**Aqyn agha? Abai Zholy as socialist realism and as literary history**

Gabriel McGuire

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nazarbayev University, Kabanbai Batyr 53, Astana, Kazakhstan

**A R T I C L E   I N F O**

**Article history:**
Received 10 December 2017
Accepted 10 December 2017
Available online 21 December 2017

**Keywords:**
Kazakh literary history
socialist realism
oral literature
Abai Zholy
Zar Zaman

**A B S T R A C T**

In Mukhtar Auezov’s 1942 novel *Abai Zholy*, socialism is an end anticipated not just by history but more specifically by Kazakh literary history. In his earlier scholarly writings, Auezov had presented Abai as a transformational figure in the emergence of written Kazakh literature. In the novel, Abai becomes not only a literary innovator but also a political reformist: Auezov’s Abai is horrified by the harsh and feudalistic behavior of his father Qunanbai, a wealthy local leader, and finds companionship and inspiration in his encounters with a series of famous 19th century Kazakh aqyns (bards). Auezov thus used *Abai Zholy* to argue that Kazakh folk literature had always been animated by a spirit of social critique which, in its laments and desires, had anticipated the Soviet world. This paper compares these aqyns’ depiction in the novel first with Auezov’s earlier scholarship on the 19th century and second with the content of the aqyns’ own surviving works. These ideas reflected both contemporary shifts in Soviet nationalities policy and the influence of socialist realist literary models, which commonly staged both literary history and generational conflicts as allegories of political change.

Copyright © 2018, Asia-Pacific Research Center, Hanyang University. Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Mukhtar Auezov’s *Abai Zholy* is literary history written as revolutionary epic.1 In the novel, Auezov fused his enduring preoccupation with Kazakh literary history with his specific interest in the 19th century Kazakh essayist and poet Abai Qunanbaiuly to create a text hailed as a classic of socialist realism. Auezov’s interest in Abai dated to his earliest years: in a 1918 essay entitled “Abai, his works and craft,” he made expansive claims for Abai’s social and literary significance. For earlier poets, he wrote, verbal dexterity had been not an art but only a device to gain food and shelter, and so “the aqyn and the beggar had gone hand in hand;” Abai was the first to use poetry “to depict the human character, to tell its flaws, and show the path to humanism” (1918/2014, p. 42). In later works, Auezov continued to present Abai as transformational in his understanding of the link between verbal art and humanism, but he replaced the harsh evaluation of earlier aqyns with sophisticated explorations of the genres and themes of Kazakh oral literature. Auezov’s 1927/2014 *Adebiet Tarikhy* (*History of Literature*)—a foundational attempt to organize Kazakh oral literature into a history of genres—contained detailed descriptions of earlier aqyns along with transcriptions and analyses of their works. In his novel, Auezov repeatedly shows the young Abai meeting with Kazakh aqyns who are fictionalized versions...
of the real 19th century aqyns who had earlier figured in Auezov’s scholarly works. Abai listens to their songs, reflects on their hidden messages, discusses these themes with the aqyns themselves, and is inspired to become an aqyn himself. Abai’s revolutionary literary conscience is, in Auezov’s telling, a weapon for social justice forged from the raw ore of Kazakh oral literature.

The historical Abai (1845–1904) was an odd choice as the hero of a socialist realist novel. He came from a wealthy and powerful family, was the son of the district’s Agha Sultan, in his youth studied at a medrese, had multiple wives, and even served as an administrator for the Tsarist authorities. Abai was plausible as a Soviet hero largely due to his ties with Russian revolutionary thought: in his late 20s he elected to travel to Semipalatinsk to study in a Russian school and there became close friends with Russian exiles and dissidents, whose ideas influenced Abai’s most famous work, a collection of 45 short essays entitled the Qara Sozder (Black Words) in which he advocates for a Russian-inflected path to modernity. Abai (1897–1961) was similarly a Kazakh poet and essayist was a task of chapters, and added new sections to others. This paper uses specific details of the textual history of the first volume in order to examine the strategies Auezov followed as he attempted to craft a novel that would marry the conventions of socialist realism with a literary genealogy in which Abai was at once the heir of Kazakh oral literature and the forefather of Soviet Kazakh literature.

2. Socialist realism and nationalism

Stalin, so the story goes, coined both the famous description of authors as ‘engineers of human souls,’ the injunction that this meant they must depict ‘reality in its revolutionary development,’ and the conclusion that all this was done through a genre to be known as ‘socialist realism.’ These terms – enshrined as official policy at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 –problematically demanded modes of writing at once realistic and fantastic, for the ‘reality’ to be depicted was not the Soviet Union as it was but socialism as it would surely become (Clark, 2000, esp. p. 36–41). These ambitions meant that the socialist realist novel was a kind of Dr. Jekyll to the Mr. Hyde of Bakhtin’s ‘novel.’ The epic differs from the novel, Bakhtin wrote, in that the former describes a complete and temporally distant world with no room for “open endedness, indecision, indeterminacy,” while the latter – inhabited by heroes whose faces are but the first in a series of masks and animated by the anarchic energies of the carnivalesque – offers a “a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7). In the classic novels of socialist realism, exemplary Soviet citizens fought in the Revolution, struggled to re-open a factory or organize a kolkhoz, furiously confronted kulaks or careerists bureaucrats, and along the way gradually learned to harness their earlier-unbridled energy.

5 This focus on the tension between Abai Zholy and the oral literary texts incorporated builds on the discussion of intertextuality, authority, and the emergence of ‘intertextual gaps’ in Bauman and Briggs (2003), and Bauman (2004).

6 The revision of classics of socialist realism in order to ensure their conformity with changing ideological norms was a standard part of Soviet literary culture. The revisions to Auezov’s Abai Zholy were comparatively limited in comparison with other works – there were at least four substantial revisions to Fedor Gladkov’s Cement between its initial publication in 1925 and its final publication in 1958, the cumulative effect of which were to substantially simplify the novel’s depiction of the NEP-era Soviet Union – see Laursen (2006).

7 For detailed descriptions of the adoption of the term socialist realism at the 1934 conference, see Brooks (1994) and Schild (2010). On socialist realism as a genre, see the studies of Clark (2000), Robin (1992), and Dobrenko (2007).
This was a mode of socialist realist writing championed by Maksim Gor’kii, but one whose ‘realism’ decisively differed from the ‘realism’ Georg Lukács found in Gor’kii’s own pre-Revolutionary writings. Lukács wrote that Gor’kii’s great task was to describe “the seething witch’s cauldron in which history is brewing the new classes of capitalist society out of the old rotten, feudal, and semi-feudal estates,” and Gor’kii’s great talent was to reveal this through his characters’ own muddled, conflicted, and contradictory experience of being molded into members of a class (Lukács, 2002, p. 210). But where Gor’kii’s characters’ inner conflicts index their immersion in the economic struggles of the pre-revolutionary era, the inner world of the heroes of socialist realist historical fiction merely model a utopia in which these tensions will have been harmoniously resolved. Socialist realist novels thus sought in the future what both Bakhtin and Lukács claimed the epic had found in the past: an uncontested and unitary society defended by a hero who wore no masks and cast no shadow.8

Both forms of the novel were rooted in folklore, but to contrary ends. Bakhtin praised the novel as infected with the anarchic spirit of folk laughter, which mocked the high pomp and dignity of the past and thereby brought the epic low, stranding it amid the quotidian concerns of everyday life and forcing it to speak in “the low language of contemporaneity” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21). At the 1934 Congress, Maxim Gor’kii similarly called for a novel that sprang from folklore, saying “I again call your attention, comrades, to the fact that folklore, i.e., the unwritten compositions of toiling man, has created the most profound, vivid and artistically perfect types of heroes” (Gorky, 1935, p. 35). In Gor’kii’s view, myths, epics, and folktales were all the artistic creation of the common people, grounded in their concrete physical labor; the tales of Vasilisia the Fair and Simple Ivan, with their magic looms and fantastically triumphant village fools, expressed both common people’s desire for technological progress and their experience of being molded into members of a class (Lukács, 2002, p. 210). But where Gor’kii’s characters’ inner conflicts index their immersion in the economic struggles of the pre-revolutionary era, the inner world of the heroes of socialist realist historical fiction merely model a utopia in which these tensions will have been harmoniously resolved. Socialist realist novels thus sought in the future what both Bakhtin and Lukács claimed the epic had found in the past: an uncontested and unitary society defended by a hero who wore no masks and cast no shadow.8

In the Kazakh SSR, the embrace of folk literature eventually ran afoul of another change in Soviet cultural politics: the revalorization of Russian nationalism. In the Central Asian republics in the 1920s, concern that ‘Russian Chauvinism’ would evoke Tsarist oppression and enflame national resistance to Soviet rule had meant Russian language and culture were downplayed, while local languages, culture, and cadre were promoted (Hirsch, 2005; Martin, 2001; Schild, 2010; Slezkine, 1994). The development of national languages remained a central concern in the 1930s but it began to coexist with increased acceptance of Russian nationalism: in a 1933 speech to a limited audience of the Soviet elite, Stalin praised Russians as “the major nationality of the world; they first raised the flag of the Soviets in opposition to the rest of the world; the Russian nation — it is the most talented nation in the world” (Martin, 2001, p. 453). Lowell Tillett, in his The Great Friendship (1969), charted the stages of this evolution: in the 1920s, historians wrote relatively freely of the darker aspects of Russian colonial expansions; in the 1930s, this history was softened through the claim that Russian expansion had preserved neighboring people from the ‘greatest danger’ of colonization by other empires; following the war, the orthodoxy enforced was that Russian colonialism had benefited neighboring peoples by exposing them to a Russian culture now hailed as ‘progressive’. No longer were the territories of Central Asia conquered; rather, the process was one of ‘prisoedinienie,’ a sort of peaceful convergence in which the progressive elements in Central Asian society, recognizing the benefits of Russian culture, voluntarily initiated annexation. Unfortunately, where party degrees and Pravda articles spoke of voluntary annexation and of the deep history of the friendship of the peoples, the actual songs and epics of Kazakh agyns too often spoke bluntly of impoverishment and corruption, or glorified leaders who, like Kenesary Qasymuly, Syrym Datuly, and Isatai Taimanuly, had led rebellions against Russian rule.

The contradiction between these two narratives was particularly fraught during the second world war. Throughout the Soviet Union, the need for compelling local examples of military heroism meant that pre-Revolutionary military commanders were suddenly rehabilitated, transformed from defenders of a corrupt autocracy into heroic guardians of their narod. In Russia, Tsars Peter I and Ivan IV were lauded in films; in the Kazakh SSR, authors wrote plays and historians published pamphlets dedicated to Kazakh batyrs and khans, in which even figures like Edige – who in the 15th century threatened to burn Moscow – were represented as brave and wise men worthy of emulation (Yilmaz, 2015). In 1944–1945, however, this cultural space began to close: the heroes celebrated in Kazakh language propaganda were suddenly either safely before or after the era of Tsarist expansion into the steppe (Carmack, 2014, pp. 102–103). Agyns associated with 19th century rebellions shifted from being folk creators back to being ‘court agyns’ who worked for ‘feudal lords’; Kazakh scholars who had praised these figures were criticized in newspaper articles for failing to stress the ‘positive’ aspects of Russian occupation (Tillett, 1969). The Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR, planned in the early years of the war by a team of Kazakh and Russian historians and finally published in 1943, was initially praised only to then be harshly criticized for its relatively positive depiction of Kenesary Qasymov and for its apparent criticism of Russia’s expansion into the steppe; despite the editor’s protestations that acknowledgment of national minorities’ resistance to Tsarism was consistent with the principles of Marxist–Leninism, the book was withdrawn.

---

8 The relation between Bakhtin and Lukács’ respective division of the novel from the epic and the debates over the difference between the novel and the socialist novel is covered in detail in Clark and Tihanov (2011); see also Robin (1992, pp. 57–60).
from circulation and a new and better-bowdlerized version ordered written (Tillett, 1969; Zelnik, 2005).

The composition of *Abai Zholy* spanned these eras: the final four volume text gathered together novels and short stories whose compositions, publications, revisions, and re-publications ran from the late 1930s through the 1950s. The first volume in particular thus travelled through a series of different eras in Soviet history, and its text in turn had to accommodate these rapid shifts in political and literary norms. The first volume was based on an Arabic script manuscript Auezov wrote between 1939 and 1941, though one section was published as early as 1937. In 1942, the complete manuscript – significantly edited for length by Auezov himself – was published under the title *Abai* in Almaty. This volume was followed by a second volume in 1947, and the two works were almost immediately recognized as classics of Soviet literature: the first volume was translated into Russian in 1945, translations into other languages of the USSR soon followed, and in 1949 Auezov won a Stalin prize. In 1949 Auezov published the novella *Ayyn Agha* in a literary journal; shortly thereafter, Auezov substantially expanded this manuscript, publishing it separately under the title *Abai Zholy* in 1952, and then republishing it as the third volume of an *Abai Zholy* trilogy. The fourth volume was begun in 1953–1954 and portions of it were soon published in different journals over the next two years before being gathered together with the other novels to form the final 1961 version.

The later volumes of *Abai Zholy* were thus published (and the first volume republished) in an era when the boundaries for acceptable representations of pre-Revolutionary Kazakh–Russian relations had radically narrowed. Yet even in the 1942 volume, Auezov had already written a text that anticipated the orthodoxies of the post-war years: the arc of its plot, at least, painted a bleak picture of steppe society and a bright picture of Russian.

3. Tribal patriarchs and dissident sons: Abai and Qunanbai

*Abai Zholy’s* plot unwinds from a moment of brutal trickery on the part of Abai’s father Qunanbai, the head of the Yrgyzbai lineage of the Tobyqty clan and the Agha Sultan of the region. Qodar, a poor man from the Tobyqty’s Bokenshi lineage, is falsely rumored to be having an affair with his widowed daughter-in-law, Qamqa. When a neighboring leader taunts Qunanbai with this gossip, Qunanbai and his younger brother, the volostnoy Maibasar, gather the elders from the most powerful lineages within the Tobyqty clan and demand Qodar be punished. Qodar and his daughter-in-law are seized, dragged to a nearby village where Qunanbai and the elders wait, and then executed by being hung by the neck from a camel. When this fails to kill Qodar, Qunanbai orders him flung from a cliff, then demands that the people “cleanse our souls of this heathen” by stoning his body “as Sharia demands” (*Auezov, 2002, p. 38*). The elders are shaken by the cruelty of the execution, and Bozheï of the Zhigitek warns the others that “it wasn’t Qodar’s but your own necks that you put nooses on” (p. 39). Bozheï’s warning is born out when Qunanbai uses the rumored crimes of Qodar as a pretext for seizing the winter pastures of Qodar’s relatives and violent strife breaks out between lineages within the Tobyqty. Though Qunanbai and his opponents eventually negotiate a kind of truce, this conflict will only be succeeded by other battles, sometimes sparked by wealthy Kazakhs’ greed for pasture land, sometimes by young people’s resistance to arranged marriages, and sometimes by poor Kazakhs having been forced to turn to banditry to survive.

In *Abai Zholy* as in other socialist realist novels, the structure of the plot diagnoses a historical trajectory. In a production novel, the hero’s struggle to re-open a factory or form a kolkhoz maps out in miniature form the path the people of the USSR as a whole would follow as they clambered up toward socialism. In *Abai Zholy*, the reverse is true: the surface chaos of feuds, raids, and counter-raids covers fundamentally static social relations, and the form of the plot is thus mimetic of the supposed ‘dead end’ of pastoral feudalism as a mode of production. The plot’s persistent image of Kazakh society is of a feudalistic gerontocracy, riven by conflict and indifferent to the well-being of the young and the poor. Within this stasis, it is Abai alone who progresses: by chance, Abai – almost thirteen and newly returned from his studies at a medrese – arrives in the village at the very moment Qodar is flung from the cliff, only to flee in horror at the sight of Qodar’s broken body being stoned by his own relatives. Qunanbai’s brutality thus inadvertently sets in motion not only his own feuds within the Tobyqty, but also his son’s turn toward humanism.

In accordance with the rhetoric of prisoeidintenie, Abai’s nascent humanism means an embrace of Russian culture. At the end of the novel’s first volume, Abai, now married and the father of a family, resolves to return to his studies and prepares to depart for the city of Semipalatinsk. When he visits his father Qunanbai’s yurta to say his farewell, the two quarrel over the respective merits of youth and age, and Qunanbai calls his son aside. As the two sit on a small hill outside the encampment, Qunanbai first reproaches Abai for his lack of deference, and then advises his son that he has three faults: he does not understand the value of his own possessions and scatters them carelessly, for he is “shallow! And shallow waters are lapped by dogs and birds

---

9 Translation was intended to ensure that the Soviet investment in national literatures would create a common Soviet literary heritage rather than a series of isolated national literary traditions; see for example Gould (2012) and Holt (2015).

10 These details of publication history are drawn from the editorial commentary in the Soviet-era collected works of Auezov, which provide a detailed, line-by-line, survey of changes in phrasing and even corrections to typography between the editions – see Bozheïev and Saxareïev (1979, pp. 416–418), Narizheïev (1980, p. 407), and Yaqatov (1980, pp. 446–447). In 2014, a new and much more comprehensive edition of Auezov’s collected works was published; the editors provided a less granular survey of changes to the text, but more detailed discussion of the politics of these changes – see Akim (2014, pp. 397–422).

11 Unless otherwise noted, the text cited is a 2002 edition of Auezov’s final 1961 version.
In the novel, the two first meet at the funeral of Bozhei, mercy nor generosity but merely ‘enough to be future allies, Abai dismisses this as neither instructing Abai to limit his aid to those families wealthy father’s displeasure – when Qunanbai sends a messenger share their stock of winter hay, and does despite his own appeal to Abai for help. Abai orders his extended family to break through to find forage – and the poorer households ing rain falls on snow, forming a crust that flocks cannot by a calamitous behavior earlier that spring, when the district was struck sions in fits of foolish generosity was a reference to Abai’s loyal (but old) servant of the Tsars who fears the Russians, flicts as allegories of political change. Paradoxically, it is the literary models, which similarly staged generational con-change. This conflict reflects the influence of socialist realist literature: You have compared me to a shallow pond. Yet a deep well can help only those who hold tools in their hands, and I count it better to be a shallow pond that profits the young, the old, the wealthy, and the poor alike. Second, you have described the qualities of a leader. From what I know, the people at one time were like sheep. A single shepherd told a flock of sheep ‘ait and they all stood, ‘shait’ and they all lay down. Later, the people were like a camel. Throw a stone before it and shout ‘shop,’ the camel will bellow and turn. But now the people are no longer like children, the poor aren’t peaceful, their eyes have begun to open. Now the people have become like horses. Whatever weather the herd sees, frost, blizzard, or rain-storm, the shepherd mustn’t spare himself, he must lay in the frost and ice, take the skirts of his coat for a bed and the sleeves for a pillow, and only then may he lead them … The man who leads must be close to the people. Third, you have said I am like a Russian. But for the people and for myself, the greatest treasure is the art of knowledge. And this art the Russians have. (Auezov, 2002, p. 364)

Auezov has written an Abai who has the energy of youth, is sympathetic to the poor, eager to learn, and who prophesies the dawn of a new era, while his antagonist is old, selfish, haunted by religious superstitions, and fearful of change. This conflict reflects the influence of socialist realist literary models, which similarly staged generational conflicts as allegories of political change. Paradoxically, it is the loyal (but old) servant of the Tsars who fears the Russians, but his rebellious (and young) son who welcomes them as saviors.

Qunanbai’s accusation that Abai scatters his possessions in fits of foolish generosity was a reference to Abai’s behavior earlier that spring, when the district was struck by a calamitous jut – a natural catastrophe in which freezing rain falls on snow, forming a crust that flocks cannot break through to find forage – and the poorer households appeal to Abai for help. Abai orders his extended family to share their stocks of winter hay, and does so despite his own father’s displeasure – when Qunanbai sends a messenger instructing Abai to limit his aid to those families wealthy enough to be future allies, Abai dismisses this as neither mercy nor generosity but merely ‘sauda’ (business) (2002, p. 296). In staging this confrontation in the midst of a merciless winter storm, Auezov drew on classic imagery of 1930s socialist realism: nature was an adversary to be defeated through a combination of Stalin-inspired willpower and technological progress (Clark, 2000, pp. 100–6). Abai’s own call for a leader who doesn’t spare himself but rather lies in the frost and snow with only his coat for bedding seems to demand nothing so much as a Pavel Korchagin for the steppe (Kaganovsky, 2004).

Abai’s bitter confrontation with his father stands in sharp contrast to his encounter with a Kazakh aqyn with whom he similarly debates the state of Kazakh society. In spring, Abai sees the terrible aftermath of the jut when he travels through the neighboring auls, slowly making his way toward the village of the aqyn ‘Qadyrbai.’ In the original version of 1942, this character was ‘Sabyrbai’; in the 1950s, Auezov changed the name to ‘Qadyrbai,’ but quotations from songs and details of lineal identity made it clear this was still an at best lightly-fictionalized version of the real 19th century aqyn Sabyrbai Aqtaiaalqy (Bozheev & Saxaruev, 1979, p. 418). In the novel, the two first meet at the funeral of Bozhei, one of the tribal leaders with whom Qunanbai had clashed following the death of Qodar. When Qadyrbai teasingly asks Abai why he loves poetry when his father Qunanbai notoriously dislikes it, Abai courteously replies that perhaps Qunanbai only disliked one of Qadyrbai’s poems, and then recites some lines of the petition to Soltabai. Qadyrbai bursts into laughter, delighted by the sly wit of Abai’s reply and by the young man’s evident familiarity with his poems (Auezov, 2002, p. 260).

In their second meeting, Abai and Qadyrbai discuss the scale of the spring jut, but Abai then turns the conversation toward the natural disaster’s meaning.

Abai now began to knot the hardship’s of this year’s jut together with those of years past. Since ancient times, jut had been the implacable enemy and unceasing sorrow of the Kazakhs in their felt tents. All knew this. In the aftermath of jut, they seemed no longer a proud people but rather wandered like sheep struck by disease. But was this to be the only pattern of life handed down from father to son, from son to grandson? Was there no escape from this misfortune? Had no one ever thought what measures might change them from a tumbleweed chased by the wind and make them into a nation … Had their people never had a leader whose heart felt their pain, who could have shown them a better path? Did Qadyrbai know of anyone like this? (2002, p. 312–313).

Though Qadyrbai is surprised by these words, after a brief pause he replies by reciting a proverb that turns on the meaning of human mortality: both gardens and human life are things of this world, born to decay, for “the fragrant wildflower withers in fall…as the apple cheeks of youth wither in old age” (p. 313). Auezov writes that Abai understands the old poet believes these tragedies speak not to the Kazakhs way of life but rather the common lot of humans in a mortal world.

12 In 1925, Auezov collected parts of songs by Sabyrbai and Sabyrbai’s father Aqtaiaalq from Abai’s former pupil Kokbai Zhanaatev. Sabyrbai and his father were from the Siban lineage, and Auezov transcribed Sabyrbai’s petition to Soltabai, the tore (leader) of the Siban, who had departed to visit neighboring auls. In his absence, the Siban suffered from the raids of the Tobyqyt. Sabyrbai’s song describes these misfortunes and repeatedly implores Soltabai to return (Auezov, 1925/2014: and b). Auezov published these texts in the journal Tang in 1925 and later used Aqtaiaalq’s song as an example in his 1927 Adelbet Tarikhy.

13 In his reply to Abai, Qadyrbai acknowledges that Qunanbai objected to his high praise of Soltabai, but doesn’t explain why. One possibility is that the raids Qadyrbai described originated with Qunanbai’s Tobyqyt.
Abai is unsatisfied with this answer, and gradually develops a counter-analysis which is intuitively one of historical materialism. Other nations, he emphasizes, learn from one another and thus progress, but the Kazakhs had never sought to develop in this manner, and “the consequences of this backwardness is that from ancient times until now we have been content with the eternal felt house, the wandering flock, and the implacable jut” (2002, p. 313). This argument lasts for some days, until finally Qadyrbai asks what Abai proposes in place of the old ways and Abai replies: “the nation needs knowledge and industry. It needs education. The coming time is not one in which we will gain strength by sleeping, trusting in our great steppe and our fertile pastures. It is a time in which we must learn from the example of other and more progressive nations.” This answer, Auezov writes, is not something Abai says in the spur of the moment, but rather “one he had long meditated on in solitude. ‘This is what my people need, this too is the path I must follow,’ he had thought” (p. 313).

Qadyrbai’s reply foregrounds the gulf between the values of an aqyn and those of a wealthy flock-owner and tribal leader. Where Qunanbai responds with anger, Qadyrbai ponders telling Abai that “education” meant knowledge of one’s ancestral heritage, but instead pauses, reflects, and finally says: “If I answer truthfully, your words have been just, my child. Your dreams have also entered my mind. If the coming times are thus, then let them be so! You have spoken the words of your own generation and of generations to come. But, to whom will you go? Unwilling to learn, suspicious of strangers, this has indeed been our people’s way” (2002, p. 314). The old aqyn, Auezov writes, had argued strongly against Abai, but he had also understood him and in the end accepts Abai’s words as true. Abai himself reflects that Qadyrbai had become like a father to him, but “not a father who was always ordering him to ‘Guard the flocks! Gain wealth! Give me grandsons! Remember you are a ruler!’ Rather, he was a father in art, in learning, and in the path of justice” (p. 316). Qadyrbai himself suggests that Abai’s concerns for the plight of his people parallel the laments of other aqyns’ songs: “Abai, my child, you spoke truly a few days back…You tell of your dreams, and of the jut which struck our people this May. In these days there are many aqyns who sing of ‘zar’ (sorrows)…all who look see few who are joyful. They tell of shanlyraqs broken and fallen. And just not of this. Just as you speak, they sing of the helpless and the homeless” (p. 316).14

Qadyrbai’s mention of aqyns who sing of their people’s sorrows hints delicately if slightly misleadingly at the Zar Zaman poets of the 19th century: these aqyns did offer striking imagery of Kazakh misfortunes, but it was not winter storms but Russian forts whose presence on the steppe they lamented. With this reference, Auezov also alludes to the earliest friendship between Abai and an aqyn included in his novel. It is in this encounter that Auezov most clearly signals his work’s theme, and here also that his subsequent revisions most clearly illuminate the risks of this theme. In his initial description of the encounter, Auezov consciously effaces the differences between oral poetry and literary novel; in his subsequent revisions, Auezov preserves this thesis yet erases an example whose too-harsh critique of Russian colonialism had become anathema to the idea of the friendship of the peoples.

4. Revolutionary lyricism: Abai and the Zar Zaman poets

After Abai witnesses Qodar’s death, he falls ill from shock and horror and only gradually recovers after traveling with his mother and grandmother to the family’s zhailau (summer pastures). There, Abai finds himself bored with the pursuits that excited him in years past, and instead spends his time listening to his mother’s songs and his grandmother’s folktales and reminiscences of raids between Kazakh villages. One day two men arrive as guests: “Abai knew the young man. As soon as he recognized him he had flushed with happiness. It was the young bard Baigokshe, who only the year before had spent three days as their guest and had sung Qozy-Korpesh Bayandy. The old man at his side Abai didn’t know, but Abai’s grandmother certainly did.” Soon after this, the young man laughingly tells Abai he has come with a “store-house of tales and songs,” for “this man is the aqyn Dulat!” (Auezov, 1942/2013, p. 142).15

In this moment, Auezov the novelist introduces Abai to an aqyn of long-standing interest to Auezov the literary historian: Dulat Babataiuly, one of the most famous of the 19th century Zar Zaman poets. The use of the word Zar Zaman (time of sorrow) to designate a literary genre had itself originated with Auezov, who in his 1927 Adebiet Tarikhy used the title of a poem by the aqyn Shortanbai Qanaibuly to refer to a whole series of mid to late 19th century poets. According to Auezov, the ‘current’ of Zar Zaman began at the time of Ablai Khan and lasted until Abai Qunanbai (p. 203), and he listed Shortanbai Qanaibuly (1818–1881), Dulat Babataiuly (1802–1871), Murat Monke-uly (1843–1906), and Abubakr Kerderi Borankululy (1858–1903) as the key figures within the group. In the titular poem, Qanaibuly offers an extended lament for the condition of the steppe peoples: “Saying, our time a time of sorrows/ From this I go in fear./ Winter lengthens, summer dwindles/ The bais done, their flocks lost/ ‘Kin will not see kin!’ Father and son a prey to strife/ And our faith lost/ From this I go in fear” (Madibaeva, 1916).

14 The implicit suggestion here that only Soviet modernity could deliver the Kazakhs from the hunger and uncertainty of a mobile pastoral economy was in sharp if hidden conflict with the then-recent history of Soviet Kazakhstan: the jut described in the novel pales in comparison with the mass famine and loss of life that followed the collectivization drive in Kazakhstan [see Pianciola, 2004]. Auezov’s depiction of the jut complements the official rhetoric that collectivization and scientific practices had transformed sheepherding from a practice characterized by catastrophic swings in flock size into a sector of steadily increasing surpluses [Alimaev & Behnke, 2008; Humphrey, 1999, pp. 230–232].

15 The circular wooden frame at the top of a yurt through which smoke escapes. To say that a shanlyraq is ‘qor’ (black) is to say that it has been darkened by years of sot, an indication of the family’s endurance; to toast newlyweds with the words ‘shanlyraq bııq bolsyn’ (may your shanlyraq be high) is to wish them wealth; to speak of it fallen is, conversely, to predict calamity.
Auezov’s use of this poem’s title to denote a broader literary ‘current’ was less an assertion that the different poets were members of a common literary movement than an acknowledgement of the evident thematic and formal similarities between their works: Qanaiuly’s list of ‘sorrows’ mirrors the fears and angers found in the works of Babataiuly and of the other Zar Zaman poets. Specifically, Auezov concluded that “within this movement religious theology was joined with an indigenous Kazakh perspective,” and he went on to state that for all these poets, the problem was first the presence of Russian colonial power in the Kazakh steppe and second the corrupt compliance of the Kazakh elites with the Tsarist administrators (1927/2014, p. 227).

Babataiuly’s poem “Sayir zherden airylyp” (“The fertile fields are taken) offers a characteristic example. In 1831, a Russian fort had been constructed on the Ayagoz River in East Kazakhstan, and Babataiuly begins with a long description of the rich pasture lands along the river and in the neighboring Sary Arqa uplands. Babataiuly writes of “the river bank’s graceful willows/ the shady places’ flowers’ honey/ the sheep drink and grow fat,” and then comes to a question: “whose voice will speak/ and say whose land the Ayagoz was?” (Qorabai, 2013, pp. 28–30). The poem then shifts to explicit denunciations of the Russian presence, as Babataiuly says that “When her banks turned Russian/ When Russians drank her water/ The very waters of the Ayagoz shivered.” For the Kazakhs, the consequences are both sheep that fail to grow fat—“look at the flocks/ lean, never to fatten”—and protests that are met with political repression, for “the fertile pastures taken/ and a Russian raion made./ Take your complaint to the Major/ And be driven to Siberia.” The agyn matches his critique of the Russian colonial presence with equally sharp condemnations of an indigenous elite who had failed to define the pasture lands of the Ayagoz. Babataiuly observes that there is “no one with the will to strike the enemy,” and he derides the local leaders as “tosekhandy” (cushion-souls) who never stir from the side of their hearts. Elsewhere in the poem, Babataiuly follows his excoriation of local leaders by saying, “take in your hands a mirror,/ even if once only, look,/how stood your face” (Qorabai, 2013, pp. 28–30). Babataiuly’s denunciation constitutes exactly such a mirror, and the suggestion is thus made that the public recitation of social ills serves as a goad to reform.

This link between social critique and the performance of poetry was the explicit focus of Babataiuly’s “Qaighylyny uattym” (“Consoler of sorrows”) (Qorabai, 2013, pp. 10–13). Central Asian agyns often began recitations of epic poems by stating their tribal identity and poetic lineage, but in Babataiuly’s hands this device becomes the basis of a larger examination of what powers and obligations identity as a poet can confer.18 In the poem’s first line, Babataiuly imagines a listener asking his clan affiliation, and immediately gives a direct answer: “I am Naiman,/ Thick as hairs on a sheep’s fleece.”19 He then poses questions that shift the focus from lineal identity to social identity: “Ask me my song,/ My words are gilt with bright gold,/ Ask me my essence,/ It is the cloud’s quiet rain.” In subsequent lines, Babataiuly describes himself at the center of a wedding, declaring his poetry:

If sorrows choke my heart,  
they wash away with song.  
Listen then to Dulat’s song,  
Pounding like a hail of rain.

Like a river wild in flood,  
like sweetest honey dripping,  
thick in the crowd of a wedding,  
gathered for the wedding games,  
before the rich and poor alike,  
the crowd will tremble at my words.

As the poem continues, Babataiuly describes both his own abilities—“full-chested, thick-lipped,/ never yielding,/ the stallion’s strength is mine”—and the strength his poetry grants his hearers. Babataiuly assures his audience that the very act of listening to his recitation offers some form of redress: his recitation will awaken his audience, bring them to tears, yet also stir them to action, for “one who listens to my song,/ the last one whom my words fill,/ listens and cannot be calmed,/ for I am the channel of a song,/ that roars as a flood in a dry gully.” As Babataiuly develops this theme, he alternates between a series of material metaphors for poetic speech—his words are pearls, diamonds, gold adulterated with base metals—that link the poem’s political power with its beauty, and sections that envision his audience as a collective fused by the shared sound of his voice.

In the novel Abai Zholy, the days following the arrival of the agyn ‘Dulat’ are a story of Abai’s ever increasing friendship with the great bard. As their dinner cooks on the night of their arrival, Dulat sings the epic of Qoblandy Batyr, and Abai realizes that “the greatest and most beautiful epic the world had ever heard come from out of the mouths of the Kazakhs or off the pages of a book was this” (Auezov, 1942/2013, p. 142). When Abai asks whose work the epic was, Dulat explains how it had come down from agyn to agyn from a singer in the Kishi zhuz (little horde). Auezov presents these exchanges as a revelation for Abai, the moment when he understood that his own people’s oral literature could be as great a source of inspiration as works of written literature. As Auezov writes, “before this Abai had thought of philosophy as coming from books, of knowledge and poetry as things known from the medrese” (p. 143).

Yet even as Dulat teaches the young Abai to appreciate the Kazakhs oral epics, Auezov shows Dulat as himself experimenting with the expressive possibilities of poetic language. Auezov writes that in the evenings Dulat would sing the songs he himself wished to hear:

---

17 All quotations from the works of Qanaiuly are from the critical edition edited by Qanipash Madibaeva (2013); all quotations from Babataiuly are translated from Seriqqazy Qorabai’s critical edition (2013).
18 See the discussion of opening formulas in Reichl (1992, pp. 303–308).
19 The Naiman are one of the larger Kazakh clans; like the Tobytyq, they are part of the Orta Zhuz (middle horde).
To Abai, the Dulat of the evening appeared completely from the Dulat of the day. He was no longer Dulat the joker, the one who always set out to make people laugh. In the evenings, he was a man of wisdom, and sometimes also an old man broken with sorrow.

It was at times like this that Dulat would reveal a little of himself:

Ask me my essence,

It is the cloud’s quiet rain.

If sorrows choked my heart,

they wash away with song ...

Listen then to Dulat’s song,

Pounding like a hail of rain!

He would say, as if his own soul had turned into a poem. [Auezov, 1942/2013, p. 143]

In this moment, Auezov binds a direct quotation from Babataiuly’s ‘Qaighylunya uatym’ into his text in a manner that is both homage and literary analysis. In this telling, while Dulat’s earlier performance of Qoblandy Batyr had offered the excitement of epic, the Zar Zaman poem provided the interiority of lyrical poetry; while one was performed publicly to entertain, the other, if still oral, had as its first audience the poet himself. The great oddity of this reading is the extent to which it contradicts its own content: even as Auezov shows Babataiuly engage in private and sorrowful recitation, Babataiuly within that poem shows himself as engaged in dramatically public performances.

Yet the turn away from public performance did not mean a turn away from public politics, for in the very next lines Auezov has ‘Dulat’ recite lines in which the Agha Sultan and other elites are compared to vultures feasting on carrion.

‘When Dulat said ‘the Bek and the judges,’ of whom did he speak? He didn’t explain. But Abai himself still grasped the meaning. He always looked for examples close to hand. But the boy too never revealed these secrets.

He takes the Major’s orders,

With his tail between his legs,

The nation’s leaders prowl like wolves ... 20 ... They themselves put fear into the people,

Of the people themselves in fear ...

‘This is the starshina Maibasar,’ thought Abai.

Auezov goes on to quote sections of Babataiuly’s poem in which the agyn criticized a Tsarist tax regime that expected equal tribute from poor and wealthy households. Abai had never before heard such laments, Auezov wrote, though “the songs of Asan Kaigy, Shortanbai, and here Dulat all flowed into a single stream” (Auezov, 1942/2013, p. 145).

The crux of the section comes later: as Dulat and Baigokshe prepare to leave, they are given horses as gifts. Dulat suddenly recites a short poem in which he speaks of a boy becoming a young man and setting off for far places in quest of the truth. At the end, he presses a dombra into Abai’s hands and tells him, ”look, my child, let this be my blessing. Use it tell the truth with mercy!” (Auezov, 1942/2013, p. 145). An embarrassed Abai is left awkwardly holding the instrument. In this moment Abai has become the literary if not the literal heir of Babataiuly: Auezov suggests that Abai’s critical essays and poems, however different in form from Babataiuly’s supposedly oral poetry, are a continuation of the spirit of critique found in the works of the Zar Zaman poets. Abai’s central position in Kazakh literary genealogies in turn implies that this spirit of critique is, or should be, the common spirit of all Kazakh literature.

The inclusion of ‘Dulat’ in Abai Zholy was of brief duration. As the 1940s progressed, the historical Babataiuly’s bleak portrait of the Russian presence on the steppe was at increasingly awkward odds with the rosy visions of the ‘friendship of the people’ and the ‘progressive benefits’ of Russian civilization. Much like other Kazakh historians and authors, Auezov began to rewrite and reframe his accounts of Kazakh literary history. In 1948, he sketched out a plan for a new volume on ‘Kazakh Literary History’ of the 18th and 19th century that would assess the agyns and writers from a firmly Marxist–Leninist perspective (Akim, 2011, p. 449). This outline – eventually published in 2011 as part of the collected works of Auezov – largely consists of chapter headings and brief lists of content. In the section on the Zar Zaman poets, however, Auezov pauses to offer a preview of his proposed conclusions. “In general,” he writes, Babataiuly’s “great deficiency was an inability to fully appreciate the great new ideas and thoughts of his time” (Auezov, 2011, p. 365). Qaighilyny received the sharpest evaluation: “although the poet’s works do succeed in correctly showing the oppressive aspects of colonialism, he fails to show the progressive aspect of the Kazakh’s incorporation into Russia. Shortanbai’s ideas were feudal, patriarchal, filled with religious mysticism, and he was unable to escape from the pessimism inherent in these roots. He failed to understand the great culture of the Russians, and was left with archaic and foolish beliefs” (Auezov, 2011, p. 367).

In Abai Zholy, this thesis was made manifest by acts of erasure: the chapter was part of the first volume’s publication in 1942, but for the 1955 edition Auezov changed the agyn’s name to Barlas and replaced the excerpts from Babataiuly’s poems with original compositions of his own. The chapter was otherwise unchanged, and Abai was again shown listening to a poem and realizing that its description of “an akim called a starshina” who preys on the poor and shackles the disobedient resembled his uncle Maibasar. The poem itself similarly compares the Agha Sultan and the starshina to hungry wolves who treat their own kin as food, but where Dulat’s poem linked this critique to specific aspects of the colonial regime – craven obedience toward a ‘major’ and enforcement of an unjust tax policy – the new poem offers only abstract denunciations of the feudal elite (Auezov, 2002, pp. 54–55). Auezov himself later wrote that he had made these changes in response to the Party’s earlier “just criticism” of the “fundamental ideological error” of

---

20 The poem does not explicitly compare the nation’s leaders to wolves; rather, Babataiuly uses the verb ‘zhortu,’ which usually refers to a wild animal searching for prey.
ignoring the dangers implicit in praising literary figures who were “feudal and reactionary.” He went on to describe in more detail both why he had included Dulat Babataiuly in the original manuscript and why he had later erased him:

My second reason [for the change] was that the words, character, and actions of the Dulat found in the novel were not based on objective historical material. Rather, his was a fictional figure the author had himself fashioned in a flight of literary fancy. I thought I would show the great impression a meeting with a folk aqyn had made on the young Abai, and so I wrote a character who had many positive qualities. I was confident that these were indeed the qualities of the historical Dulat. Only later was the objective historical truth revealed, and Dulat shown as a man with a wholly negative consciousness. In order to cleanse my fully imaginary character of the association with Dulat’s false and negative views, I gave my fictional character a new name which was likewise wholly fictional. I similarly discarded my quotations of the folk poems of Dulat with their falsifications and slander. I instead gave this fictional figure of Barlas oral poems I had myself written. (Auezov as cited in Akim, 2014, pp. 414–15; see also Bozheev & Saxariev, 1979, p. 419)

These new poems, shorn of the specificity that animated Babataiuly’s own poem, speak words in comfortable harmony with the conventions of the 1950s. Barlas may be in sorrow; he is never in rebellion.

5. Conclusion: Abai as artifact of the future

In the book’s later conflicts, Abai becomes at once a voice of reason who counsels his father to act with justice and a young man whose ever increasing alienation from his society leaves him ever calmer. When the dispute that began with Qodar’s execution flares up again and other tribal leaders carry petitions against Qunanbai to the Russians, it is Abai who has the courage to tell his father that he must placate the other elders by returning fifteen winter pastures seized in earlier years. The Zhigitek and their allies celebrate with elaborate feasts, gift-giving, and games, but Abai is cynically amused at the success of his strategy:

Could honor and purity then be healed with land and winter pastures? Why then say ‘the people cry ... they tighten their belts. They are oppressed’? These thoughts long troubled and oppressed Abai. It seemed people had only to fill their own bellies and they would abandon the campaign and become peaceful. Abai pondered this, and that fall came to clearly understand the measure of the elders (Auezov, 2002, p. 210).

This insight also insulates Abai from a deep attach-
ment to his own clan, for while many of the Yrgyzbai are humiliated by the outcome of the conflict—“The Zhigitek are glad, they triumphed. And while we who follow the Myrza lose heart and sorrow, they play games and gloat” (p. 210)—Abai merely smiles and, as though “clad in chain mail no arrow could pierce,” reaches for a dombra and plays a song that gently mocks the steppe intrigues (p. 211). The inner world of Abai Zholy’s central character is a mirror of its literary history: the novel fashions harmony from the clashing dialogues of steppe aqyns, and from that harmony produces a hero whose defining feature is a transcendent calm. Lukács, apparently in reference to Pavel Vlasov, the hero of Gorky’s novel Mother, observed that the conflicted and anguished characters he had praised in Gorky’s earlier novels had been replaced by “the sovereign calm of the great humanist who sees the path of mankind lying clear before it” (Lukács, 2002, p. 238). Abai, with his broad shoulders, calm eyes, and thirst for knowledge, is Pavel Vlasov incarnated as a 19th century Kazakh poet; an artifact of the future found buried, to the confusion of contemporaries, in the strata of the past.

In the second volume of Abai Zholy, Auezov shifted his attention from Kazakh aqyns to Abai’s encounter with Russian literature and culture. Auezov makes Abai’s reading of Pushkin the driving force in Abai’s maturation as a poet and thinker: when Abai meets with Kazakh aqyns, he is inspired by them yet is also somehow subtly already ahead of them in his thinking; when he reads Pushkin, he is transformed, and later reflects that his study of the Russian language “had been a crack through which light had crept and illuminated a new world” (2002, p. 117). Pushkin in turn offered Soviet writers an interpretive grid through which to make sense of Auezov’s own achievement. Gabit Musirepov, in a long and laudatory 1943 review of the first volume, repeatedly drew upon Belinsky’s description of Eugene Onegin as an “encyclopedia of Russian life” to mark the heights to which, in his view, Auezov had now brought Soviet Kazakh literature (Musirepov, 2012).

The irony of the novel is that while the plot presents the Kazakh past as something to be abandoned, the novel’s language represents the reclamation of the language of that past, for even the volumes most directly framed as praise of the language and literature of Russia were written in a Kazakh shorn of Russian borrows and idioms. In this, the novel now speaks directly to the linguistic anxieties and agendas of post-independence Kazakhstan. Many Kazakhs now remember the Soviet era not as the culmination of the process of prisoedinenie, but rather as a historical trauma, one that cut the Kazakhs from their history and culture and left their language corrupted. The country exited the Soviet era possessed of a citizenry who, even if Kazakh, might not know Kazakh, and even if knowing Kazakh, might speak a version riddled with Russian borrows (see Dave, 2007, and Fierman, 2009). In writing his novel, Auezov drew upon his extensive knowledge of 19th century Kazakh oral literature not only to tell the story of Abai but also to craft a Kazakh literary language dense with archaic Kazakh vocabulary, rich in loans from Persian and Arabic, and thick with its own indigenous literary allusions and idioms. This image of the Kazakh language has meant that a text written to be national in form but socialist in content may now be reread as, if national in form, therefore nationalist in content.

Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there are no known conflicts of interests associated with this publication and that there has been no significant financial support for this work which could have influenced its outcome.
Acknowledgements

Sections of this paper were presented at the following conferences and workshops: ‘Orientalism, Colonial Thinking, and the Former Soviet Periphery’ (Vilnius University, 2015), *Intersections of History and Literature in Central Asia* (American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, 2014), *Kazakh Culture: Legacies and Innovation* (Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University, 2013), the Central Eurasian Studies Society annual conference (UW-Madison, 2013), and as an invited lecture at the Department of Folklore and Comparative Literature at UW-Madison (2014). I am grateful for all of the comments and suggestions received. Thanks are also due to Zbigniew Wojnowski, James Nikopoulos, Tiffany Hong, Saniya Karpykova, Alima Bissenova, Anna Oldfield, Christopher Baker, Christopher Fort, Naomi Caffee, Diana Kudaibergenova, Narek Mkrtchyan, Boram Shin, and the editors and reviewers of *Journal of Eurasian Studies* for comments, support, and help in acquiring necessary texts.

References

Akim, T. (2011). Ghylymi tusinikteme. In *Maqalalar, tezister* (Vol. 47, pp. 449–450). Almaty: “Dauir” “Zhibek Zholy.”

Akim, T. (2014). Ghylymi tusinikteme. In U. Qalizhanov (Ed.), *Abai zholy: Roman epopeia* (Vol. 2, pp. 397–422). Almaty: “Dauir” “Zhibek Zholy.”

Alimaev, I. I., & Behnke, R. H. (2008). Ideology, land tenure and livestock mobility in Kazakhstan. In K. A. Galvin, R. S. Reid, R. H. Behnke, & N. Thompson Hobbs (Eds.), *Fragmentation in semi-arid and arid landscapes: Consequences for human and natural systems* (pp. 151–178). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Auezov, M. (2011). *Qazaq adebietining tarikhy*. In T. Akim (Ed.), *Abai roman epopeia* (Vol. 6, pp. 272–273). Almaty: “Dauir” “Zhibek Zholy.”

Auezov, M. (2012). *Abai* romany turaly. In S. S. Qirabaev (Ed.), *Abai Zholy roman epopeia* (Vol. 1). Almaty: Ana Tili.

Auezov, M. (2014a). Syban Aqtaiqal bi. In U. Qalizhanov (Ed.), *Angime, zertteuler, pesalar: 1927–1933* (Vol. 6, pp. 278–279). Almaty: “Dauir” “Zhibek Zholy.”

Auezov, M. (2014b). Syban Sabyrbai aqynnyng Soltabai torege aitqan tezister. In *Klassikalyq zertteuler* (1), 45–58. Almaty: “Dauir” “Zhibek Zholy.”

Auezov, M. (2015). Abai Zholy (Vol. 1). Almaty: Zhazushy.

Auezov, M. (2016). *Qorabai, S.* (2013). *Dulat Babataiuly shygarmalary: Tolghaular, aitystar, dastandar.* Almaty: Ana Tili.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1927/2014b). *Syban Sabyrbai aqynnyng Soltabai torege aitqan tezister.* Almaty: Ana Tili.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Speech genres and other late essays.* New York and London: Garland Publishing.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1992). *Voices of modernity: Language ideologies and the politics of inequality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bozheev, M., & Saxariev, B. (1979). *Tusinikter: Abai Zholy* roman epopeia. In Abai roman epopee (Vol. 3, pp. 411–423). Almaty: Zhazushy.

Brooks, J. (1994). *Socialist realism in Pravda: Read all about it!* Slavic Review, 53(4), 973–991.

Campbell, I. W. (2011). *Knowledge and power on the Kazakh steppe, 1845–1917* (Ph.D.). University of Michigan.

Carmack, R. J. (2014). *History and hero-making: Patriotic narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh front-line propaganda, 1941–1945. Central Asian Survey, 33(1), 95–112.

Clark, K. (2000). *The soviet novel: History as ritual* (Third ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Clark, K., & Tihanov, G. (2011). Soviet literary theory in the 1930s: Battles over genre and the boundaries of modernity. In E. A. Dobrenko & G. Tihanov (Eds.), *A history of Russian literary theory and criticism: The soviet age and beyond* (pp. 109–143). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Dave, B. (2007). *Kazakhstan – ethnicity, language and power* New York: Routledge.

Dobrenko, E. A. (2007). *Political economy of socialist realism* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Fierman, W. (2009). *Identity, symbolism, and the politics of language in Central Asia* Europe-Asia Studies, 61(7), 1207–1228.

Gorky, M. (1935). Soviet literature. In T. Akim (Ed.), *Abai roman epopeia* (Vol. 3, pp. 411–423). Almaty: Zhazushy.

Gourley, J. (1994). *Socialist realism: An impossible aesthetic* (1 ed.). Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Holt, K. (2015). Performing as Soviet Central Asia’s source texts: Lahuti and DZambul in Moscow, 1935–1936. *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale* (24), 213–238.

Humphrey, C. (1999). Marx went away – but Karl stayed behind (Revised). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kaganovsky, L. (2004). How the Soviet Man was (Un) made. *Slavic Review, 63*(3), 577–596.

Kudaibergenova, D. T. (2017). *Rewriting the nation in modern Kazakh literature: Elites and narratives* Lanham: Lexington Books.

Laursen, E. (2006). “A new enigmatic language”: The spontaneity-consciousness paradigm and the case of Gladkov’s cement. *Slavic Review, 65*(1), 66–89.

Lukacs, G. (2002). *Studies in European realism* E. Bone, Trans. New York: Hase and Conte Ferg.'

Madiibaeva, Q. (2013). *Shortanbai Qanaiuly shygarmalary: Tolghaular, aitystar, dastandar.* Almaty: Ana Tili.

Martin, T. (2001). *The affirmative action empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union* (pp. 1923–1939). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Musrepov, G. (2012). “Abai” romany turaly. In S. S. Qirabaev (Ed.), *Abai Zholy roman epopeia* (Vol. 1, pp. 56–71). Almaty: Aideb Alemi.

Nayrizbaev, B. (1980). Tusinikter. In Abai zholy roman epopeia (Vol. 5, pp. 407–422). Almaty: Zhabzushy.

Oinas, F. J. (1973). Folklore and politics in the Soviet Union. *Slavic Review, 32*(2), 45–58.

Pianciola, N. (2004). Famine in the steppe: The collectivization of agriculture and the Kazakh herdsmen, 1928–1934. *Cahiers Du Monde Russe, 45*(1/2), 137–191.

Qorabai, S. (2013). *Dulat Babataiuly shygarmalary: Olenqder, dastandar, mysal olenqder.* Almaty: Ana Tili.

Reichl, K. (1992). *Turkic oral epic poetry: Traditions, forms, poetic structures.* New York and London: Garland Publishing.

Robin, R. (1992). *Socialist realism: An impossible aesthetic* (1 ed.). Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Schliss, K. D. (2010). *Between Moscow and Baku: National literatures at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers (Ph.D.).* Berkeley: University of California.

Slezkin, Y. (1994). The USSR as a communal apartment, or how a socialist state promoted ethnic particularism. *Slavic Review, 53*(2), 414–452.

Tillett, L. R. (1969). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Uyama, T. (2000). The geography of civilizations: Spatial analysis of the Kazakh intelligentsia’s activities, from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. In K. Matsuzato (Ed.), *Regions: A prism to view the Slavic-Eurasian world* (pp. 109–143). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Yilmas, H. (2015). *National identities in soviet historiography: The rise of nations under Stalin* Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Zelnik, R. E. (2005). *Perils of Pankratova: Some stories from the annals of Soviet historiography* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.