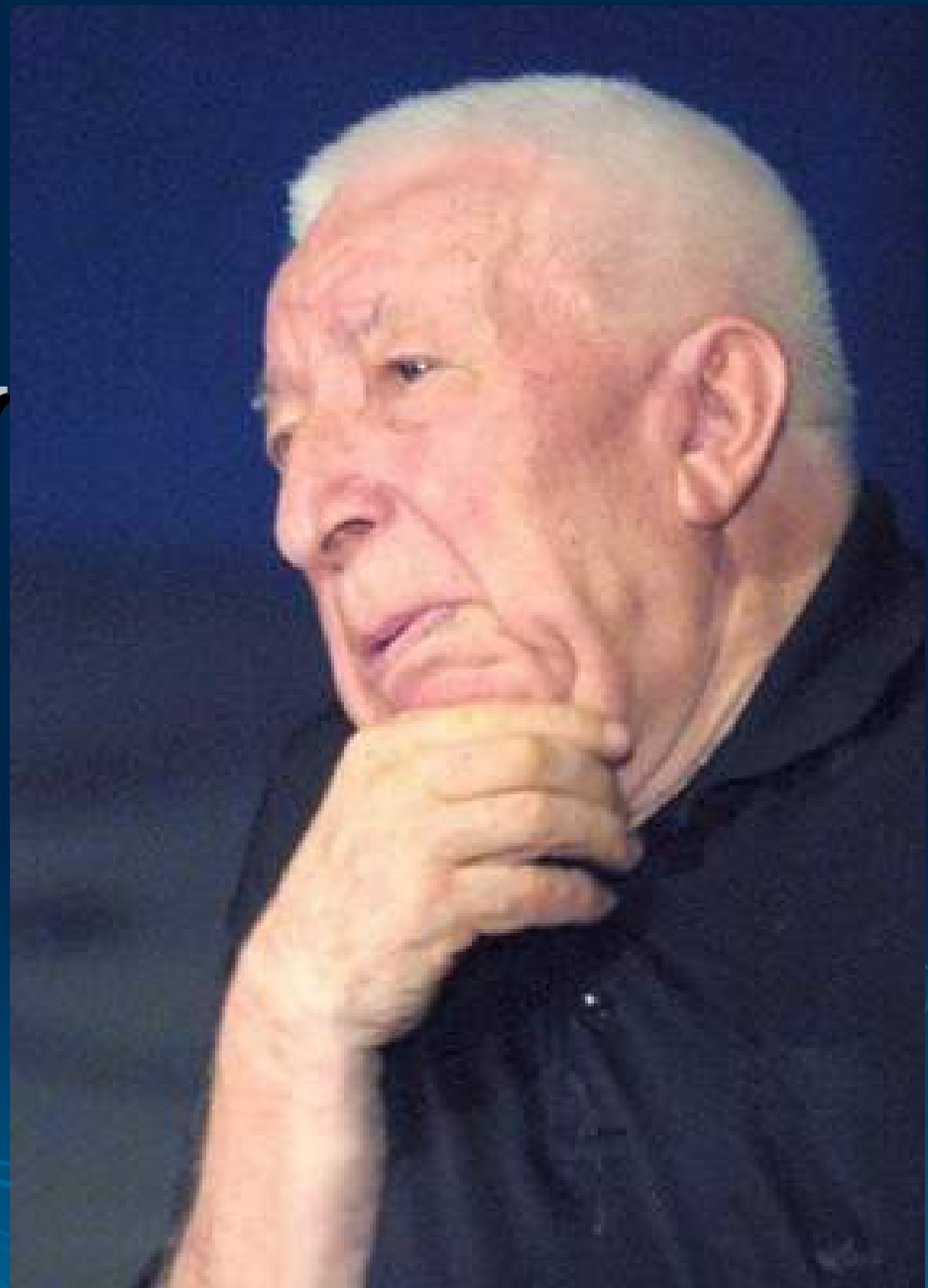


Rasul Gamzatov

1923-2003

By Mikhail Nokhov
Gymnasium #1
Khasavyurt





- **Rasul Gamzatov was born on September 8, 1923, in the Avar village of Tsada in the north-east Caucasus. His father, Gamzat Tsadasa, was a well-known bard.**

- **Bards were held in high honour. When Makhmud, famous poet of the previous generation, sang in a busy market-place, plucking the strings of his pandura for accompaniment, young and old would listen in silence with bated breath: even a bee's flight could be heard.**



**Legendary Bard
Makhmud**



**Gamzat Tsadasa
and Young Rasul**

- The young Rasul, impatient of any interruption, would listen for hours on end to the Avar stories, legends and fables his father would say. «When I was quite small,» he recalls, «he would wrap me in his sheepskin cloak and recite his poems to me, so I knew them all by heart before I ever rode a horse or wore a belt.»



➤ From the small window of his father's flat-roofed house of solid stone he could see a patch of green field spread like a tablecloth below the village and, above it, overhanging rocks.

Gamzat Tsadasa's House in the Village of Tsada.





- As a boy Rasul would climb half a day to join shepherds in the mountains and walk half a day back just to hear a single poem! In the second form at school he walked twelve miles to see an old man, a friend of his father's, who knew many songs, poems and legends. The old man sang and recited to the young boy from morning till night. Rasul wrote down what he could and went happily home with a bagful of poems.

- He was eleven when he wrote his first verse. It was a poem about the local boys who ran down to the clearing where an aeroplane landed for the first time in 1934.
His father was his first tutor in the art of poetry.
- He studied at the pedagogical institute and, in 1940, returned to teach in his village school for a short time. He then took on a series of jobs, including director's assistant in a traveling theatre troupe, and worker for radio and the newspaper *Bolshevik Gor*.

➤ In 1943, he published his first collection of poems, *Fiery Love and Burning Hate*, in Avar, the language of Dagestan. That same year, he became a member of the Soviet Writers Union. The title of his first book of poems was «Love Inspired and Fiery Wrath». He was overjoyed when girls in the mountains who had read it wrote to him—and to his day he couldn't forget his pain on seeing a shepherd in winter pastures using pages of his book to roll a cigarette.



In 1945 with a few books of his own in Avar tucked under his arm and with a meager sum of money in his pocket, he arrived in Moscow to enter the Gorky Institute of Literature. There in the stimulating company of young poets and under the guidance of veteran writers he studied Russian and World literature and the craft of poetry. By turns he fell in love with Blok, Mayakovsky, Yesenin, Pasternak, Tsvetayeva, Bagritsky, the Avar Makhmud and the German Heine.



- **But Pushkin and Lermontov remained his constant love. Over the past fifty years Rasul Gamzatov has been one of the most prolific of Soviet poets. From his pen have come short love lyrics, long narrative poems, ballads, epigrams and philosophical octaves, which have won him millions of devoted readers.**

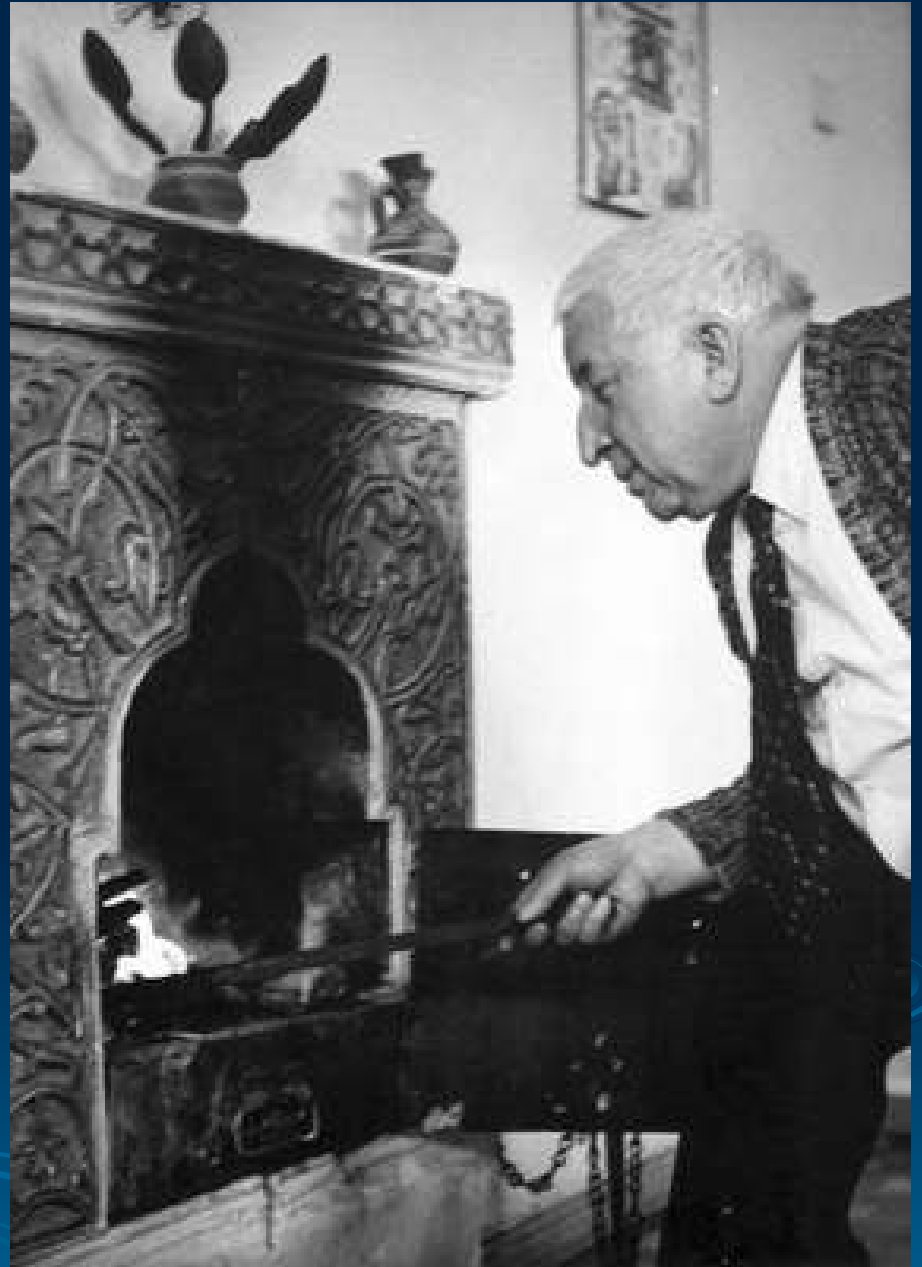


- He lived with his three charming daughters Zarema, Patimat and Salikhat in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan on the shores of the Caspian. His home was open to all.



➤ Of the land of his birth, of its people and its poets he had drawn a fascinating, intimate and human portrait in his recent prose volume of musings and reminiscences «My Dagestan».

- **Winner of the Lenin Prize for poetry and honoured with the title of People's Poet of Dagestan, Rasul Gamzatov was a well-known public figure, chairman of the Union of Dagestan Writers. He traveled widely in Europe, Asia and America.**







➤ **Rasul Gamzatov wrote in his native Avar tongue, a language spoken by no more than 500,000 people. Yet even so the Avars along with the Darghins, Lezghins, Chechens, Lucks, Kumyks are among the largest ethnic groups in the two-million population of Dagestan, where 38 different languages are spoken.**





- **According to old legend the horseman who rode across the world distributing languages threw a whole sackful into the mountain gorges and told the people, «sort them out yourselves!» So the problem of translation is a familiar hurdle to the people of Dagestan, where books are written and published in nine different languages.**

- **Rasul Gamzatov was fortunate in his Russian translators, Naum Grebnev and Yakov Kozlovsky, many of whose brilliant versions have become classics of Russian poetry.**



➤ In 1959, Gamzatov was declared a People's Poet of Dagestan. In 1974 he became a Hero of Socialist Labor.

In 1950, Gamzatov was named Chairman of the Dagestani Writers Union, a post he held until his death.

In connection with the approach of Gamzatov's 90th birthday, the entire of 2013 was declared the Year of Rasul Gamzatov in Dagestan.





- **On 3 November 2003, Rasul Gamzatov**
- 🔊 **passed away in the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow.**



➤ STARS

Stars of night, stars of night,
at my verses peer
like the eyes, like the eyes
of men no longer here.

In the hour of night repose
I can hear them say:
"Be the conscience bright of
those
the war years took away!"

A hillman, true to Dagestan,
no easy path is mine.
Who knows, perhaps, who
knows, perhaps
I'll be a star sometime?

Then at another's verse I'll
peer,
an earth-committed star,
The conscience bright of
those who my
contemporaries are.

➤ Shall my successors only read
translations of Makhmud?
Am I the last Avar to write
and still be understood?

I love this life, the whole wide
world
I view with loving gaze.
But best I love the Soviet land,
which I—in Avar—praise.

I'd die for this free land of toil
what ranges East and West.
But let it be on Avar soil
that in my grave I rest,

And let it be in Avar words
that Avars meeting there
speak of Rasul, their kinsman,
poet.
A poet's son and heir!

➤ MY NATIVE TONGUE

Such follies trouble us in sleep—
last night I dreamt I died:
in a deep ravine I lie unseen,
a bullet in my side.

A stream is thundering nearby,
in vain I wait for help.
Upon the dusty earth I lie,
soon to be dust myself,

For no one knows that here I
die,
and nothing conies in view,
but eagles wheeling in the sky,
a shy young deer or two.

To mourn my most untimely
death
and weep in solemn chorus
come neither mother, wife, nor
friend,
none of the village mourners.

➤ Yet just as I prepare to die
unnoticed and unsung,
I hear two men go passing by
who speak my native tongue.

In a deep ravine I lie unseen,
I pine, but they with glee
relate the wiles of one Hasan,
the intrigues of Ali.

And, as I hear the Avar speech,
my strength comes flowing back—
his is a cure no scholars teach,
a balm the doctors lack.

May other tongues cure other men
in their particular way,
but if tomorrow Avar die,
I'd rather die today!

No matter if it's hardly used
for high affairs of state,
it is the language that I choose—
to me Avar is great!

The Cranes

- I sometimes think that warriors brave who met their death in bloody fight were never buried In a grave but rose as cranes with plumage white.
- Since then unto this very day they pass high overhead and cry, is that not why we often gaze in silence as the cranes go by?
- In far-off foreign lands I see the cranes in evening's dying glow fly quickly past in company, as once on horseback they would go.
- And as they fly far out of reach I hear them calling someone's name. Is that not why our Avar speech recalls the clamour of a crane?
- Across the weary sky they race who friend and kinsman used to be, and in their ranks I see a space – perhaps they are keeping it for me.
- One day I'll join the flock of cranes, with them I shall go winning by, and you who here on earth remain will listen to my strident cry.

Rasul Gamzatov and Ian Frenkel

