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## “THE ISLAMIC BREAKTHROUGH:” MUSLIM LITERATURE IN SEARCH OF IDEOLOGY

*The pleasure afforded by a deft turn of phrase was valued so highly that when Mecca was destroyed by a flood in 823 and the caliph sent money and a letter of consolation, it was given to understand that the “people of Mecca appreciated the letter more than the money.”*

*A. Mets, The Islamic Renaissance*

### A b s t r a c t

**T**he next season of the literary prize “The Islamic Breakthrough” was announced in October 2006. This is the second year a contest has been held for this prize, after it arose on the basis of a web poetry competition called “Reading the Sweet Koran” held with the support of the Federal Press and Mass Media Agency. The main goal of the award is to ignite Russian society’s interest

in the Muslim culture. Last season, the journal *Druzhba narodov* (Friendship of Nations), the Ummah Publishing House, and the Sobranie Association of Public Organizations acted as the founders of the award. Original (untranslated) works by currently living authors in the Russian language competed for the prize. There were three categories: “Poetry,” “Prose,” and “Journalism.”

If we are to believe the Regulations of the Open Literary Prize “The Islamic Breakthrough,” its main goal is “to awaken and ignite Russians’ interest in Islam.” To be honest, this is rather a bizarre goal. Is it not rather absurd to be trying to awaken and ignite interest in one of the largest world religions on the planet, which has occupied the center of mankind’s, whereby not only progressive mankind’s, attention for several decades now? The last thing Islam needs at present is an awakening interest in it. What Islam and the Muslims need today (in spite of the coquettish statements of certain Muslim officials) is the formation of a positive image of this great world religion.

Of course, fiction is a powerful weapon capable of having an effect on the minds of those who are still able to discern letters amidst the deluge of numbers and symbols. It is only unfortunate that far from everyone is capable of intelligently handling this double-edged sword. You could get cut!

We all know that experiments do not always end well, and when non-professionals are involved, the chances of success are practically nil. The complete absence of relevant literary traditions dooms the formation of Muslim fiction in Russia to a sure death before it is even born. It is not surprising that instituting a Muslim literary prize in Russia aroused bewilderment in many, to say the least.

"Islamic? Breakthrough? Where are you going to get the authors from? Do you only accept theological works?" writers I know asked me and took fright when they heard that "The Islamic Breakthrough" prize claims no more and no less than the role of "midwife" for Muslim literature in Russia.

Later I was disappointed to learn that I do not take precedence in trying to build a basis for contemporary Muslim literature. As early as the last quarter of the 20th century, an Islamization campaign began in Malayan literature. You might be wondering what Confucian-Muslim Malaysia has to do with secular Orthodox Russia?

But the thing is that by the beginning of the 1970s, that is, by the beginning of that very Islamization campaign, there was no longer any Muslim literature in Malaysia, nor was there any in other Muslim countries, despite the previous literary tradition closely tied with Islam. So the claim that Malayan literature would not have come about without Islam can to one extent or another be projected onto the literature of many Muslim states.

In the Middle Ages and the New Age, in addition to a significant stratum of scientific-popular literature in the Arabic-script Malayan language, which acquainted readers with the basics of Muslim theology, as well as with the biographies of outstanding figures of Muslim history, literary works were also well known in Malaysia: Sufi poems (*shairs*), and so-called novels in prose and verse (*hikayats* and *shairs*, respectively) from the 18th century, in which Islamic motifs and themes were used. For example, the main character of the heroic poem *Shaire on Siti Zubaid*—the wife of a Muslim ruler—not only frees his husband from Chinese captivity, but also converts the local czarinas to Islam.<sup>1</sup>

But by the mid-20th century, Malayan literature was Westernized, and the government had to exert great effort to interest local writers in the Islamic problem: literary awards were instituted, discussions were held in the press with the participation of well-known writers, and so on.

As M.M. Bakhtin noted (and it is difficult not to agree with a classicist), the history of literature cannot be separated from the history of culture. Does this mean that we can think nothing of it and classify the creative works of some Muslim authors, in which Islamic traditions are undoubtedly reflected to this day, as Muslim literature? In other words, should the theme determine whether a work belongs to this literature? If the heroes of the works are Muslims or they talk about Islam and Muslim traditions, can these works be called Muslim?

And what are we to do about those authors who are not Muslims but use Islamic topics in their creative work? If we follow this theoretical approach, Pushkin's *Podrazhanie Koranu* (Imitations of the Koran) can automatically be classified as a Muslim work, which is essentially laughable, if we recall the Pushkin's own well-known comment about his own poetry: "'The unrighteous,' writes Muhammad, '...think that the Koran is a collection of new lies and old fables.' The opinion of these *unrighteous* is, of course, justified; but, despite this, many moral truths are set forth in the Koran in strong and poetic fashions." Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, in which the author presents his version of the history of the birth of Islam, is also Muslim literature according to all the technical signs.

It is equally unfair to only regard literature as Muslim on the grounds that it was written by a Muslim.

Another more sensible and functional approach, in my view, makes it possible to classify only those works as Muslim literature that touch on the everyday problems of Islam and Muslims in the main storyline. For example, the question of retaining Islamic values in today's family. Not writing about topics that are pertinent for Muslims, referring only to the fact that there is no text more perfect than the Koran, is not the best solution for "the engineers of human souls." Muslim writers are faced with the task of looking at the defects of the world around us through the eyes of a Muslim, objectively, without bigotry and hypocrisy.

The biographical works of outstanding figures of Muslim history should also be mentioned. These works also directly relate to Muslim literature.

<sup>1</sup> See: B.B. Parnikel. "Kampaniia za islamizatsiiu malaiskoi literatury (posledniaia chetvert XX v.) i ee predystoriia," in: *Religii v razvitiu literatur Azii i Afriki XX veka*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 2006, p. 72.

There is no need to talk about spiritual poetry. As long as people are interested in Sufi poetry, which does not have any national boundaries, there will always be the hope of a revival in Muslim literature.

*In other words, Muslim literature is not literature "about Islam," but pro-Islamic literature.* Muslim literature is in the full sense high-quality poems, verses, novels, stories, tales, and so on, and not biased and moralizing psalms with an ideal positive hero and indistinct antiheroes. We should realize that there are not that many authors who will be able to find a golden mean between religion as such and literature. But is quantity really that important?...

In 2005, I, as one of the founding fathers of "The Islamic Breakthrough" prize, was one of the jury members, among whom were also people with different views, such as writer and editor-in-chief of *Druzhiba narodov* A.L. Ebanoidze, writer and politician E.V. Limonov, poet and publisher I.V. Kormiltsev, and writer S.A. Shargunov. I also (because of the meager funds offered by sponsors) carried out the function of reader and, in this way, had the opportunity to acquaint myself with all the works submitted to contend for the prize. In this respect, I ask the reader's apology in advance if, when setting forth my view of the results of the award's first season, I refer from time to time to works not included on the Short List, but which without a doubt deserve serious (or not very serious) attention.

For convenience sake, I have broken down the works into three sections, each of which I entitled in the same way as each of the prize categories: "Poetry," "Prose," and "Journalism."

## Poetry

Turning the web poetry competition "Reading the Sweet Koran" into the literary prize "The Islamic Breakthrough" (by introducing two more categories—"Prose" and "Journalism") was, as subsequent experience showed, the only correct decision. However the poetic component of the prize contenders proved, to the organizers' surprise, beyond all criticism. I long did not want to believe that the great literature that gave the Russian-reading public Pushkin's even not entirely Muslim *Po-drazhania Koranu* could produce nothing more commendable than the poem *El-Mina (Vzgliad s moria na menia)* (El-Mina [View of Me from the Sea]):

Sea  
Ships  
Islands  
Boats  
Beach  
Palms  
People  
Hotel  
Restaurant  
Terrace  
Armchair  
Coca-Cola  
Me

The author of this Coca-Cola advertisement poem is Sergei Isaev, a former Franciscan and Hospitaller monk, who converted to Islam. When we first met each other, I asked him straight out: "Why Coca-Cola? In poems submitted to 'The Islamic Breakthrough' we should be drinking Mecca-Cola." Isaev smiled sadly in reply: "I can't stand cola: either Coca or Mecca."

Justifying his strange, at first glance, choice, Ilya Kormiltsev, who was the jury member responsible for the "Poetry" category, noted sadly that Isaev's poem was the only one that related to Muslim poetry as such. All the others were nothing more than rather unsuccessful attempts at stylization "in

the Oriental style.” But not all the jury members shared the viewpoint of Nautilus’ former songwriter. Most were in favor of giving first place to Petersburg Islam expert Mikhail Rodionov, the author of a free translation of several verses from the Surah “The Elephant” done way back in 1965.

Have you seen what your Lord did to the people of the elephant?  
 Did He not cause their schemes to backfire?  
 He turned their arrogance to vainglory:  
 By sending upon them swarms of birds  
 That struck their shields with their beaks  
 And pecked out their eyes.  
 God’s thunder raged over them  
 And showered them with hard stones.  
 Falling like ears under the scythe,  
 He made them like chewed up hay.

The dispute about what is more important in poetry—the form or the content—was of principal significance not only for the “Poetry” category, but also for the entire award in general. Keeping a balance between a high-quality literary “wrapping” and contents relevant to the award’s name proved to be a most difficult task. The “Journalism” and in part the “Prose” categories coped with this task quite well. I will talk about that below.

As for Isaev’s poems, far from all of them can be classified as Muslim poetry, that is, poetry using Islamic topics. Let’s take that ill-fated *El-Mina* as an example. I think the only works by Isaev that can really be called Muslim are the virtuous *Musul’manka* (Muslim Woman) and the impossibly protracted *Krepost’ Sindzhil* (Fortress of Saint-Gilles), in which a former monk bellicosely cries:

Leave our faith alone!  
 Leave our mosques alone!  
 Leave our cities alone!  
 Leave our people alone!

Reading the poems of the prize-winners, I just could not rid myself of a bothersome question: if this is *what* contemporary Muslim poetry is like, perhaps it would be better to wait until the proper time, rather than trying to extract a premature child out of its mother’s womb with forceps?

If I had given Isaev first place, it would not have been for his literary merits, but for his priceless gift of prophecy, which so many, sometimes very talented, poets lack. The poem *Esli zavtra nachniotsia voina* (If a War Starts Tomorrow) was written before the Lebanese-Israeli war of the summer of 2006:

If a war  
 Starts  
 Tomorrow...

What will it change  
 In the world,  
 If a war  
 Starts  
 Tomorrow?!

The wind tosses  
 The branches  
 Of the Lebanese cedar—  
 An evil  
 Western wind.

I fall asleep  
Peacefully,  
Without fear—  
But all the same:

What will happen to the cedar,  
If a war  
Starts  
Tomorrow?...

However, whereas Isaev walks through the ancient ruins of the Fortress of Saint-Gilles in search of catharsis, the other two poets from the Short List (Marina Kivirian and Mikhail Rodionov, already mentioned) find travel to the East primarily an exciting adventure, sometimes with a romantic “filling:”

Finding myself far from home,  
In the holy days of Ramadan,  
I encountered beautiful Ali  
By the mosque of Great Kayruan.

After this meeting, the young poetess and artist was filled with an overwhelming desire to see the beautiful young man again:

If the chance to travel arises again—  
I will cast away distant lands,  
But will return to look once more  
On the Great mosque of Kayruan.

The only antidote to the impotence of contemporary Muslim poetry in Russia might be the locally produced rubais, if they a) were not so numerous and b) had at least some originality. I will not risk trying the reader’s patience by presenting the creative works of the other “Khayyams.”

The Islamic breakthrough in poetry failed...

## Prose

After the critics castigated the novel about Apostle Paul, prose writer from Ufa Svetlana Churaeva wrote another novel that was hardly noticed by the critics called *Nizhe neba* (Lower than Heaven), which amazed the chairman of the prize jury A.L. Ebanoidze with its “beauty of moral feeling.” Admittedly, people who knew the prototype of the work’s main hero—Bashkirian artist Devletkildeev—claim that he was an entirely different person. But is this important? The novel talks not so much about a specific artist, as about the problems of freedom of creativity for the believer and, in this case, for the Muslim.

It is a well-known fact that Islam prohibits depicting any live beings, at least if the matter concerns painting, and not photography. Devletkildeev, on the other hand, is, as though deliberately, a talented portrait-painter. Blessed by God.

After overcoming all the internal prohibitions, the artist chooses freedom of creativity. He makes this choice in order, at the end of his life, to come to the following conclusion when asked by his young and guileless student: “What for? God draws flowers more beautifully than you. And makes sickness more terrible, and bread more aromatic. But when you look at a painting, when you listen to music, when you cry over a book, you know that God exists.”

The art of the artist becomes an act of praising the Almighty, rapture over His inimitable creations, which in spite of everything, you want to put on record and keep for your descendents.

There is no place for preaching in Churaeva's novel, she does not moralize and does not enlighten. If the reader wants to find out something new about Islam, it will hardly be worth reading *Nizhe neba*. Churaeva's novel was written for those who are interested in the life of Russian Muslims. In this sense, *Nizhe neba* is a Muslim novel to the same extent as Tarkovskiy's *Andrei Rublev* is a Christian film.

The complete opposite to the novel *Nizhe neba* is Holm van Zaitchik's anti-utopian novel *Delo nepogashennoi luny* (The Case of the Unextinguished Moon), where events unfolded in Palestine, however not real Palestine, but a fictitious one that never was and possibly never will be. The Arabs who sheltered the Jews fleeing from the Nazis and lived with them in complete harmony are no less fantastical than the fox-werewolves or independent Ukrainian dervishes from other novels by van Zaitchik. But this entertainingly written fairy tale "on the verge of a foul" is something there is not enough of in contemporary Russian literature.

*Delo nepogashennoi luny* was welcomed with open arms in Israel, which gave reason for several cyber Muslims—the denizens of forums—to backbite: "whose hands are you playing into?" Does this mean you should reject everything your ideological adversaries like merely out of a spirit of contradiction? The novel *Delo nepogashennoi luny* is near and dear to the Muslims because the ideas of humanism preached by van Zaitchik's author—"translators" in no way run counter to the moral standards of Islam.

The fact that the jury's choice of van Zaitchik's novel was justified is confirmed by other novels and stories in the genre of alternative-historical prose among the large number of entries for the prize. Dmitri Akhtiamov's *Russkiy khalifat* (The Russian Caliphate) is a good bet, in which he sets forth Russian history, beginning with Prince Vladimir after he converted to Islam along with the rest of Old Russia.

What is more, essentially not one work was submitted for the prize in which topics from Muslim history were used. And we all know that there are tons of such topics.

The only and, fortunately, very successful exception is the beautiful story by Kalam Alyshanov "I uzkiy serp luny—pechali simbol" (And the Sliver of a Sickle Moon—the Symbol of Sorrow), which plays up the well-known Koranic topic of the disappearance of the younger wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Aisha, during a campaign.

Why do Muslim writers not recall the glorious past of Islam in their works? The answer is easy to surmise. Most of the author-contenders for the prize are terribly illiterate. They acquired their knowledge about Islam from popular brochures of dubious origin, which are hardly likely to inspire the creation of anything more than books like *Russkiy khalifat*, *Islamskiy proryv* (The Islamic Breakthrough), and others.

The creator of historical novels should have at least some knowledge about the era he is describing. All that is needed to think up yet one more anti-utopian novel is a little imagination and the utmost literary impudence.

## Journalism

Everyone understands the word "journalism" differently in Russia. For some, journalism is what is published on the last pages of thick magazines. For others, it is yesterday's conversation with friends recorded in a rough-and-ready fashion. "Journalism is everything that is not poetry or prose," says the third. And all will be to a certain extent correct.

So there is nothing surprising about the fact that such disparate pieces as a theological work by Karelian mufti called *Blagotvoritel'nost v islame. Zakiat* (Charity in Islam. Zakat), notes by a psychotherapist from Piatigorsk entitled *Islam otkryvaet vsemu miru put' k fizicheskomu i psikhicheskomu sovershenstvu* (Islam Opens the Way to Physical and Psychic Perfection), the reminiscences of a front-line soldier about his first love for a Muslim girl, an article on the role of women in the Islamic

economy, a regional study monograph called *Moskva musul'manskaia* (Muslim Moscow), a travel novel about Lebanon by the same irrepressible Isaev, and many more contended for the prize in the "Journalism" category.

But if there had been a separate category called "Oddities" in the competition, the winner here would probably have been Lazar Fleischman, a 79-year-old engineer electrician as well as amateur theologian from near Tel Aviv—the author of the work *Dzhikhad protiv Izrailia—eto Dzhikhad protiv Allaha* (Jihad Against Israel is Jihad Against Allah). Relying on a way outmoded translation of the meanings of the Koran by Sablukov with "Ъ" and "Ѣ" ["yers" and "yats"—old Cyrillic letters] and elevating it almost to the rank of the Word of God, the former repatriate from "the city of Orel" proves that Muslims should make an immense fuss over Jews if they do not want to bring the wrath of Allah down on themselves.

For lack of real opponents, the author, continuing the famous tradition of Jacob's struggle with God, engages in a bitter debate now with Allah, now with Academician Primakov. "How splendidly you refuted the Academician! (why with a capital letter? Or is the theologian placing Primakov on the same level as Allah?—*R.B.*)," boasts Fleischman after "chopping in," not very successfully, a few quotes from the works of the former Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and several English publications of the middle of the last century. After refuting the Academician, Fleischman descends to criticizing an Arab professor (with a small letter).

This pamphlet ends with an accursed economic question: the theologian seriously wracks his brains over how much gold must be paid to the Palestinians for them to cleanse their land for those to whom it rightly belongs: "And when the Arab Palestinians and the entire Muslim world find out the true truths (the only thing left for us to do is take our hats off to the "true truths."—*R.B.*) of the Koran—the Holy Land bestowed on the Jews by Allah and bequeathed to them—and believe in these truths of the Koran, the need for a conscious voluntary transfer will inevitably come to full fruition. Not an ordinary transfer, but a golden one... It appears we are to subject ourselves to the will of Allah, but not with empty hands. For there are many poor people and even very poor people among them. And if the Torah did not permit the Jew-slave owner to set his slaves free empty-handed, it stands to reason that our relatives along Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's lines should not be allowed to go without compensation either. And not small compensations, but those designated by Allah."

Such authors shouldn't be claiming any "The Islamic Breakthrough" prize, but going straight for the Nobel Peace Prize. And the money received should be given to the Palestinian brothers.

It is amazing thing, but the jury did not get a peep of journalistic works on the Palestinian problem (with the exception of Fleischman's opus mentioned). The same can be said of the war in Chechnia: no attempts were seen at "The Islamic Breakthrough" competition to understand what is going on in the republic from the Muslim viewpoint. The authors who sent their novels on the latest Chechen wars to compete for the award were more interested in combat action than philosophy.

Unfortunately, the large number of autobiographical essays by Muslims who freely converted to Islam (and not those who were made to convert to Islam) were superficial and did not go beyond the bounds of a pointless theological dispute. The overwhelming number of such authors are intellectuals who found the answers to many of their own questions in Islam.

It goes without saying that the researcher who at some point takes up study of the phenomenon of Russian Muslims will not be able to manage without analyzing their creative work: the religious fervor of Russian Muslims often assumes literary forms. In "The Islamic Breakthrough," they make up more than 3/4 of the prize contenders. Ethnic Muslims, on the other hand, who are dabbling their hand in writing, are more occupied with national topics. For example, if we analyze the geographical location of the contenders, we are immediately struck by the essentially total absence of works from the Northern Caucasus and Tatarstan. Most of the works submitted came from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and, for some reason, Riga.

Leftist intellectuals who have a liking for Islam constitute a special group among the author-contenders for the prize; its most striking representative in contemporary Russian literature is Alexei Tsvetkov, Jr. His travel essay on Istanbul *Vtoroi Rim v aprele, ili nastoichivoe chuvstvo Vsevyshnego* (The Second Rome in April, or An Insistent Sense of the Almighty)<sup>2</sup> could have competed with the well-known essay by Joseph Brodsky *Puteshestvie v Stambul* (Journey to Istanbul). And whereas Brodsky likens Istanbul's mosques to toads, Tsvetkov studies the city architecture not through the eyes of a naturalist, but as a gourmet: "The porphyritic, like frozen meat, court columns are what I remember about the mosques of Beyazit;" "From afar, Eyüp looks like a pile of sugar on a hill overgrown with black cypresses. Close up, the sugar turns out to be endless rows of gravestones. After a long trek up the hill, you suddenly turn into a cemetery and find yourself in a memorial forest of white pillars covered with an unfamiliar alphabet. At some of them, relatives sing quietly, turning their palms skyward. I would like to hide forever among these sugar-like tombstones from everything in the world, or, at least, sit down for a long time."

In contrast to some Muslim authors, who were unable to figure out their relationship with God, and in contrast to Brodsky, who did not feel the beauty of Islam, it seems that Tsvetkov managed to do both: "An ant, who runs along the lines all of its life, gradually begins to understand what is written, and also surmises something about the author, this is what a sense of the Almighty is."

But Tsvetkov would not be Tsvetkov if he had not found red alavits (*al-'alaviyya*)—Muslim dissidents fighting for justice under a mixture of Islamic and Communist slogans—while walking among the thousand-year walls of Constantinople.

I have often heard authors I respect say that writing travel essays is a waste of time. "Who needs travel notes in our day and age, when anyone can take if not an actual, at least a virtual, journey to essentially any place in the world," one well-wisher said to me. After reading Tsvetkov's *Vtoroi Rim v aprele...*, I understood that it is too early to hand over the genre of travel essays to young participants contending for the "Debut" prize and suffering from a shortage of topics.

I have always been a curious tourist to the point of being a pain in the neck. When I found myself in Istanbul for the first time, I tried to see everything, or almost everything, there was to see in this city. When I returned to Russia, I enjoyed watching programs about Istanbul, reveling in the fact that I had been to places where the average tourist had not looked. After reading Tsvetkov's essay, I understood that I knew nothing about true Istanbul...

Julia Prudnikova, who was on the Short List with her essay *Glavnaia musul'manskaia kniga* (The Main Muslim Book) and critical article called "Islam ot protivnogo" (Islam Interpreted by Contraries), can be included among the leftist intellectuals who have a liking for Islam.<sup>3</sup>

It is not often that poetry at the end of a prose work by the same author is successful. Prudnikova's case, who took second place in the "Journalism" category, is no exception. The three poems at the end of the essay *Glavnaia musul'manskaia kniga* significantly spoil the impression created by the earlier prose relating the young author's relationship with the Koran.

Two of the three poems are a free translation of the meanings of two short Surah of the Koran "The Traducer" and "The Earthquake." For all their shortcomings, in comparison with the translation of the Koran by Porokhova, which hangs helplessly in the airless space between science and literature, Prudnikova's poetry looks somehow convincing. Keeping in mind the low level of the works in the "Poetry" category, I would have raised it with the poems from *Glavnaia musul'manskaia kniga*. The "Journalism" category would definitely not have suffered from this.

The article called "Islam ot protivnogo," which took the book that gave the award its name to pieces, is a significant argument in favor of the jury members' impartiality. At first the impression is created that Prudnikova entirely yields to the extremely emotional criticism of the obviously hopeless novel by Akhtiamov, but the article ends with important conclusions that relate to Muslim literature

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Tsvetkov, "Vtoroi Rim v aprele, ili nastoichivoe chuvstvo Vsevyshnego," *Druzhba narodov*, No. 6, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See: J. Prudnikova, "Islam ot protivnogo," *Druzhba narodov*, No. 8, 2006.



as a whole. Successfully comparing Akhtiamov's<sup>4</sup> *Islamskiy proryv* with Chudinova's *Mechet' parizhskoi bogomateri* (The Mosque of Our Lady of Paris), the author claims: "The idea of an 'Orthodox' novel by Chudinova is just as far from Christianity as the idea of the 'Islamic' novel sermon by Akhtiamov is from Islam."

If Akhtiamov's novel is in fact capable of arousing a negative reaction in people who have a liking for Islam (and *Glavnaia musul'manskaia kniga* does not leave any doubt about this), what can we say about those who relate to the Muslim religion at least with mistrust? Prudnikova is ever so right: "works" like Akhtiamov's *Islamskiy proryv* and Chudinova's *Mechet' parizhskoi bogomateri* can do much more damage to Islam and Christianity, respectively, than any conceived hostile propaganda.

In contrast to Tsvetkov's and Prudnikova's works, Alfinora Gafurova's biographical essay *Ataulla Bayazitov* is written in a meager style and does not indulge the reader with sharp turns in storyline. The hero of the essay himself is probably to blame in part for this. The merit of the author of *Ataulla Bayazitov* lies in something else: in 1990, it was Alfinora Gafurova who revived the newspaper *Nur* (Light) created at the beginning of the 20th century by a Tatar public and religious figure, Ataulla Bayazitov. Admittedly, pre-revolutionary *Nur*, in contrast to the current, post-Soviet publication, was to a greater extent Islamic than Tatar. In our day and age, the newspaper, on the contrary, gives priority to the national over the religious, although (another paradox of the globalization era!) it comes out in Russian.

## C o n c l u s i o n s

The seasons to come may make it possible to correct several of the author's conclusions about the prize. For the time being, however, the works submitted to the organizing committee of "The Islamic Breakthrough" during the second season announced in October 2006 only confirm the observations made earlier and summarized below:

- most of the authors of works on the Islamic theme are Russian Muslim neophytes;
- works written by members of the leftist intelligentsia who have a liking for Islam have high literary quality and understanding;
- among the works submitted to contend for the prize there are none in which topics from the history of Islam and the Muslim world were used;
- not one (!) work expresses any hate for the members of other religions, or criticizes any particular confession, even when the matter concerns conversion from Christianity to Islam;
- poetry, as a rule, is of a very low quality with a prevalence of Orientalist themes;
- a style that tends toward describing everyday phenomena is clearly traced in the prose;
- a new trend is observed in the alternative history genre: the depiction of the main dogmas of Islam in literary form;
- no attempts are made in the works presented to look at the war in Chechnia through the eyes of today's Russian Muslim.

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<sup>4</sup> The first attempt to set forth several provisions of Islam and the Shari'a in the form of literary works was the novel by R. Bekkin called *Islam from Monk Bahira* published in 2002. His second publication was sent to press at the Ultra Culture Publishing House in 2006.