

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: KAZAKH ORAL LITERATURE IN JÜSİPBЕК
AIMAUYTOV'S NOVEL *AQBİLEK*

by

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Abstract

Aqbilek is one of the first and most innovative novels in Kazakh literature. In this novel, Aimauytov merges Kazakh oral literary genres with novel form. This research looks at the style of *Aqbilek* and its continuity with pre-existing Kazakh oral literary forms. Analyzing the Aimauytov's use of stylistic features of oral epic poems, such as grammatical parallelism, end-rhyme, alliteration, the use of formulaic systems and similes, I argue that Aimauytov uses Kazakh oral literary techniques to adapt the novel form. Aimauytov also integrates Kazakh oral literary genres, such as *kōrisū* and *joqtau* into the plot of the novel, to emphasize the alienation of *Aqbilek* from the society and her final reintegration. Aimauytov uses stories of *Äldekei*, which imitate *šešendik söz*, to offer a social critique of the corruption and oppression that was enabled by the rich and influential Kazakh men. Having been banned shortly after its publication, *Aqbilek* was subject to little scholarly investigation up until this day. This research, with its focus on the stylistic aspects of the novel, contributes to both the knowledge on *Aqbilek* as well as Kazakh literary scholarship on early Kazakh novels.

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Introduction

It's been two and a half months since I've gone out. If you ask what I did, I finished writing a novel while being in "Qyluat," its size is twice as large as that of *Qartqoja* that you saw. All my thoughts, enthusiasm and spirit went into that novel, I was like a crazy person, I almost forgot about friends, companions, about my dear precious brother. If you wonder how I spend the day, here, like this: I get up at eight o'clock in the morning, drink tea and go to the service to teach children. I teach children six hours a day. At three o'clock I come home, eat. Then I sleep.

I wake up at six or seven. I drink tea. I sit down to write. From there, I write, staying up until two or three at night. When I'm completely exhausted, I go to sleep. That's what I've seen for about two and a half months.

But on this day, my novel is finished. I'm going to send it to print. If it gets printed, you will see (Аймауытов 2003, 285).¹

The epigraph above is an excerpt from Jüsipbek Aimauytov's reflection on his writing process. In this letter from January of 1928, Jüsipbek Aimauytov writes to his relative, Mäshür Jüsip Köpeiuly, about the new novel that he is writing, *Aqbilek* and compares it to his previous novel, *Qartqoja*.

Both *Qartqoja* and *Aqbilek* are among the first novels written in Kazakh literature. Although Mürjaqyp Dulatov's *Baqytsyz Jamal* is usually considered to be the first novel in Kazakh literature, *Qartqoja* was also suggested by Älihan Bökeihanov to be considered the first novel. In his 1926 review of *Qartqoja*, Älihan Bökeihanov, who was the ex-leader of the Alash party at the time, suggested that *Qartqoja* should be considered the first novel in Kazakh literature (Бөкейхан 1995, 367). Bökeihanov wrote that the novels written before *Qartqoja* were limited in the sense that they portrayed only one or two facets of life.

¹ Екі жарым ай болды, үйден түзге шықпағаным. Не істедің десеңіз, "Қылуатта" жатып бір роман жазып бітірдім, өзіңіз көрген "Қартқожадан" үлкендігі екі есе үлкен болады. Бар ойым, ынтам, рухым сол романға кетіп, тап жынды кісідей болыппын, досты, жолдасты, құрметті қымбат ағаны ұмытып кете жаздаппын. Мен күнді қалай өткізеді десеңіз, міне, былай: таңертең сағат сегізде тұрамын да, шай ішіп, қызметке бала оқытуға кетемін. Күніне алты сағат бала оқытамын. Сағат үште үйге келемін, тамақ ішемін. Одан кейін ұйықтаймын.

Сағат алты-жетілерде оянамын. Шай ішемін. Сүйтем де жазуға отырамын. Сол отырғаннан түнгі сағат екі-үшке дейін отырып қалам. Әбден талғанда барып ұйықтаймын. Міне, екі жарым айдай көрген өмірім осы.

Бірақ бұл күнде романым бітті. Баспаға жібергелі отырмын. Басылып шықса, көрерсіз.

Qartqoja, in contrast, presented different aspects of life from multiple perspectives. In particular, Bökeihanov praised *Qartqoja* for depicting the life of Kazakh society and the class conflict that may be easy to overlook. He noted before this novel, there were no people who could clearly show the class struggle in Kazakh society, either due to the lack of knowledge or due to being heavily entrenched in nationalistic views. The depictions were often subject to exaggeration or underestimation. Bökeihanov stated that Aimauytov did it with precision. The lives of Kazakhs under imperial rule, through the revolution and during the Soviet Union are all portrayed in this novel. Bökeihanov admired the way the novel depicts the conflict between rich and poor, slaves and masters, oppressors and oppressed, aristocracy and commoners, *bis* and peasants. He stated that *Qartqoja* depicts a time of turmoil, a time when a new history is being written.

Qartqoja and *Aqbilek* are similar in that they depict of the events of 1916 and the effect of the 1917 revolution in the Kazakh steppe. Similar to *Qartqoja*, *Aqbilek* also depicts conflict between rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, people in power and regular Kazakh people. In *Qartqoja*, the main character is a young male character, whose prototype is Aimauytov himself, according to his autobiographical writing “Öz jaiymnan maǵlūmat.” The eponymous *Qartqoja* goes through a series of trials like *Aqbilek* and grows through these difficulties. In *Aqbilek*, the main character is a young girl. The editor of Aimauytov’s collection of works, Serik Qirabaev, suggests that the idea for writing *Aqbilek* might have come to the author while writing *Qartqoja*. In one of the scenes in *Qartqoja*, on the road *Qartqoja* sees a Russian officer dressed in military clothing with two horses by his side. The officer has a Kazakh girl bent over his shoulder. As the officer passes by, the girl looks *Qartqoja* in the eyes. This scene is similar to the abduction scene in *Aqbilek*, in which three Russian officers capture *Aqbilek*. Aimauytov takes this scene and expands it into a novel, this time focusing on the perspective of the abducted girl.

The abduction of Aqbilek marks the beginning of her tragic fate, in which she suffers the abuse of a White Army officer and the later alienation of Aqbilek from her community. Aqbilek is a 14-year-old girl who gets kidnapped by the former soldiers of the White Army. These soldiers arrive in the Altai region in the aftermath of the 1917 revolution in the Russian Empire and turn into a brigandage that makes a living through raids on Kazakh villages. As the Russians flee after the raid on Aqbilek's village, Aqbilek's fiancé Bekbolat and his friends see that the Russians have kidnapped Aqbilek and chase them. However, Bekbolat gets shot and the entire group stays behind, while the soldiers leave with Aqbilek. In the White Army camp, Aqbilek becomes the concubine of one of the Russian officers. After some time, the White Army leaves the camp, abandoning Aqbilek alone in the mountains. At night, she fights a pack of wolves and the next day, she sets out on her way back to her village. She stops for an overnight stay in one of the nearby villages whose people send a messenger to Aqbilek's village. When she wakes up, she sees her brother Amir, who brings her to her village. Her compatriots act warm in the beginning, but quickly start to shame her and gossip about her. Her father feels ashamed that his daughter, who was abused by the Russians, came back alive. The problem of Aqbilek's isolation becomes further exacerbated when her father marries Örik, a widow, who is separated from her two children and sold to Mamyrbai. Örik shames Aqbilek for being humiliated by the Russians and once it is revealed that Aqbilek got pregnant from the Russian officer, Örik spies on her to confirm her pregnancy, gossips about her and turns her father against her. Aqbilek gives birth but rejects the child and asks for it to be taken away. Bekbolat, having heard the rumors, decides to cut ties with Aqbilek. In the next few years, Aqbilek moves to the city, receives a Russian education, meets a man named Baltaş and gets married. In the final scene of the novel, she comes back to her village, whose people welcome and accept her. There she meets her son,

who she thought was killed. The world of *Aqbilek* is similar to that of its first readers and the events described in the novel are based on the lives of Kazakh people.

In addition to praising Aimauytov for depicting the lives of Kazakh from multiple perspectives, Bökeihanov also praises the innovations Aimauytov brought into Kazakh literature. He compares the structure of *Qartqoja* to that of the works by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In particular, he admires Aimauytov's use of short and mysterious titles for chapter titles. He writes that *Qartqoja* is written like books of European writers. Bökeihanov believes that similar to Pushkin's *Yevgeniy Onegin*, *Qartqoja* is a book that will have great value in Kazakh literature. Speaking of Aimauytov's style, that Aimauytov's language is "meaningful, beautiful words" that make a "creation like a thread of golden jewels" (Бөкейхан 1995, 367). The events in the book follow each other and flow into one other. Bökeihanov notes that the events are described quite beautifully: "they lead the reader like a noble camel, making them walk, without letting the rope get tangled" (Бөкейхан 1995, 367).

Aimauytov takes his stylistic innovations to a new level in *Aqbilek*, in which he combines the novel form with Kazakh oral literary tradition. This fusion can be best illustrated through the figure of the narrator, whose behavior and interactions with the audience imitate the behavior of performers of Kazakh oral poetry. Such a mode of interacting with the audience can be witnessed at the end of the first chapter, where the narrator discusses the plot and the narration of the novel with an imaginary audience. At this point in the novel, when the Russian officers kidnap *Aqbilek*, shoot *Bekbolat* and flee, the identity of the Russian officers and *Bekbolat* is not yet established. As the chapter is about to end, the narrator, who has been mostly observing until this point, steps in and addresses his imaginary audience (Аймауытов 2013, 171):

Who is that person on a pied horse? Who are the Russians who kidnapped the girl? Who is the one chasing, who caught a bullet? Shall we say who they are? Shall we let them speak? Let's see, I am collecting votes. Those who say that we should tell [reveal the identities of characters], raise your hands. One, two... Those who say "No,

let them speak,” raise your hands... Four, five... With myself, this is the majority. So the word will be given to them. The guy who caught a bullet will speak first (Аймауытов 2013, 181)².

Here, Aimauytov’s narrator does not separate himself from his audience. To figure out the identity of the people who kidnapped Aqбіlek and of those who chased after the officers, the narrator proposes that “we” — him and the audience — let the characters speak for themselves. The narrator talks about himself and the audience as “we,” implying that both the narrator and the audience are following the events in this novel. In addition, the use of “we” also bridges the gap between the narrator and the imaginary reader, putting the two on equal footing when it comes to determining the further development of the novel. Instead of asserting the mode of narration from his position as the teller of the story, Aimauytov’s narrator suggests making a decision with a vote. He says that those who want the narrator to talk about the characters should raise their hands, and those who want to hear the characters themselves should also raise their hands (Аймауытов 2013, 150). Then, the narrator counts the number of imaginary votes and includes himself in the second group. Finally, he announces that the majority chose for the characters to speak. Talking with the audience, instead of talking to them, suggests a proximity not only in status, but also in an imaginary spatial arrangement. The author could be mimicking the typical interaction of the performer of oral epic poems with the listeners. However, the fact that the novel is written and not performed links Aimauytov’s narration to another social setting, in which several people would gather to listen to written books. This practice was common when most Kazakh people were illiterate. One of the few literate people would read different writings aloud, while a group of people would be listening.

² Манағы ала атты кім? Қыз алып қашқан орыстар кім? Бұларды қуам деп оққа ұшқан кім? Олардың кім екенін біз айтайық па? Өздерін сөйлетейік пе? Қане, осыны дауысқа саламын. Біз айтайық дегенің қолдарыңды көтер. Біреу, екеу... жоқ, өздері сөйлесін дегендерің қол көтер... Тәртеу, бесеу... Өзіммен көпшілік. Сонымен сөз өздеріне берілетін болды. Әуелгі сөз оққа ұшқан жігіттікі

In his attempt to keep the audience engaged and attentive to the events of the novel, Aimauytov is similar to the performers of oral epic poems, whose task was not only to perform in front of the audience, but also to manage the reactions and interruptions of their audience. This is in stark contrast with the style of narration frequently used in novels, in which the narrator tells the story to one reader who is often silent. The narration also takes place in a unidirectional manner, with the narrator being the sole decision maker in how the narration will unfold. Aimauytov's narrator, on the other hand, assumes that the audience participates in the telling of the story. The narrator makes suggestions to the imaginary audience, which consists of several people instead of one solitary reader. The imaginary audience, in turn, replies to the narrator when asked for their opinion, thus participating in the creation of the narrative.

Addressing the audience in a familiar manner and imitating the familiar figure of a traditional performer could be Aimauytov's way of introducing his audience to the new genre. Rapid shifts in points of view and different narrators are uncommon in oral epic poems but are frequently used in novels. Bearing in mind the fact that *Aqbilek* was one of the first novels in Kazakh literature, one can assume that the general public was largely unaware of the literary conventions of prose writing, especially long prose like a novel. Thus, by arranging an imaginary voting process, the author finds a creative way of transitioning from one chapter to another, from one point of view to another.

Aimauytov's imitation of traditional performers can also be due to the fact that the idea of an abstract narrator itself may have been alien to his immediate audience, who were used to the narrator-performers of oral epic poems. The narrator in oral epic poems is the performer, who can be seen, heard and talked to. The performer of oral epic poems is a tangible, existing human. On the other hand, the third-person omniscient narrator of many novels is usually abstract. He exists, but he cannot be touched, seen or heard. He tells the

story to the audience, but the audience cannot speak to him. Aimauytov's narrator bridges the gap between these two alternatives and lets the third-person omniscient narrator be more accessible to the public. By doing so, he accommodates the novel form into Kazakh literature through the elements of oral epic poetry.

The characteristics of the novel outlined above show that *Aqbilek* is a mixture of oral and written narrative genres, one that poses a challenge to the understanding of the boundaries between the epic and the novel form. As a global genre, epic poems have been defined in multiple ways, with Aristotle's definition being one of the most influential examples. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines the epic as "representational and narrative, in meter, and of a certain length," while its content speaks of a "heroic action" (Reichl 2018, 121). Discussing Aristotle's definition in his 1992 book *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, Karl Reichl argues that the Aristotelian definition of the epic used in the Western scholarship is not suitable for the study of the epic in Turkic societies. The problem that Reichl identifies in this view of the epic is that, when applied to Turkic oral epic poetry, this definition proves too narrow and leads to the underrepresentation of an otherwise rich poetic tradition (Reichl 2018, 123). For example, Turkic oral epic poems exhibit a prosimetric composition—a poem that has parts in verse and parts in prose. In addition, the extent to which a poem has to be lengthy in order to be classified as an epic is not clear. Therefore, Reichl introduces a term intrinsic to the cultures being discussed, *dastan*. According to Reichl, "a *dastan* is a narrative in verse or in a mixture of verse and prose; it is of sufficient length to comprise more than one episode and to allow for the elaboration of individual scenes (with monologues and dialogues)" (2018, 124). What is important in Reichl's approach is not the terminology that he suggests, but the fact that it incorporates multiple dimensions of oral epics, with form and content on the one hand and performance on the other. These two dimensions are not mutually exclusive, as they give rise to one another.

From versed narration to the use of stock similes, from poetic performance of *Aqbilek* to Äldekei's storytelling, this novel showcases a great extent of continuity with the pre-existing Kazakh oral literature. The merger of two forms, the novel and the oral epic poems, is the central focus of this thesis. In his review of *Qartqoja*, Bökeihanov compared Aimauytov's writing to the work of a good camel driver and highlighted his innovation in plot and his innovation in stylistic technique. In this thesis, I analyze what exactly makes Aimauytov's work similar to the work of a skilled camel driver.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the author and his background and discuss the history of publication of *Aqbilek*. Chapter 2 analyzes the way *Aqbilek* uses stylistic techniques from oral epic poems. This chapter shows that the novel's versed narration exhibits the features of oral epic poems, such as grammatical parallelism, which gives rise to end-rhyme, alliteration and formulaic systems. While chapter 2 discusses the oral literary techniques used in *Aqbilek*, chapter 3 analyzes the way Kazakh oral literary genres appear within the plot of the novel. In this chapter, I discuss how the author uses genres, like *joqtau* or *šešendik söz* to depict social isolation and acceptance on one hand and corruption and oppression on the other, with the discussion of style leading back to the discussion of thematic content.

Chapter 1: Aimauytov's life and *Aqbilek*

Aimauytov's allegorical short story "Eles" ("Apparition") written in 1924 can be read as an authorial statement on the nature and purpose of literature in general as well as the role of literature in Soviet Union, as well as his view of the past and the future of Kazakh literature. The story narrates a conversation between a "revolutionary writer" and a stranger, who happens to be an apparition (Аймауытов 1924, 68). When the stranger asks the writer what revolutionary writers write about, he says:

We write about the freedom and equality that the revolution gave us. We sing for the heroes who died in the name of the revolution. We praise socialism and the Soviet Union. ... We call the workers for class struggle; we write about women's equality. We inspire the youth, call people to education. We criticize the rich and the influential. ... Some write words denouncing the *moldas*³ and old traditions (Аймауытов 1924, 69)⁴.

The stranger is dissatisfied to hear such an answer, saying that it has been seven years since the revolution and yet none of these writers write about real life, the real revolution. He demands that the writer write about issues, like the way the lives of Kazakh people changed after the revolution, the imprint of the war between the White and the Red Army, which spilled over into the Kazakh steppe, the famine that took place shortly after and the struggle for power and the corruption within Kazakh society (Аймауытов 1924, 70). "Who is a writer?," he asks. "Who is a poet? Do you know? They are mirrors of their time. They are those who put onto the mirror of literature the lives, the dreams, the wishes of their people" (Аймауытов 1924, 70). In this way, the stranger urges the writer to think about his identity and responsibility as a writer. The writer in the story is reluctant to write on the topics that the stranger brings forth (Аймауытов 1924, 72). It is only after the stranger points his gun at the writer and threatens to shoot that the writer agrees to write.

³ Kazakh pronunciation and spelling of *mulla*

⁴ Біз төңкерістің берген бостандығын, теңдігін жазамыз. Төңкеріс жолында құрбан болған ерлерді өлең қыламыз. Ортақшылдар жолын, Кеңес өкіметін мақтаймыз. ... Тағы да еңбекшілерді тап күресіне шақырамыз; әйелдер теңдігіне арнап жазамыз. Жастарды оятамыз, жұртты оқуға үндейміз. Байды, жуан жұдырықты түйрейміз ... Ескі молдаларға, дінге, ескі әдет-ғұрыпқа қарсы сөздер де жазылады.

The stranger's call for open depiction of the implications of the revolution for the Kazakh steppe corresponds to the time when *Aqbilek* was published, in which the literary censorship was still loose. *Aqbilek* was serialized in a journal called "Äiel teñdigi" ("Equality of Women") from 1927 to 1928 (Жұмабаева and Қалым 2020, 234). Prior to 1928, the literary conventions in the Soviet Union were loose. Katerina Clark, in her book *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, analyzes Socialist Realism in Soviet novels. In her overview of the changes in the degree of censorship, she argues that the literary space was more open to diverse views before the end of 1927: "[u]ntil approximately 1927, the Soviet literary scene was reasonably fluid, and the outcome of various literary struggles was not assured. By the end of 1927 the literary world had begun to change rapidly. ... From then until 1932 the literary battles became progressively dirtier and more dire in their consequences for the losers" (Clark 1981, 31). This puts the publication date of *Aqbilek* at the end of a more open, fluid period and at the beginning of the period in which literature started to be more tightly controlled.

The period in which *Aqbilek* was published was also favorable for the development of national literatures. Kathryn Schild, in her 2010 dissertation "Between Moscow and Baku: National Literatures at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers," analyzes how national literature and national identity were regulated by the Union of Soviet Writers in 1930s and how they were understood by the "natives" — non-Russian members of the Soviet Union. She argues that the development of national literatures was encouraged in the Soviet Union. Even though Schild's work focuses on the 1930s, the development of national cultures was already addressed in 1929 by Stalin, who stated that "The prospects are that the national cultures of even the very smallest nations of the USSR are going to develop, and we are going to help them" (Schild 2010, 2-3). Developing national cultures was seen as the way to achieve a uniform society: "Promoting national development was a way to end national differences"

(Schild 2010, 3). Since literature was considered a tool for bringing education to the masses, national literatures were a means of raising the education of the representatives of each nationality and thus increasing the educated proletariat. The development of national cultures was encouraged so that these nationalities could reach the level of progress necessary for communism.

In addition to fostering the development of national cultures, the period in which *Aqbilek* was published allowed the depiction of interethnic conflict. Prior to 1930, the depiction of interethnic conflict was permissible in Soviet Union. Lowell Tillett, in his 1969 book called *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities*, analyzed the creation and proliferation of “the friendship myth” in Soviet historiography — the idea of a friendship between different nationalities of the Soviet Union (Tillett 1969) . Looking at the origins of this idea, he argues that the existence of conflict and tension between different nationalities was acknowledged before 1930s, but after this point, the history of interethnic interactions was rewritten to create a narrative, in which no conflict ever existed between the nationalities of the Soviet Union, both in terms of interactions between non-Russian nationalities and the Russians as well as between two non-Russian nationalities (Tillett 1969, 11). After World War II this claim was revised, this time stating that this friendship between nationalities existed even before the 1917 revolution (Tillett 1969, 7). Tillett argues that “[the Bolshevik ideologists] have more recently asserted that not only does no hostility *now* exist, but that it has *never* existed” (Tillett 1969, 6). It was said that different nationalities united against the common enemy, the Imperial rule. However, this claim, too, was changed and even the Russian imperialism was interpreted as an act of “brotherly” care and protection.

The core arguments of “the friendship myth” contradicted the earlier opinions held by key Soviet ideologues. “The friendship myth” stated that the non-Russian nationalities chose

to submit themselves to the Russian rule voluntarily, while resistance movements against the Russian rule were classified as class struggle (Tillett 1969, 7-8). Stalin, in his 1922 speech at the Party Congress, clearly stated that the existence of capitalism means that there is no possibility for the equality between different nationalities and no possibility for the cooperation between the working classes (Tillett 1969, 22). Stalin also recognized, in 1919, that tsarist nationality policy led to the hatred of the Russians in the Eastern people (Tillett 1969, 23). In addition to Stalin, a key Soviet historian Mikhail Pokrovsky made statements that negated the idea of people's friendship before 1917. A part of "the friendship myth" was a claim that the Russian conquest was necessary to protect the vulnerable and backward non-Russian nationalities from other threats, such as British and Persian colonization (Tillett 1969, 7). Pokrovsky asserted that the threat of British conquest was no bigger than that of Russian colonialism (Tillett 1969, 28). He also refuted the idea that the annexation of non-Russian nationalities was made voluntarily, without violence, arguing that the colonized people suffered tremendously from the hands of the conquering generals (Tillett 1969, 28). The contradiction that are found in the works of Soviet ideologues show that the Soviet ideology was not uniform and underwent changes as time passed. The discussion of interethnic conflict, which was acceptable at the time of publication of *Aqbilek* was no longer allowed starting from the 1930s. Particularly, after 1930s, a story of a non-Russian girl suffering at the hands of Russian soldiers would be considered ahistorical, even if the Russian soldier was a part of the White Army.

In addition to demanding a more "realist" depiction of the 1917 revolution, Aimauytov's stranger condemns the abandonment of the old culture and old literature and points at the lack of better, "new" alternatives. He argues that revisiting the pre-Soviet literary traditions is an important part of creating new literature:

Some of you say we're now for the modern and hence the old literature needs to be set on fire; if the old literature and the old culture are to be set on fire, who was ever

born a genius [from a mother], who was ever born as a worker? Which son was ever born with clothes on?

Let's say the old literature, the old culture belongs to the rich and to the king. Now, show me your new literature, your new achievement! (Аймауытов 1924, 70)⁵

Aqbilek is an example of “new literature,” a part of the building the canon of Kazakh national literature which, however, does not deny its predecessors, integrating them instead. Its use of versed narration – a characteristic that links it to the earlier Kazakh literary tradition, which was predominantly oral and poetic in nature. Indeed, in her book *Kazahskaia Hudojstvennaia Proza: Poëtika, Janr, Stil'* (*Kazakh Literary Prose: Poetics, Genre, Style*) dedicated to the history of the Kazakh novel, Aigül İsimaqova (1998, 389) states that pre-existing genres of Kazakh literature dictated and facilitated the adoption of the novel as a genre. This mixing of different genres was a part of the author's attempt to portray the “real world” and “real people”; the way they feel, think and speak. İsimaqova (1998, 193) argues that the novelty that Aimauytov brought into Kazakh literature through his *Aqbilek* is the type of narration that focuses on the inner worlds of characters and concerns itself with existential problems. With his appreciation for the earlier Kazakh literary tradition, it is no wonder that, in his search for an expression of the characters' inner worlds, the author turns to Kazakh oral poetry. More specifically, one can see a close connection between *Aqbilek* and the oral epic form, which was a main narrative genre of Kazakh literature before the emergence of the novel.

The novel form was indigenized into Kazakh literature through the aesthetic devices accumulated in oral literature. In the twentieth century, when the novel appeared in Kazakh literature, which had previously been predominantly oral, with few short prose forms emerging before the adoption of the novel. According to İsimaqova, the novel came to

⁵ Біреуің жаңашыл болғанның жөні осы деп ескі әдебиетті отқа өртеу керек деп жүрсіндер, ескі әдебиетті, ескі мәдениетті отқа өртеп, енеден данышпан, енеден еңбекшіл болып туған кім бар еді? Киімшең туған қандай ұл? Ескі әдебиет, ескі мәдениет байдікі, патшанікі екен. ... Берші, кәне жаңа әдебиетінді, жаңа өнегенді!

Kazakh literature as a “ready genre,” imported from the outside world (1998, 150). The first novels in Kazakh literary history, though influenced by Western-type novels, are more similar to a mixture of an oral form narrative and a written prose, with *Baqytsyz Jamal* by Mırjaqyp Dulatov opening with a two-page poem. These first novels as well as pieces of short prose, published in various literary journals, adapted the genre to Kazakh literature and Kazakh readership. Aimauytov’s choice of stylistic features from Kazakh oral literature was affected by the different influences that he was exposed to through his family, education, career and his literary background – all of which will be outlined in the following sections.

Aimauytov’s childhood and education

Like many other members of the Kazakh elite, Aimauytov first received a religious education. His autobiographical record “Öz jaiymnan mağlumat” (“Information about myself”) is one of the few sources available about the author’s biography, which he provided at the request of a fellow ex-member of Alash party Smağұл Säduaqasov in 1928. Writing about his early education in this record, he states:

Our father had no more than 6-7 cows before 1917. That’s why father prepared us ... to earn money. On the one hand, he gave a cow each year to *moldas* for them to teach me and my brother Aqat ... on the other hand, he sent us to the cobblers and carpenters in the villages so that we could learn craftsmanship. (Аймауытов 1928, 286)

From the age of 5 to 15, Aimauytov was taught to read and write in Arabic script by the village *qoja* and *molda* (Аймауытов 1928, 286). As a part of his education, he studied religious texts and prayers. The process of studying from a *molda* is described in detail by Adeb Khalid, in his 1998 book *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, in which he provides an overview of Central Asian education, its relationship with the Jadidist movement as well as the impact of imperial interventions on literacy in the area. In his book, Khalid provides an overview of the traditional religious education that was popular before the Russian secular education. Children were usually taught by *moldas* hired by the children’s parents, usually Tatar *moldas* (Khalid 1998, 27). Sometimes the local *bai*

could hire a *molda* for his children and the rest of the children in the village could join the classes. The “classes” did not have a set place and could take place in houses of the *molda* or the person who hired him, or in mosques (Khalid 1998, 26). Describing the typical experience of a child sent to learn from a *molda*, Khalid writes that the education of children began with teaching letters and vowels, with the teacher pronouncing the names of the letters and children repeating (Khalid 1998, 23). After learning these, the children were taught surahs and verses from the Quran. Khalid notes “the Qur’an was taught in the Arabic, with no translation provided and no attempt made at explanation” (1998, 23). In the absence of understanding of the text, the progress of the student was measured by his ability to recite appropriate surahs in appropriate contexts (Khalid 1998, 20).

Traditional education involved the memorization of a selected range of religious and literary texts. After memorizing Quranic verses, the students were expected to memorize religious tracts on ritual, belief and proper modes of behavior. In addition, the children memorized Persian and Turkic poetry from poets like Hâfiz, Sufi Allah Yâr, Fuzuli, Bedil, Nawâi, and Attar. According to Khalid, “[t]he works of these poets constituted the canon of Central Asian literature, and acquaintance with them (and the ability to recite verses from memory at appropriate times) was *de rigueur* for an educated person.” Since the traditional education in Central Asia involved religious and literary works from different cultures, it created a “cosmopolitan community of Muslims” (Khalid 1998, 113).

In addition to learning religious texts, Aimauytov learned to read and write — two rare skills that were not popular among the students of *moldas*. Reading and writing were not given as much importance as memorization because these skills were used rarely and in narrow contexts (Khalid 1998). Both the teaching method as well as day-to-day interactions of Central Asian were primarily oral. This applies both to social transactions as well as cultural works. Oral poetry is a prominent example of a cultural text transmitted orally, but

even written works were transmitted orally through storytellers and reciters reading aloud at evening gatherings. These would typically involve a literate person reading a written text and other people listening. Due to the minute role of reading in the daily of the Kazakhs, people did not actively attempt to learn to read.

The ability to write was even less common than the ability to read. Khalid explains that “[i]n a society organized around direct, face-to-face interaction between social agents, writing was of limited use and tended to become a specialized skill” (1998, 24). It was, therefore, used as a means of assisting one’s memory, rather than a way of recording information. The lack of popularity of writing can also be explained by the fact that many teachers did not teach writing, and even when they did, they only taught calligraphy (Khalid 1998, 25). Therefore, there were more people who could read than the people who could write. In his record, Aimauytov writes that he had good handwriting and that he often hand-copied books. His ability to read, together with his writing skills, points at his rigor in learning and the quality of education he received.

Recalling his learning of the Russian language, Aimauytov expresses his resentment towards his uncle who did not let him study Russian alongside his sons. Aimauytov’s father, Oimauyt, had a brother called Ospan from the second wife of their father. Aimauytov’s family worked for the family of Ospan and the families managed their livelihood together (Аймауытов 1928, 287). However, when it came to educating his two sons, Ospan did not include Jüsipbek:

Despite that, we did not please Ospan: when he paid for the education of his two sons, he did not include me. Both my father and I talked to him; he said nothing. He must have thought I would become better than the children of his second wife. (Аймауытов 1928, 287-288)⁶.

⁶ Сүйтіп жүрсек те, Оспанға жақпадық: екі баласын орысша оқытқанда, мені оқытпай қойды. Әкем де, өзім де барып айттым, үндемеді, паң еді. Мені тоқал баласынан артық боп кетеді деген арам ойы болуы керек.

However, being close to his cousin, Jüsipbek learned to read and write in Russian from him, reaching a level in which he could practice translation between Russian and Kazakh (Аймауытов 1928, 288). Aimauytov was further exposed to Russian language and education because he attended a school in Baianauyl in 1907 and lives in the house of a Russian translator Serebryannikov who worked for his uncle (Аймауытов 1928, 289). He studies there for two semesters and enrolls in an agricultural school in Pavlodar in 1908 but drops out due to a Kazakh youth revolt. He then went back to the Baianauyl school and studied for a third semester.

After having completed the school in Baianauyl, Aimauytov enrolled in a Russo-Kirgiz school where he studies for four years. These schools, established by the imperial government, provided students with both a Russian education as well as a “native” education. The Russian section taught children the Russian language, arithmetic, and in the fourth and final year geography and history (Khalid 1998, 157). The “native” counterpart provided children with traditional Kazakh education, although Khalid notes that the emphasis on the “native” part must have come from the strategic goal of gaining the trust of the parents, by assuring them that their children will get the education the parents want them to have (1998, 157-158). As a result of their education, the students were expected to be able to speak and write in Russian and to be able to work with basic documents (Khalid 1998, 158). He completed his Russian secular education with a formal pedagogical education in Semei Teachers’ Seminary between 1914 and 1919, after which he spent his time working.

Aimauytov’s advanced educational background hints that he had a more financially well-off family than that which he describes in his autobiographical record. Although Aimauytov repeatedly stresses the burden of poverty that he and his family experienced throughout his record, he may have changed the detail about the financial status of his family in favor of a more Soviet-friendly biography. Aimauytov himself writes that his purpose in

education was to be able to provide money for his poor family; however, his level of education as well as the education of his brothers and sisters suggests a wealthier background. Kazakhs who had a modern Russian education comparable to that of Aimauytov came from the aristocracy. According to Khalid, hiring a *molda* or attending Russian schools was common among members of the Kazakh aristocracy — whose children studied in Russian schools as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Khalid writes that few families could afford to hire a *molda* and even fewer could afford separating their children from labor in favor of learning (1998, 27). In addition to being educated himself, Aimauytov writes that his brother and his sisters could read, too. Assuming that boys in general were expected to work after receiving education like Aimauytov, their education would be considered a financial investment that would pay off in the future. However, the education of girls was not a necessity. If Aimauytov's family was indeed poor as he describes, the education of his sisters would be out of their family's reach. In fact, as shown by Rozaliya Garipova in her article "Muslim Female Religious Authority in Russia: How Mukhlisa Bubi Became the First Female *Qāḍī* in the Modern Muslim World", education was a symbol of status for women that came from wealthy families (Garipova 2017, 140). Considering that Aimauytov's sister was educated when the education of women was a rare phenomenon in Kazakh society, it is fair to assume that his claim about being raised in poverty was changed to fit the Soviet narrative of a Soviet citizen rising from poverty.

The career of Aimauytov

In addition to being a prominent writer, Aimauytov was a lifelong teacher. After having studied from five or six *moldas*, at the age of 15, Aimauytov started to work as a *molda* and taught children. Aimauytov recalls working for a person named Qarjas Suleimen and receiving two young horses for his service (2013b, 288). Teaching became a lifelong occupation of Aimauytov, who started to teach in schools and institutes after receiving a

Russian secular education. He taught at the city school in Qarqaraly, at the People's Educational Institute in Orenburg and Tashkent as well as in a military school in Orenburg. He also worked as the manager of the department of education of Semei gubernia and served as the head of Shymkent Pedagogical Technicum between 1926 and 1929 (Аймауытов 2013b, 7).

Aimauytov wrote manuals and instructions for teachers that provided the newest knowledge on topics like teaching methods, child psychology and approaches to upbringing. His works include “Tärbiege jetekši” (“A Guide to Upbringing”), “Sabaqtyñ komplekstik jüiesiniñ ädisteri” (“Methods of Complex Lesson Systems”), “Jan jüiesi jäne öner tañdau” (“The System of the Soul and the Choice of Art”) and “Psiqoloģiya” (“Psychology”) (Аймауытов 2013, 61). In particular, his “Psiqoloģiya” gained a positive review from Älihan Bökeihanov. Pointing at the fact that works outlining new psychological insights are not present even in Russian literature, Bökeihanov praises Aimauytov for including new perspectives. He acknowledges that it takes a great level of mastery to write this kind of book with simple and accessible language. Despite this, he emphasizes that reading such material in Russian takes a lot of knowledge and reading it in Kazakh takes even more knowledge. Therefore, he urges the reader, specifically teachers, to read this book slowly and thoughtfully and believes that doing so will benefit educators greatly (Бөкейхан 1995b, 367-368). He guards Aimauytov from potential criticism by saying that if there are inconsistencies or contradictions within the book, this is not due to writer's fault, but due to the state of the development of psychology as a discipline.

In addition to producing original work, Aimauytov made a number of translations from Russian and Western writers. In his record, he says that he translated works of writers, like Hugo, Maupassant, London, Tagor, Gogol and Konrat Berkovich (Аймауытов 1928, 289-290). These translations were indirect translations from Russian since Aimauytov did not

speak French or English. These translations are available in the third volume of his collected works, with the exception of his translation of *Les Misérables* by Hugo, which has been lost and is not available (Aimauytov 2013). The editor of Aimauytov's collected works, Serik Qirabaev, states that it is Aimauytov who first introduced the concept of "aq öleñ"⁷ into Kazakh literature through his plays, with other writers like Äuezov and Müsirepov taking it up from him (Aimauytov 2013). Aimauytov's versed narration in *Aqbilek* could have been inspired by his translation of Maksim Gorky's "Pesnya o Sokole". However, Karl Reichl's analysis of the prosimetrum in Turkic oral epics in his book *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, shows that versed prose was long a part of the Turkic literature, particularly due to the influence of *1001 Nights* (Reichl 2018). Regardless of the origins of "aq öleñ", Aimauytov made significant contribution to Kazakh literature, both through his own writings as well as through his translations.

Apart from his literary legacy, Aimauytov is known for his political career. Aimauytov's political career started during his studies in Semei Teachers' Seminary in 1917, when he participated in the Semei Regional Congress of Kazakh people which took place between April 27 and May 7, 1917 (Қуантайұлы 2013, 25-26). The members of the Kazakh elite that participated in this congress alongside Aimauytov were Šäkärim Qūdaiberdiev, Halel, Gabbasov and Älimhan Ermekov to name a few. As a result of this meeting, it was decided that the members of the meeting fully supported the establishment of a Kazakh autonomy and expected the actionable plan to be made in the upcoming All-Kazakh Congress. Writing about the significance of the Semei Regional Congress, historian Kenes Nurpeisov stated that what made this congress special is the fact that the congress made major decisions about the establishment of the autonomy and governance (Қуантайұлы 2013, 26). After the All-Kazakh Congress, in preparation for the Russian Constituent

⁷ Free verse poem

Assembly, Aimauytov and a scholar Qanyş Satpayev were sent to Pavlodar to meet the local people and explain the voting process (Қуантайұлы 2013, 35-36). Aimauytov met Qanyş Sätpaev and Mūhtar Äuezov during his studies in Semei Teachers' Seminary. In 1919, they became the members of the electing panel in Semei provincial committee. In 1920, he joined the Communist party, but left in 1922. Later, he was also elected as the member of the Central Executive Department of Kazakh ASSR and worked as the head of People's Commissariat for Education in Kazakh ASSR. However, he did not work in this position for a long time and went back to teaching.

Aimauytov's political involvement is closely tied to the Alash Party, particularly, through his editorial work for key Alash news outlets, such as "Saryarqa" and "Abai." Both of these outlets are recognized as the main channels of communication through which the Alash Party members reached the general masses (Қуантайұлы 2013). Aimauytov was an editor for both the newspaper "Saryarqa" and the journal "Abai". His writings that were published in these journals echo the ideas of the apparition in the story "Eles," who demands that the writer writes about the "actual" way the revolution took place and the way it affected the Kazakh steppe. Among the articles that he published in these outlets was an article "Qazırgı saiasi hal" ("The current political situation") published in "Abai", in which he provided updates on the success of resistance movements against Bolsheviks. He congratulates the public, saying that most of the cities were taken back by the joint forces of Kazakhs and White Army officers and that the Bolsheviks had to retreat (Қуантайұлы 2013). He calls the Bolsheviks "the Bolsheviks who sold the name of Socialism" and argues that the job of a Bolshevik is to make raids on villages, to earn by oppressing people and to kill whoever dares to speak against them. He states that there are no people who did not suffer because of the Bolsheviks, no property that was not stolen, no city that was not taken away (Қуантайұлы 2013). His nationalist, pro-Alash views and anti-Bolshevik stance is made

clear in his writings published in “Saryarqa” and the journal “Abai”, as well as other newspapers that he worked for, such as *Kedei tañy*, *Qazaq tili*, *Aqjol*, *Eñbekši Qazaq*. He was arrested on May 14, 1929, while working for *Eñbekši Qazaq* in Qyzylorda. On April 21, 1931, he was executed by firing squad for his alleged membership in the “counter-revolutionary organization,” that is, Alash Orda (Аймауытов 2013b, 8). After the death of Aimauytov, his books were banned, including *Aqbilek*. *Aqbilek* was rediscovered in 1989, after the rehabilitation of the author.

The history of publication of *Aqbilek* and the literary influences of Aimauytov

Aqbilek was serialized in a journal called “Äiel teñdigi” between 1927 and 1928. This journal was a female-led journal run by Esova, Sanaliev and Aryqova which originated in 1926 in Qyzylorda and consisted of several sections dedicated to literature, education, health, the lives of worker women, the work of the journal as well as a general section (Жұмбаева and Қалым 2020, 234). The journal published writers like Mırjaqyp Dulatov, whose article “Qazaq äieli” (“Kazakh woman”) outlined the ills of Kazakh society, and particularly the issue of forced marriage, betrothal of children and *ämeñgerlik*, or levirate marriage – a practice in which a widow is taken as a wife by a brother of her deceased husband (Жұмбаева and Қалым 2020, 235). He also denounced the idea of “buying” a woman against her will by bribing the leader of her village. Alongside Dulatov, the journal published short stories and poems of Älihan Bökeihanov and Beïmbet Mailin on the topics of women and gender equality. Similar to the statement that Aimauytov makes with *Aqbilek*, “Äiel teñdigi” and the literary works that the journal published stressed the importance of education for the equality of women.

Women were at the origin of Aimauytov’s exposure to literature, which began early in his life through the literary practices of his mother and sister. In his autobiographical record,

he recalls listening to the *jyrs*⁸ composed by his mother for widows and by reading the poems his sister wrote for her friends who were about to marry (Аймауытов 1928, 287). His brother and sister learnt to play *dombyra* from his father, and both Jüsipbek and his brother frequently attended celebrations in which they would sing songs alongside other participants (Аймауытов 1928, 287). *Dombyra* is a traditional Kazakh musical instrument with two strings and no frets, which *jyrşy* and *aqyns* would use in their performances (Reichl 2018, 107). Aimauytov also points out that he liked reading *qissa*⁹ and that his mother used to have a chest full of written *qissa* for him to read.

Aimauytov credited as his inspiration Abai Qūnanbaev, the 19th century Kazakh poet. In his autobiographical record, Aimauytov writes that when he was young, he had written down some of Abai's poems from traveling poets and knew Abai's poems very well. In the year the first book of Abai was published, he obtained a copy of the book and copied it. Aimauytov was exposed to poetry in his youth and started his literary endeavor by writing poems. Looking back at his first poems, he says that he imitated Abai's poems (Аймауытов 1928, 289). He started writing at the age of 13 but did not get fully immersed in literary work until he was 19 years old (Аймауытов 1928, 289). At this age, he began to write poetry, short fiction, plays and critical articles, which were published in newspapers like "Qazaq", "Saryarqa" and "Äiel teñdigi" (Аймауытов 1928, 289-290). It is only in the late part of his career that he wrote long prose, with his two novels, *Qartqoja* and *Aqbilek*.

In addition to contributing to the canon of Kazakh national literature through his novels, Aimauytov worked towards the larger project of canonizing Abai's poetry. Around the time of publication of *Aqbilek*, Aimauytov and Äuezov worked together to publish essays on Abai and his importance for Kazakh poetry. One of their essays "Abaidyñ öneri häm

⁸ In a strict sense, this means "oral epic poem". However, here, the author uses this word in its broad sense, meaning a poem.

⁹ *Qissa* is a story in verse or prose, sometimes considered to be a type of oral epic poems. *Qissa* can include religious stories that serve didactic purposes or lyrical epic poems that narrate a love story.

qyzmeti” (“The art and role of Abai”) is published in the second issue of *Abai* magazine in 1927, under the pen name “Ekeu”. In this essay, the authors review the value of Abai’s poetry and his contribution to both Kazakh language and Kazakh literature. They argue that Abai’s poetry is multifaceted, admirable for various aspects: didactic, philosophical, critical, artistic, lyrical, satirical aspects as well as his translations (Аймауытов 2013, 130). They credit Abai for “transforming, making useful, correcting” Kazakh language (Аймауытов 2013, 133). Writing with simple, short words that nevertheless carry multiple meanings, Abai writes in a language that is “beautiful, precise, melodic, clean and clear” (Аймауытов 2013, 133). The authors emphasize that such a masterful use of language was not typical of poets that came before Aimauytov.

Echoing the apparition from “Eles”, Aimauytov and Äuezov present Abai as a model for setting a new direction for Kazakh literature that was still rooted in the old tradition. Comparing Abai to the poets of the past, Aimauytov and Äuezov criticize the poets before Abai for being too focused on praising or condemning, exaggerating, just like the revolutionist writer in “Eles,” or for underestimating as well as for being too pessimistic and lamenting (Аймауытов 2013, 133). They state that the words of these poets were not valued because poetry was seen as a means of gaining sustenance, not as an art form. In addition, the poets were not educated and came from lowly origins, which diverted the public from valuing poetry or becoming poets (Аймауытов 2013, 133). Abai refused to follow the ways of the previous poets and paved a new path. Aimauytov and Auezov praise Abai for being more intelligent, more poetically gifted than the poets before him and for recognizing poetry as art (Аймауытов 2013, 133). Recognizing Abai as the pioneer and a pillar of new Kazakh literature, the authors believe that the literature of Kazakh people will quickly reach the level of the literatures of developed cultures. The authors believe that there is poetic giftedness in Kazakh people that is “in their bones” (Аймауытов 2013, 133). “The two” believe that

together with the example set by Abai, who comes from a “backward nation” and yet competes with the poets of developed nations, this poetic giftedness will lead to great development in Kazakh literature. This discussion of the merits of Abai’s works suggests that one can anticipate similar qualities in the works of Aimauytov and Äuezov themselves.

While “Abaidyñ öneri häm qyzmeti” can be considered Aimauytov’s attempt to build a canon of Abai from a theoretical perspective, *Aqbilek* is his practical way of doing that by incorporating Abai’s poetry into the novel. In *Aqbilek*, the narrator describes the moment Aqbilek and Bekbolat are left alone at night. Speaking of their kiss, the narrator states that he is not able to describe such a moment and invokes a part of Abai’s poem “Qyzaryp, sūrlanyp”:

Breath getting hotter,
Fingers getting colder,
Getting shy for some reason,
Shape changing,
Shoulders touching,
Kissing in silence,
drunk (Аймауытов 2003, 203)¹⁰

The author seeks to communicate the feeling and experience of the kissing scene in the most impactful way and to do so, he invokes Abai’s poem. The poem is not performed within the world of the novel and is not heard by the characters – it is directed at the reader. In reciting these lines, the narrator assumes that the reader should be familiar with Abai. This assumption points at the familiarity of an average Kazakh reader with Abai, while also canonizing the poetry of Abai through this novel.

¹⁰ Демалыс ысынып,
Саусағы суынып,
Белгісіз қысылып,
Пішіні құбылып,
Иығы тиісіп,
Үндемей сүйісіп,
мас болып

Aimauytov's work in creating a canon of national literature as well as his use of Kazakh oral literary techniques in *Aqbilek* echoes the statements of the apparition from "Eles." The apparition states that a writer is the mirror of his people whose responsibility is to show the lives of his people in literature. In depicting the way the revolution was experienced by Kazakh people and in telling the story of an abused girl, Aimauytov puts the stories of his people into a new genre, the novel form. In doing so, he shows the literary tradition of Kazakh people, both through demonstrating the use of oral literary techniques in the novel's text and making individual oral literary genres a part of the novel's plot.

Chapter 2: Kazakh oral literary techniques in *Aqbilek*

In her book *Kazahskaia Hudojestvennaia Proza: Poëtika, Janr, Stil' (Kazakh Literary Prose: Poetics, Genre, Style)*, Aigul Ismakova analyzes the narrative within *Aqbilek* from a Bakhtinian perspective and demonstrates the way the author incorporates multiple genres into the novel. One of the genres that make its way into the novel is Kazakh oral epic poetry. In order to trace the impact and role of oral epic poetry in *Aqbilek*, this chapter will analyze the stylistic characteristics of the novel. The stylistic choices made by Aimauytov are particularly important, because the author's style indicates his keen awareness of the oral epic form, thus connecting the novel to the pre-existing Kazakh oral literary tradition.

In order to analyze this connection, this chapter will provide an overview of the oral epic poem as a genre, defining what an oral epic poem is and highlighting its main characteristics. Next, the chapter will provide an analysis of *Aqbilek* in terms of its continuity with traditional oral Kazakh literature. Continuing with the stylistic features of oral epic poems, Aimauytov uses grammatical parallelism, and the devices' parallelism gives rise to: end-rhyme, alliteration and formulaic systems. These features are best illustrated in the scenes where the narrator turns to versed narration as a means of creating an emotionally heightened experience for his audience. Similes, being an instance of formulaic systems, take the emotional impact even further by creating vivid images that parallel the emotional states of the characters. Aimauytov's use of similes introduces novel uses to symbols that are frequently used in Kazakh oral literature, such as a goose or an eagle and imbues them with new meaning.

The composition of oral epic poems

A comprehensive view of the Turkic oral epic poems needs to incorporate both intratextual and extratextual characteristics of the Turkic oral epic. Reichl argues that Turkic oral epic poetry should not be treated as simply a text with content and form, but as a

communicative event, a performance (Reichl 2018, 124). This view is shared by another scholar, Albert Lord, who studied the oral epic poems of the Yugoslavs jointly with Milman Parry in 1935 (Lord 1971, 3). In his book *The Singer of Tales*, Lord provides an in-depth analysis of the way the singers of oral epic poems compose and transmit their oral epics. Oral epics are usually sung by trained singers at important social gatherings, like weddings, to entertain the audience (Lord 1971, 15). Lord (1971, 16-17) states that unlike a writer or a poet who composes their pieces in solitude and without interruptions, the singer of oral epics has to manage different aspects of his performance, such as the interruptions from the audience as well as the variability in the attention of the audience. Kazakh practices around the performance of the oral epic closely resembled that of the Yugoslavs as described by Lord. In Kazakh culture, a professional singer of oral epics was called an *aqyn*, *jyrşy*, or *jyrau*, and performed oral epic poems at important social gatherings. They often played the *dombyra*, a traditional Kazakh musical instrument, as a part of their performance (Reichl 2018, 124). The need to improvise meant that the performers needed stylistic choices that would facilitate their composition.

In terms of their literary features, Turkic oral epics can exhibit fully metric composition or a composition that is partly in verse and partly in prose. Reichl calls such a combination of prose and verse “prosimetrum”— a characteristic composition of Turkic oral epics. These two parts generally differ in terms of their content, with the verse parts being more “static,” representing monologues and dialogues. As for the prose parts, they tend to be more narrative and serve to advance the plot line (Reichl 2018, 128). Reichl (2018, 101) notes that in performance different parts of the prosimetrum can be distinguished by the way they are pronounced: the verse parts are sung, whereas the prose parts are recited in the manner of speech. Reichl notes that the distinction between verse and prose parts is not clear and is not simply about “active” and “static” episodes. Type scenes characteristic of the

Turkic oral epic, like the journey of characters or battle episodes, can be described in verse-parts, while prose-parts can rely more on description. Reichl (2018, 128) states that in some instances, the prose-parts can exhibit metrical pattern and involve rhyme. He links one of such rhymed prose-parts found in the Uzbek *dastan Raushan* to the *1001 Nights*, which also employs rhymed prose to describe a “place, situation, and character” (Reichl 2018, 129). Despite being similar, the author notes, to other forms found in world literature, Turkic prosimetrum is unique in that verse and prose parts exist in close relationship to one another and produce a form together.

If one were to consider an oral epic poem as text, they may expect that such an uneven distribution of the syllables would lead to an irregular metric composition. However, looking at an oral epic as a performance shows that such a variability is not found in the recited version of the oral epic (Reichl 2018, 174). Since an oral epic poem is recited with a particular melody, the structure of the music plays an important role in evening out irregularities. When the lines are sung, they are sung as groups of several syllables, each of which is given an equal duration in the melody, thus making the lines sound even, despite the number of syllables (Reichl 2018, 174). A 7-syllable-line is used in long stanzas with varying number of lines, whereas an 11-syllable-line is used in four-line stanzas (Reichl 2018, 173). Sometimes stanzas composed in 7-syllable-lines have lines with 8 syllables, and the same can be stated about the lines composed of 11 or 12 syllables. Each line is divided into two or three parts that consists of four and three syllables.

7-syllable-lines typically form long stanzas with an indeterminate number of lines that are bound together by end-rhyme and assonance, whereas 11-syllable-lines form stanzas of four lines. These four lines rhyme in an a-a-b-a pattern called *murabba* in Arabic, also called *qara öleñ* in Kazakh (Reichl 2018, 177). These patterns are not adhered to strictly, with nonrhyming lines interrupting the stanzas. In fact, Reichl argues that rhyme (and assonance)

is an outgrowth of parallelism—another literary characteristic of the Turkic oral epics—rather than an end on its own.

Parallelism

According to Lord, parallelism is a method that singers of oral epics had to use due to the oral mode of composition and delivery of the poems. Lord stresses that elements like parallelism were used not because the singer felt obliged to use them and/or to stay within the fixed constraints of the poetic text, but because these methods served a purpose, namely, easing the task of improvisation.

The singer's problem is to construct one line after another very rapidly. The need for the "next" line is upon him even before he utters the final syllable of a line. There is urgency. To meet it the singer builds patterns of sequences of lines, which we know of as the "parallelisms" of oral style (Lord 1971, 54).

Parallelism manifests itself in both syntactic and semantic aspects of the Turkic oral epics. Due to the agglutinative nature of most Turkic languages, lines that have the same syntactic structure typically have assonance (Reichl 2018, 177). Since Turkic languages usually have vowel harmony, the vowel in the last syllable of a word will also harmonize with the rest of the vowels in the word, while the last vowel in the line will harmonize with the last vowel of the next line, thus creating assonance (Reichl 2018, 178). Although the respective lines can have words that are composed of different sounds, by virtue of employing the same suffixes and word endings that are needed to create a specific syntactic structure, these lines will have the same consonants at the end. Similarly, when the same suffixes or word endings are put at the end of the lines, this leads to an end-rhyme (Reichl 2018, 177). In addition to syntactic parallelism, Turkic oral epics make use of semantic parallelism, through highlighting either the similarity or the dissimilarity between two words or pairs of words. These words usually have the same place in syntactically parallel lines. This combination of parallels on multiple levels – syntactic, phonological, semantic – is a common feature found in Turkic oral epic poetry.

Parallelism gives rise to another major characteristic of oral epic poems, that is, their use of formulaic systems. Lord borrows the idea of Parry, according to which a formula is “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (Lord 1971, 4). Such formulas combine into sets, given the condition that “they all share at least one constant word and ... the relationship of their variable elements can be semantically specified, i.e., if the variable elements are synonyms or belong to the same semantic field” (Reichl 2018, 192). These sets then combine into a formulaic system, in which elements from different sets can be mixed and matched without disruptions in syntax or semantic meanings of the lines.

The use of formulaic systems brings a new perspective on the notions of creativity and improvisation. Prior to the appearance of books of oral epic poems, performers had to learn the oral epic poems by hearing another person perform them (Lord 1971, 22). Although they would remember the main motifs of a given oral epic, they altered the nuances of the poems, like the word choice or the sequence of lines. This way, the poems would not be memorized word-for-word, leaving room for improvisation in performance. The performer’s talent, therefore, was evaluated by both his ability to uphold the pre-established ways of performing the poem as well as his creative use of poetic elements.

The fact that the performers’ competence is determined by both adherence to the pre-established tradition as well as the performer’s own creativity shows that formulaic systems were not a constraint in which the performers had to thrive, but a solution to the problem of the need for rapid composition. Lord argues that “[i]n making his lines the singer is not bound by the formula. The formulaic technique was developed to serve him as a craftsman, not to enslave him” (Lord 1971, 54). This explains the simultaneous similarity and variability between the oral epic poems of different performers as well as of different cultures.

Formulaic systems have been used in studying Turkic oral epic poems. Namely, Jonathan

Ready analyzed the use of similes in the Kyrgyz oral epic poem *Manas*, alongside other four modern oral epic poems (Ready 2017). In addition, Kumiko Yamamoto's analysis of the *Shahnameh* was also based on Parry's idea of formulaic systems (Yamamoto 2000). In addition to the study of oral epic poems, formulaic systems can be useful in analyzing texts like *Aqbilek*, which incorporate elements of oral epic poems within themselves.

Stylistic Features of Oral Epic Poems in *Aqbilek*

The analysis of *Aqbilek* shows that Aimauytov makes frequent use of grammatical parallelism and alliteration in his narration, in keeping with the poetic structure of oral epic poems. These are used extensively in the emotionally heightened moments in the text and the narrator's speech often reminds the reader of Kazakh oral literature. For example, in the scene when *Aqbilek* and her brothers approach the village, the narrator makes the following lyrical speech:

You lost your mother, who melted her stone breast, widened her narrow womb, like a camel! ... Your dignity is disrupted, your humanity is destroyed. Your young heart burned before beating. [Your] newly growing melon vanished before ripening. Your young soul, like a candle, was gone without burning. Precious childhood — like food in the bowl spilt — and stopped. Cry, cry! Let your grief wash away with tears! Let the sea gather from your tears! Let the storm move the sea! Let the waves rise! Let the sorrows that made you suffer suffocate, be poisoned in your water! May their wives and daughters be left alone, be loud like you! (Аймауытов 2003, 130)¹¹.

This speech possesses multiple characteristics of an oral epic. One of them is the poetic structure of the speech. In fact, if the Kazakh original is arranged into 7-syllable lines, in the manner of a poem, the resemblance becomes even more obvious:

¹¹ Тас емшегін жібiткен, тар құрсағын кеңiткен, аруанадай анаңнан айрылдың! ... Ар-ұятың төгiлдi, адамшылығың жойылды. Жас науатек жүрегің - соқпай жатып өрт болды. Жаңа шыққан жауқазын - піспей жатып жоқ болды. Шам-шырақтай жас жаның - жанбай жатып жоқ болды. Есіл ерке балалық - аяққа құйған астайын шолтаң еттi - тоқталды. Жыла, жасың бұла! Жасыңмен қайғың жуылсын! Жасыңнан теңіз жиылсын! Теңізді дауыл толқынтсын! Құтырсын толқын, туласын! Зарлатқан сені мұңдарлар тұншықсын - суың да улансын! Қатын-қызы тұл қалып, сендей болып шуласын!

Tas emšegın jıbitken,
tar qūrsağyn keñitken,
aruanadai anañnan airyldyñ! ...
Ar-ūiatyñ tögildi,
adamšylyğyñ joiyldy.
Jas nauetek jyregiñ -
soqpai jatyp ört boldy.
Jaña šyqqan jauqazyn -
pıspei jatyp joq boldy.
Šam-šyraqtai jas janyñ -
janbai jatyp joq boldy.
Esil erke balalyq -
aiaqqa qūiğan astaiyn
šoltañ etti - toqtaldy.
Jyla, jasyñ bula!
Jasyñmen qaiğyñ juylsyn!
Jasyñnan teñiz jiylsyn!
Teñizdi dauyl tolqyntsyn!
Qūtyrsyn tolqyn, tulasyn!
Zarlatqan seni mūñdarlar
tūnšyqsyn - suyñ da ulansyn!
Qatyn-qyzy tūl qalyp,
sendei bolyp šulasyn!

You lost your mother,
who melted her stone breast,
widened her narrow womb, like a camel!..
Your dignity is disrupted,
your humanity is destroyed.
Your young heart burned before beating.
[Your] newly growing melon
vanished before ripening.
Your young soul, like a candle,
was gone without burning.
Precious childhood —
like food in the bowl
spilt — and stopped.
Cry, cry!
Let your grief wash away with tears!
Let the sea gather from your tears!
Let the storm move the sea!
Let the waves rise!
Let the sorrows that made you suffer
suffocate, be poisoned in your water!
May their wives and daughters be left
alone,
be loud like you! (Аймауытов 2003, 130)

From this arrangement, one can see that the beginning of the “poem” is arranged in an a-b-a-b rhyme with lines of 7 syllables each. The rhyme in the even-numbered lines results from the end-rhyme achieved through the use of the same word endings at the end of the line. The odd-numbered lines showcase the repetition of the grammatically and lexically parallel lines, in which only two words are changed at a time:

soqpai		ört	
pıspei	jatyp	joq	boldy
janbai		šoq	

Towards the end of the text, the rhyme pattern changes into a-a-a-a type with 8 syllables in each line. The last words of the rhyming lines have the same word ending, which creates both

grammatical parallelism and assonance. Alliteration manifests within the lines, with the repetition of the same sound in different words, as well as between the lines, with the repetition of the same sound in the same location within different lines. For example, the line “Šam-šyraqtai jas janyñ” (“Your young soul, like a candle”) makes recurrent use of the sounds “š” and “j,” whereas the lines

Jas nauetek jüregiñ. -
Jaña šyqqan jauqazyn –

make use of the same “j” sound in the same spot in these two lines. Similar to works of Kazakh oral literature, the author does not always follow the rhyme scheme and the syllable count, adjusting it to fit his purpose and leaving uneven lines in places. The pace that is created by the rhyme, parallelism and assonance creates an emotionally tense experience, as the narrator expresses his sympathy for Aqbilek’s grief. The feeling of pity and sadness created by this experience soon transforms into a feeling of horror, as the narrator turns to curse the perpetrators of Aqbilek’s tragic fate of being abducted by the Russian officers and being rejected by her society later.

Another example of the versed narration is the description of the fight between Aqbilek and the wolves. The author uses a series of juxtapositions between the wolves and Aqbilek, producing a cinematic effect of shifting between two episodes, one of which focuses solely on the wolf, the other— solely on the heroine:

The wolf advances. Aqbilek beats, the wolf barks. Aqbilek beats, the wolf barks. Aqbilek says “Oh God,” the wolf rages, Aqbilek rolls down... The wolf howls... Aqbilek screeches, the wolf growls, Aqbilek shrieks... (Аймауытов 2003, 108)¹²

The sentences are constructed according to the syntactical parallelism which follows a subject+verb structure, with the words “qasqyr” and “Aqbilek” alternating as nouns. The author’s use of verbs serves a double purpose. First, each pair of juxtaposition makes use of

¹² Қасқыр қамалайды. Ақбілек сабалайды, қасқыр абалайды. Ақбілек сабалайды, қасқыр абалайды. Ақбілек “аллалайды”, қасқыр долданады, Ақбілек дөңгелейді... Қасқыр күркілдейді... Ақбілек шырылдайды, қасқыр қыркырайды, Ақбілек шыркырайды...

similar-sounding verbs, creating an assonance and alliteration. For example, “Aqbilek sabalaidy, qasqyr abalaidy” (“Aqbilek blocks off [the wolves], the wolves growl”) uses the two verbs that differ only in one letter, the “s” at the beginning. Despite this similarity, the words have different meanings, suitable to the nouns that they pertain to: Aqbilek beats, the wolf (or wolves) bark. Second, the collection of verbs used in this excerpt is semantically related to the act of producing a sound of some type. The words “abalaidy,” “qyrqyraidy,” “kürkildeidi” describe the various noises made by the wolves as they attack Aqbilek and get beaten back by her. The words “allalaidy,” “şyryldaidy,” “şyrqyraidy” describe the sounds made by Aqbilek in her desperate attempts to fight off the wolves. The word “allalaidy” derives from the Kazakh word for Allah, indicating that, as she fought, Aqbilek was praying to God as her only hope. This word could also be an interjection that expresses the feeling of fear and pain. The words “şyryldaidy” and “şyrqyraidy” are often used to describe a high-pitched cry. It can be used in relation to a baby that cries in distress: “bala şyryldap ketti,” “säbi şyrqyrıp jylady.” In addition to a baby, the sounds of small birds like sparrows can also be described by using the verb “şyrqyraidy.” Therefore, the verbs in this passage have sound in them both phonetically and semantically.

In his description of Bekbolat’s friend Aqbergen, the author similarly constructs a formulaic system of comparisons that emphasize the positive aspects of Aqbergen’s character. In particular, he describes the kind of loving and loyal attitude Aqbergen had towards Bekbolat. The author writes “Many times in youth, he was the tongue in numbness, found a way when being lost, followed as a wolf, crawled as a cat, scratched the wall as a dog, held the horse as a stake”¹³ (Аймауытов 2003, 171). While all six clauses rhyme follow

¹³ “Жастықтың талай кезеңінен асқанда үнсізде тіл болған, жолсызда жол тапқан, қасқыр боп торыған, мысық боп жорғалаған, ит боп ірге тырналаған, қазық боп ат ұстаған”

the pattern of an end-rhyme, the last four clauses are built around a syntactic formula of the following structure:

qasqyr			tory-
mysyq	bop		jorǵa- +ǵan
it		(verb object)	tyrna-
qazyq		(verb object)	ūsta-

The first word in each clause is a noun that is connected to a respective verb and in combination these two picture Aqbergen as if he was a wolf, a cat, a dog or a stake. It is notable that, in this example, the author describes the character by comparing him to an animal or an object. Typically, such a comparison involves the use of a suffix or an auxiliary word that communicates the meaning of likeness. However, in this example, the author does not write that Aqbergen follows *like* a wolf. Instead, he writes that he follows *as* a wolf, “qasqyr bop toryǵan.” This selection of words strengthens the likeness of Aqbergen to a wolf in his behavior and emphasizes his loyal and useful companionship to Bekbolat. The comparison with a wolf is one instance of Aimauytov’s use of similes, which will be analyzed in the following section.

Similes in *Aqbilek*

Aside from the rhyme, alliteration and assonance, the use of formulaic systems gives rise to another major poetic device used in oral epic poems, the simile. Jonathan Ready used the concept of a formulaic system to analyze the similes used in five oral epic poems of Kyrgyz, Indian, South Sumatran, Bosniac and Najdi literary traditions. In his book called *The Homeric Simile in Comparative Perspectives*, Ready attempts to reconstruct the way oral epic poems were composed in the time of Homer by analyzing modern epic poems (Ready 2017, 134). He focuses on the way similes work in individual oral epic poems as well as how these similes circulate between various oral epic poems. Ready’s findings show that these similes

function as a formulaic system made up of “stock” similes that can be shared by different oral epic poems, while also undergoing changes according to pre-determined patterns (Ready 2017, 136). According to Ready (2017, 140), the competence of a performer was determined by his movement throughout the “spectrum of distribution,” that is, by his ability to integrate both shared similes as well as idiolectal similes – similes that are unique to the given performer.

Aimauytov’s use of similes shows both continuity with as well as a break from the traditional use of similes in Kazakh literature. This is evident in Aimauytov’s use of the image of a goose. In Kazakh oral epic poems, a goose is an aesthetic element used to describe someone’s beauty as well as a symbol of love. The most prominent examples can be found in *Qyz Jibek*, in which Jibek is compared to a goose that walks slowly: “Slowly like a goose // Jibek comes near”¹⁴ (Қыз Жібек 2003, 111). While this simile serves the aesthetic purpose of describing the elegance and beauty of Jibek’s walk, in *Aqbilek* the same simile is used without the aesthetic connotation. When the White Army soldiers leave the mountain, the order in which they moved is described as “trailing like gees”¹⁵ (Аймауытов 2003, 105). This emphasizes the number of the soldiers and their lengthy formation, highlighting their arrangement in space instead of their grace. A similar use of this simile can be observed in the works of Aimauytov’s younger contemporaries, İlias Jansügirov (1894-1938) and Säken Seifullin (1894-1938). İlias Jansügirov uses this simile to emphasize the orderliness of the group: “Текеметтердің үстіне салынып тасталған парсы кілем, торғын көрпелердің үстінде қаздай тізілген қонақ.” Säken Seifullin uses the image of geese in describing the village that moves from one place to another: “Oh those people moving places // Walking line-by-line like geese!”¹⁶ In addition, in *Aqbilek*, when different state officials gather in the

¹⁴ “Майпаңдап, қаздай баяулап // Қасына Жібек келеді”

¹⁵ “Қаздай шұбырып”

¹⁶ “Қаздай қатар мыңғырып, Тізіліп көшкен елдер-ай!”

house of Aqbilek's brother, one of them, Yqañ is described as “adasqan qazdai ana šette qalğan” (“left out there like a lost goose”), pointing at the fact that he was left out of the group (Аймауытов 2003, 155). These instances mark a deviation from the traditional use as an aesthetic element into the description of the spatial alignment of people.

Aitmauytov further utilizes the comparison with birds to create an emotionally loaded experience for the reader. Specifically, Aitmauytov consistently uses comparison with birds to make positive and negative evaluations of a person. An example of the positive comparison can be seen in Aitmauytov's depiction of motherhood and the relationship between a mother and a daughter. When Aqbilek is about to get kidnapped, her mother comes to her rescue. In describing this scene, the author uses a series of similes comparing the mother to a bird. He writes that when the soldiers find Aqbilek, her mother comes “flying like an owl” (“ükidei üšyp keldi”) (Аймауытов 2003, 76). In the next simile, Aqbilek's mother protects Aqbilek like a mother bird that is protective of her chick: “She attacked the two Russians who took hold of her daughter like eagles, like a mother bird protecting her chick”¹⁷ (Аймауытов 2003, 76). Since birds are often considered vulnerable animals, this simile emphasizes the selflessness of the mother in trying to defend her daughter, even though she has no means to protect herself.

Aitmauytov's negative evaluation of the Russian men through the comparison to eagles is unusual given the symbolic importance of eagles for Kazakh people. In modern Kazakhstan, the eagle symbolizes the freedom of Kazakh people, and this symbol is represented on the national flag. In the book, it is also shown that eagles are a close companion to Kazakh men, particularly those who engage in hunting. After Bekbolat comes out of the hospital and meets his friend, the first thing he asks about is his eagle. The author describes at great length the kind of effort Bekbolat's friend Aqbergen has expended in order

¹⁷ “Қызын бүркітше бүріп, іліп жатқан екі орысты ... балапанын басқан ана құстай, баласын бас салды”

to raise and train his eagle: “[Aqbergen] put the eagle into his coat like his child to protect it from freezing”¹⁸ (Аймауытов 2003, 171). Here, the author compares the relationship between Aqbergen and the eagle to that of a father and a child.

Unlike the typically positive use of an eagle as a symbol of freedom, in *Aqbilek*, it is also used to characterize a negative character or symbolize a negative event. Once after Aqbilek’s arrival back at her village, her sister-in-law, Ūrqiia, sees a dream in which a big eagle takes hold of Aqbilek and flies away with her. Ūrqiia narrates this story to Aqbilek, saying that “The further the black eagle gets, the more it looks like a sparrow with a white chest”¹⁹ (Аймауытов 2003, 194). This could be interpreted as an unfortunate event turning into a good one, as indicated by the transition from a negative symbol (the eagle) to the positive symbol (the sparrow). However, there is another juxtaposition taking place simultaneously, the duality of colors. The black eagle turns into a sparrow with a white chest. The word “aq” denotes the color white but also conveys the general meaning of goodness. Hence, in addition to the transition from the eagle to the sparrow, there is a transition from black to white, thus, from the bad to the good.

The sparrow itself is a recurring element in the novel, which likens the heroine to a vulnerable, small being. It is first mentioned in the scene of Aqbilek’s kidnapping. When the soldiers capture Aqbilek, she is described as “Like a baby goat that is put into a pen by a child ... like a sparrow that injured its lungs, she got caught in a net”²⁰ (Аймауытов 2003, 76). The simile of a sparrow in a net also appears in Dulatov’s writing: “Unable to go to my beloved, // I worried, like a sparrow caught in a net.”²¹ Here, the author uses the sparrow to create a feeling of helplessness, of being entrapped and unable to reach one’s beloved. The comparison between Aqbilek and the sparrow is made more explicit, when Aqbilek herself

¹⁸ “[Ақберген] бүркітті жауратпаймын деп, ішкі тонына баласындай бөлеген”

¹⁹ “Алыстаған сайын қара бүркіт ақ бауыр торғайдай боп көрінеді”

²⁰ “Бала қамаған лакқа ұқсап, ... өкпесін соққан торғайдай торға ілінді”

²¹ “Сүйгеніме бара алмай, // Торға түскен торғайдай алақтадым.”

notes this similarity. On her way back from the camp of the Russian soldiers, she sees a sparrow that is attacked by a snake. The author draws the picture of a sparrow that is in the air, but unable to fly away because it is hypnotized by the snake. When the sparrow falls to the ground and is about to get eaten, Aqbilek steps in and kills the snake. Then the narrator says that Aqbilek “She likened herself to the sparrow, and those who did evil to her – to the snake”²² (Аймауытов 2003, 113). In these comparisons, the sparrow serves as a symbol of a vulnerable victim that is unable to protect herself.

A sparrow, alongside a puppy, emphasizes the smallness of Aqbilek and her siblings. A sparrow is characteristically a small bird, compared to an eagle or an owl. The image of a puppy serves the same purpose as the sparrow in representing a small creature unable to defend itself, but in the case of a puppy, age is emphasized alongside the physical smallness. When Aqbilek lives in the White Army camp and finds herself unable to escape, the author writes that Aqbilek stoops like a puppy that is mobbed by a group of dogs: “köp it antalağan küşiktei qūnysyp” (Аймауытов 2003, 102). Later in the text, when the Russian army leaves their camp and Aqbilek is left alone, she is compared to a puppy that is left alone and without the owner: “even though Aqbilek was left alone, straying like a homeless dog, she did not regret her loneliness.”²³ She is further compared to a puppy in distress when she casts a last glance at the Russian camp before leaving. Looking at the place where her feelings were abused so much, she feels disgust and sadness. The author draws a parallel between Aqbilek’s feelings and a puppy: “Just like a puppy that fouls the mat at the further end²⁴ of the room, if you hold it at the back of its neck and put its nose into its own feces, it feels

²² “Өзін торғайға, өзіне қастық қылғандарды жыланға теңеді”

²³ “бұралқы күшіктей қаңғырып Ақбілек жалғыз қалса да, жалғыздығына өкінген жоқ.”

²⁴ In Kazakh culture, the end of the room opposite to the entrance is considered to be the place for the most respected people. Here, the puppy fouling this place means that the puppy fouled the most important place in the room, which should be kept clean.

disgust, whimpers and retreats. When she looked back, Aqbilek was like that puppy”²⁵ (Аймауытов 2003, 105). Aqbilek feels ashamed and disgusted with herself, despite not being responsible for any of the atrocities that had happened to her. Unlike the puppy, she did not voluntarily approach the Russian man, but she still felt ashamed that she lost her virginity, and thus, lost her dignity. Her shame grows as she approaches her village, with her finally wishing that she had died instead of being humiliated the way she was humiliated. The comparison with a puppy is also used in relation to Aqbilek’s siblings, who are left without a mother and a sister to take care of them: “He felt he needed Aqbilek even more when he saw that those two young kids were straying like homeless puppies, getting dirty, getting lice and worms, losing weight”²⁶ (Аймауытов 2003, 109).

While Aqbilek compares herself to a sparrow, she compares the Russian soldiers to the snake in the same scene: “She likened herself to the sparrow, and those who did evil to her – to the snake” (Аймауытов 2003, 113). The eyes of the snake itself are compared to death (“beine ajal”) (Аймауытов 2003, 113). While the comparison with the eagle is not uniformly negative, Aimauytov’s use of the figure of the snake is purely negative. In addition to the White Army soldiers, the author uses the image of the snake to describe Aqbilek’s stepmother, Örik. When she first arrives in Mamyrbai’s house, Aqbilek gets scared, as if a snake entered the house: “Aqbilek got scared, as if a snake entered the house”²⁷ (Аймауытов 2003, 219). From this simile alone, one can expect that their relationship will not be good, particularly because the comparison with the snake is reserved only for two characters, which bring the most damage to Aqbilek’s life, the White Army soldiers and the stepmother.

²⁵ “Тәрдегі таза төсенішті былғап кеткен күшікті желкесінен ұстап, өз тезегіне өзінің тұмсығын тигізсең, қандай жеріп, қыңсылап, кейін шегінеді. Артына қарағанда Ақбілек те сол күшік тәрізді болды”

²⁶ “Анау екі жас бала бұралқы күшіктей сенделіп, кірлеп, биттеп, құрттап жүдеубасқа айналып бара жатқанын көргенде Ақбілек тіпті керексіді”

²⁷ “Үйге жылан кіріп келгендей, Ақбілектің жүрегі су ете түсті”

As this chapter shows, the style of Aqbilek presents an innovative way of mixing prose and elements of oral poetic technique. Building his versed narration on stylistic features of oral epic poems, like parallelism and end-rhyme, alliteration and formulaic systems that stem from parallelism, the author adapts prose form by using the pre-existing techniques of Kazakh literature. His use of stock similes in a new way also emphasizes his own creativity. These similes function both as an aesthetic tool for creating impactful imagery as well as a tool for characterization. Drawing on the aesthetic experiences of Kazakh people and the stylistic features of Kazakh oral poetry as well as bringing his own novel usage of the existing literary devices lets the author accommodate the novel form into the body of Kazakh literature.

Chapter 3: Kazakh oral literary genres in *Aqbilek*

Because that time when Aqbilek met her brother Ämir unexpectedly, and then met her father, women, her village, she could not say anything, could not connect two words and became numb. Later, when she learnt *joqtau* (“mourning”) from her sisters-in-law, that seemed somewhat childish, stupid, undignified and shameful to her. “But people must understand my circumstances in those days: I did *körüsü* unexpectedly then, how could I have words to say? Have I ever mourned in the past?” With such thoughts, she used to console herself (Аймауытов 2013, 181-182)²⁸.

These are the thoughts of Aqbilek, who recalls her *körüsü* (“meeting”) with Ämir, that took place after her return from the Russian camp. Having stopped overnight in a neighboring village, Aqbilek wakes up to see her brother Ämir, who was sent to bring Aqbilek to her village. When Aqbilek sees Ämir, she is not able to say anything except ‘Brother!’²⁹ (Аймауытов 2013, 127). Feeling numb, she only hugs Ämir and cries.

Despite knowing that Aqbilek was kidnapped by Russian officers, the women watching this scene do not share the sadness of Aqbilek. In fact, they feel dissatisfied with her crying ‘like a child’, because Aqbilek’s behavior does not match their expectations of how *körüsü* should be. *Körüsü* is a social occasion in Kazakh culture, in which people come to meet each other, often following the death of a person, with visitors coming to express their condolences to the close relatives of a person. As a part of this encounter, people recite poems to express how missed the other person is or to express their sympathy for the grieving person. The women watching Aqbilek and Ämir’s *körüsü* feel dissatisfied because Aqbilek did not recite any poems and kept crying like a child:

However, most women were not satisfied with this *körüsü*, because Aqbilek could not speak openly. She did not recite any of the poems that are recited in times of peace, when the bride is given away to her husband, when someone dies; her heart hidden in a trap could not spill its content to the red tongue; the great sorrow that filled her, like

²⁸ Өйткені Ақбілек әнеукүні Әмір ағасын тосын көргенде, одан кейін әкесіне, қатындарға, аулына көріскенде түк айта алмай, екі сөздің басын ұйқастырып қоса алмай, тығылып қалды ғой. Кейін жеңгелерінен жоқтау үйреніп алған соң, сондағысы өзіне бір түрлі балалық, топастық, жерсіздік, ұят сияқты көрінді. “Бірақ ол күндегі менің жайы-күйімді жұрт ұғар: мен онда шұғылдан көрістім ғой, аузыма сөз түскендей болды ма? Бұрын мен дауыс кып көрдім бе?” деген ойлармен өзін-өзі жұбатушы еді.

²⁹ “Ағажан-ай!”

a strong stream, poured in raving tears. Aqbilek had not even memorized poems; she was a 15-year-old child, unable to let go of her childhood, who thought that she still had time before she would be given away as a bride. She was not able to mourn after the death of her mother — she herself got into trouble. The women do not account for this, they likened her speechless *körüsü* to the crying of a child and felt dissatisfied. (Аймауытов 2013, 127)³⁰

The narrator notes that the women did not consider the fact that Aqbilek was only a 15-year-old child, who lost her mother and got kidnapped shortly after. Unlike the women in this scene, the narrator is sympathetic to Aqbilek, who had not learnt any of the poems that were recited upon a person's death or poems that used to be recited by brides when they got married and left their village. Aqbilek used to think that she would not be given away to her husband anytime soon, so she did not memorize any poems. Although Aqbilek was overwhelmed with her emotions, the reason why she could not find words to say was that she had not memorized any of the traditional poems that used to be recited in *körüsü* or in other social settings.

Aqbilek herself has also internalized the expectation for proper social behavior. Looking back at her *körüsü* with Ämir, Aqbilek feels ashamed of her failure to uphold social standards for proper behavior. Thinking about her *körüsü* with Ämir and later with her father and women from her village, she feels embarrassed for not being able to speak. However, she consoles herself by pointing out that her *körüsü* with Ämir was unexpected and urgent and that she had not mourned anyone before that moment. While thinking this to herself, she also hopes that her people will understand her and the situational factors that led to her failure to behave properly during her *körüsü*.

³⁰ Алайда қатындардың көңілі бұл көріске жарымады, өйткені Ақбілек суырылып сөйлей алмады. Жайшылықта, қыз ұзатқанда, кісі өлгенде айтылатын жырлардың бірде-бірін айтпады, тұтқиылда тығылып қалған жүрек қызыл тілге құшырын төге алмады, ішке толған қалың шер кернеп келген бұлақтай қатты ышқынған жас болып, ыршып-ыршып кетті. Ақбілек жыр жаттап та көрген жоқ еді, қыз болып ұзатылуға әлі талай заман бар ғой деп, балалығы арылмай жүрген, 15 жасар бала ғой. Шешесі өлгеннен бері дауыс қып жоқтағандай болған жоқ, өз басына күн туып кетті. Қатындар онысын есеп қыла ма, сөйлемей көріскенін жас баланың жылағанындай көріп, айыздары қанбады.

Both for Aqbilek and women watching her, processing feelings like grief and sadness is not an exclusively private matter. What may seem a personal tragedy for a modern person was also a matter of public practice for Kazakhs. There were certain ways in which people would meet each other when they would unite after a certain tragedy. The people involved in these situations were expected to behave and speak in a certain way. The scene of Aqbilek's *körüsü* with her brother emphasizes this communal aspect of Kazakh society, in which experiencing intense emotions, like grief and sadness, is as much a public practice as it is a personal experience.

By incorporating examples of genres from Kazakh oral literature, Aimauytov uses Kazakh traditional literary practices to show the conflict between Aqbilek and her society. This conflict is expressed in the way Aqbilek fails to uphold societal standards for behavior. Her failure to engage in literary practices in situations, like meeting a close person after separation or the death of a loved one, translates into her failure to fit into the society from which she was separated. The author highlights this tension not only on the narrative level, but also in the diegesis of the novel, by bringing in examples from Kazakh oral literature.

While the previous chapter analyzed the way Aimauytov used stylistic devices from Kazakh oral literary forms, this chapter looks at the way oral literary genres themselves are incorporated into the content of the novel. Starting from Aqbilek reciting a joqtau poem and the poem of the village girls about Aqbilek, leading to Äldekei and his stories that mimic *šešendik söz* stories, these instances of Kazakh oral literature are witnessed both by readers and characters. The examples discussed in this chapter come from the second half of the novel, in which Aqbilek arrives to her village from the Russian camp and struggles to be integrated back into her society. The instances of Kazakh oral literature are organized around two main foci, Aqbilek and Äldekei, and discuss the role of the oral literary forms in relation to female and male characters. In relation to female characters, the oral literary forms center

around the idea of isolation and acceptance, while the use of oral literature in relation to male characters expresses the authorial critique of widespread corruption and oppression brought about by the male characters.

Female characters and oral poetry: isolation and acceptance

Aimauytov makes use of the Kazakh oral literary genre, *joqtau*, to show the conflict between Aqbilek's internal state and the behavior that was expected from her. In addition to long form, "high" types of poetry like oral epic poems, Kazakh literature also has a substantial tradition of situational poetry. These are poems in genres, like *jar-jar* (wedding poem), *besik jyry* (lullaby), *jarapazan* (a type of poem recited in Ramadan) and *syñsu* (the poem recited by brides as they leave their village), that are recited in various life events of a Kazakh individual or Kazakh society in general. One of such poetic forms is *joqtau*, which has its name from the verb "joqtau", "to mourn" in Kazakh. The verb itself stems from the word "joq" – "not existent". This type of poetry is recited upon someone's death by the person's close relatives, often with loud crying or sobbing. *Joqtau* can be recited repeatedly over a period of one or two weeks, as long as visitors from the same or other villages continue to come to the family of the deceased. Typically, *joqtau* is performed by adult women in the family, who calm down in between the visitors and start crying and reciting poems each time a new visitor arrives.

When describing a scene in which Aqbilek mourns the loss of her mother, the narrator notes that Aqbilek did not know any *joqtau* poems. Aqbilek's sisters-in-law teach her a poem with two stanzas which she keeps repeating:

My spotted one among horses,
Your charm made of silk.
My dear loving mother,
My longing has not ended.

In front of the door is the cliff,
Geese land lining the cliff.
Having lost my dear mother,

I have great sorrow inside... (Аймауытов 2013, 181)³¹

The narrator notes that the poem was dull, meaningless and unsuitable for the expression of Aqbilek's feelings. The words like "My spotted one among horses" and "In front of the door is the cliff" were not in line with how she was feeling, so they felt out of place:

... [Aqbilek] now started to recite the piecewise *joqtau* taught by her sisters-in-law whenever someone comes. Since her sisters-in-law told her to do *joqtau* like this, Aqbilek assumed that this is the way it should be and kept reciting. Otherwise, words like "Spotted one among horses", "in front of the door is the cliff" were too unsuitable, meaningless, alien to express the great sorrow inside her (Аймауытов 2013, 181).³²

What makes the lines "My spotted one among horses" and "In front of the door is the cliff" unsuitable is the fact that these lines are too general and impersonal to communicate the grief of Aqbilek or to communicate the grief of losing one's mother. "My spotted one among horses" and "In front of the door is the cliff" are the kind of lines that are frequently used in Kazakh oral poetry as formulaic lines that let the performer maintain even syllable count or let him improvise in-between the lines. Since these lines do not have a strong semantic value, they could be used in any context. Due to being too general and vague, these lines fail to express a person's grief over a loved one, especially the loss of one's mother. It is more suitable to consider this poem as a template that people would use when they would find themselves in a similar situation, not as an exemplary *joqtau* poem used for mourning a

³¹ Жылқы ішінде шұбарым,
Жібектен таққан тұмарың.
Әлпештеген жан анам,
Тарқамай қалды-ау құмарым.

Есіктің алды қазған жар,
Жар жағалай қаз қонар.
Жан апамнан айрылып,
Ішімде қалың қайғым бар...

³² ... [Ақбілек] жырынды жеңгелері үйреткен, құрама-сұрама жоқтауын, кісі келсе, сұңқылдатып қоя беретін болды. Жеңгелері солай деп жоқта деген соң, Ақбілек солай болуға тиіс екен деп айта берді. Әйтпесе ішіндегі қалың қайғысын білдіруге "Жылқы ішіндегі шұбар", есік алдындағы қазған жар" сияқты сөздердің түк лайығы жоқ, мәнсіз, жат сөздер еді.

mother that died protecting her child. This shows why Aqbilek feels that this poem does not express her feelings and does not feel connected to what she is reciting.

Not only is Aqbilek detached from the poem, she also cannot understand the way other women can do *joqtau* shortly after the death of a loved one. Despite having witnessed similar situations before, Aqbilek considers the act of mourning a loved one so soon and on display strange. At first, she cannot understand how women who had lost their husbands and children could mourn their children through *joqtau*: “How come the women whose husbands have died, whose children have died are able to mourn them right after their death? How come their heart doesn’t get stuck in their throat?”³³³⁴ (Аймауытов 2013, 181). Comparing their behavior with how she was feeling, Aqbilek is confused about how these women manage their overwhelming emotions.

Aqbilek’s inadequacy can also be explained by the fact that she was too young for her tragedy. *Joqtau* was typically performed by adult women, while young girls like Aqbilek were not expected to do *joqtau*. She never felt the need to learn a *joqtau* poem because the kind of tragedy she had to go through — being kidnapped and abused by Russian soldiers and losing her mother at the same time - was not a typical way a young girl’s life was expected to unfold. Aqbilek’s mindless adherence to this poem is due in large to the fact that she does not know how to behave in this situation, so she keeps reciting the poem as told by her sisters-in-law.

As Aqbilek keeps repeating the poem, she starts to connect to it and her personal loss translates into a public act of mourning. The author uses the imagery of a bridge to show how the poem and the heart of Aqbilek start to connect: “Somehow it seemed that with each time

³³ Meaning that the women manage to not get numb.

³⁴ “Апыр-ау, осы байы өлген, баласы өлген қатындар өлісімен қалай сұңқылдатып жоқтай алады екен? Неғып жүрегі аузына тығылып қалмайды екен?..”

she spoke, with each time she cried, the bridge between those meaningless, foreign words and the grief in the heart was gradually built, connected”³⁵ (Аймауытов 2013, 181). As Aqbilek now truly mourns the loss of her mother, her personal grief becomes united with the public act of mourning. Therefore, her personal experience becomes a part of the larger literary tradition through *joqtau*.

Aqbilek’s *joqtau* marks the union of literary tradition and personal experience, of an individual and society that only takes place at the end of the novel. In the concluding chapter of the novel, the author uses a poem to indicate Aqbilek’s inclusion within the society. In this scene, before Aqbilek’s return from the city, three young girls go out to bring water, and as they walk, they say:

Into the reeds my earring fell, ringing,
My sister married into foreign people, having no mutual feelings.
My ribs bend for my sister,
Both of the rings on my hand become crooked (Аймауытов 2003, 273).³⁶

Female solidarity is the main theme in this poem, where the girls from the village express their compassion towards Aqbilek. The poem draws a parallel between the imagery of female accessories and the life of Aqbilek. Similar to an earring that gets lost in reeds, Aqbilek was kidnapped by strangers. As the speaker thinks about Aqbilek’s suffering, both of the rings on her finger bend out of sorrow. This poem is in contrast with the way Aqbilek is judged for crying instead of reciting a poem after coming back from the White Army camp. These are the same women who check the sleeping Aqbilek’s clothes earlier in the novel, to see how beautiful and fashionable she is, so much so that even Russians admire her. The poem also contrasts with the way Aqbilek’s stepmother Örik and other women treat Aqbilek, shaming

³⁵ “Қалай да сол мәңсіз, жат сөздер мен жүректегі қайғының арасына сөйлеген сайын, жылаған сайын бірте-бірте көпір салынып, жалғасқан, байланысқан тәрізденді”

³⁶ Сылдыр-сылдыр қамысқа сырғам түсті.
Сырласпаған жат елге апам түсті.
Апам үшін қабырғам қайысады,
Қолымдағы қос жүзік майысады

her, gossiping about her after her return from the Russian camp. Örik goes as far as to shame her for being used by the Russians and turns Aqbilek's father against her. Female solidarity, which is markedly absent throughout the novel, is finally created. Women of the village recognize Aqbilek as their sister and feel connected to her pain.

The point in the text in which the poem appears is important, because in this scene, Aqbilek comes back to her village having conquered all the trials that she has had to go through. She had left the village that had excluded and shamed her, received education and married a person who loves her. Looking back at her tragedy, she now feels as if it has all faded away. The narrator likens Aqbilek's life to the action of climbing a mountain. On their way to the village, Aqbilek and her companions climb Mount Altai (Аймауытов 2003, 272). As she climbs, Aqbilek remembers her past, which remains at the skirt of the mountain, far away from her, while she is at the top.

The elevation and purification of Aqbilek is compared to the elevation and purification of the Prophet Muhammad. In describing Aqbilek's renewal, the narrator uses imagery that reminds of the Prophet Muhammad's purification from evil: "Aqbilek got rid of turmoil, shame, sin, got clean like born anew from a mother, as if her heart was brought to 'arş in the seventh sky and washed in a golden basin"³⁷ (Аймауытов 2003, 272). In Islam, it is believed that when the Prophet Muhammad was a child, the angel Gabriel came to him, opened his chest and washed his heart with snow from a golden vessel. In Kazakh folklore, this story must have been transformed to include the ascending to the seventh heaven. This can be due to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad's heart was washed twice, once when he was a child and once in his adulthood, when he ascended to the seventh sky (Al-Imam Muslim 2007; al-Bukhari 1997). That ascendance is known as *mi'raj*. In this quote, the word

³⁷ "Ақбілек бейнеттен, қорлықтан, күнәдан құтылып, сонау жеті қат көктегі ғарышқа апарып, жүрегін алтын легенге салып жуғандай, анадан жаңа туғандай тазарды"

“Ғарыш” can mean “space” as in modern usage, but it is likely to be a Kazakh pronunciation of an Arabic word “*arṣ*” - the Throne of Allah. Here, both the physical and spiritual rise takes place, as Aqbilek physically climbs the mountain, and her heart reaches the highest point of purity.

Together with the poem, the religious imagery serves to mythify and preserve Aqbilek’s tragedy as a part of a broader literary tradition. The real, lived experience of Aqbilek turns into a story, in which “the sister” is not named and the reason why she married a stranger is not clarified. The rich and detailed experience of Aqbilek that the reader has been following throughout the novel is now summarized and presented in an indefinite form, as history turned into a myth. The only thing that is made known is the sorrow that the speaker of the poem feels for her sister. Both the readers and the people of the village understand the story that led to the creation of this poem. However, one could envision this poem being recited several generations later, as a poem about an unknown woman, who supposedly existed. Therefore, the poem marks both the society’s acceptance of Aqbilek and her tragedy as well as the society’s attempt to preserve Aqbilek’s story.

Male characters and *šešendik söz*: corruption and oppression

While the previous section looked at the way Aimauytov uses Kazakh poetic tradition to emphasize the social isolation of Aqbilek and the building of female solidarity, this section looks at the way Aimauytov portrays male characters in Aqbilek through the use of Kazakh oral literary genres. In his description of the entertainment of Äben and his guests – Aqbilek’s father Mamyrbai, Äldekei, Müsiräli and Imambai – Aimauytov uses a genre called *šešendik söz* together with Jyndy Qara’s performances to show that Äben and his guests are negative characters. By contrasting the idle pastime of these characters to the turmoil that Qoiteke, a young servant of Äben, has to go through, the author makes a social critique, condemning the corruption and the oppression perpetrated by Äben and his guests.

Qoiteke is a 13-year-old boy, who goes out into the cold steppe in the late winter evening to bring the camels back that were left unattended. Qoiteke is the son of Äben's servants – his father looked after Äben's sheep for his entire life before dying and his mother milks Äben's cows (Аймауытов 2003, 212). Qoiteke himself grows up raising Äben's sheep, beginning this work when he is no more than 9 years old. In this scene, Qoiteke is sent to bring camels that are left out in the steppe by the two older men out of negligence. Instead of going to bring the camels themselves, they send Qoiteke, who cannot refuse for fear of being beaten (Аймауытов 2003, 213).

Qoiteke is given a stubborn horse called tory šolaq (small chestnut-colored horse) to ride on his way to bring the camels. The narrator begins the part about Qoiteke with a detailed description of tory šolaq, emphasizing the extent to which it is stubborn and insensitive to the rider's commands. Tory šolaq is so difficult to ride that it stands to graze whenever it finds grass and does not move even when subjected to harsh beatings. Qoiteke struggles to ride this horse on his way to the camels, but manages to bring the camels back, while leaving the stubborn horse behind (Аймауытов 2003, 214). It is a late evening winter and tory šolaq makes Qoiteke's already uneasy task even more difficult and long.

Qoiteke almost freezes, but when he arrives, the shepherd that sent him after the camels scolds him for leaving the horse, without showing any concern for the freezing boy. After a week, Qoiteke dies. At this point, the narrator makes a critique of Äben's and others' entertainment:

Qoiteke was on his way, weeping, almost freezing, saying “The livestock of the dog... White bucket!” at the moment when our “good ones” were amused by Äldekei's mocking of Müsiräli, by the depiction of the pregnant *mätüşke* by Jyndy Qara, when they were full of fat in a warm house, praising the *bai* “He is the one who was given by God”. (Аймауытов 2003, 214)³⁸

³⁸ Мана біздің «жақсылар» Әлдекейдің Мүсірәліні мазактағанына, Жынды Қараның буаз мәтүшке болғанына мәре-сәре болып, жылы үйде майға тойып, «құдай берген кісі ғой» деп байды мадақтасып жатқанда, Қойтеке: «Иттің малы... ақ шелек!» деп егіле еңіреп, үсіп өлгелі келе жатыр еді.

The “good ones” mentioned in this quote are Aqbilek’s father Mamyrbai, a bai named Äben, Imambai, Äldekei and Müsiräli, who gather at Äben’s house. In this gathering, the men are entertained by Äldekei, who makes fun of Müsiräli and by Jyndy Qara, who depicts a Russian *mätüške* urinating out in the field. The narrator contrasts these two subsequent scenes, pointing out the degree of suffering that Qoiteke has to go through and comparing it to the carefree, shameless and somewhat absurd entertainment of Äben and his company.

What taints the entertainment of Äben’s guests is the fact that his guests did not gather merely to spend time together, but to get their familial issues resolved through Äben and his power, thereby causing corruption and oppression in the society. Äben is a *bai*, who also held the administrative *bolys* position under the Imperial administrative system. Äben had significant influence over the lives of the people in his village and could circumvent established laws in order to solve a problem. Müsiräli wants to get his daughter-in-law whom his potential *qūda*³⁹ is refusing to give away. Mamyrbai wants to be separated from his *qūda* to give Aqbilek to another man, find a woman to marry and take revenge on Mūqaš. Imambai wants to sell the widow Örik, who was under his protection, to Mamyrbai, while Äldekei acts as an intermediary for all of them. After talking to the *bai*’s *nökers*⁴⁰ and *bis*, they settle for a solution: Örik is separated from her two children and sold to Mamyrbai for six cows as “qalyñ mal” (“bride price”), one of which goes to Äben. Her children are given to her relatives and her property is divided between her relatives and the men in the gathering. Äben is expected to help Mamyrbai with his revenge as well as to break the agreement with his *qūda* to give away Aqbilek. Äben finds a new place for Aqbilek as well. He agrees to persuade Müsiräli’s *qūda* to give away his daughter and will get a horse from Müsiräli for helping with this issue. One character, Äben, enables a series of “deals” that perpetrate

³⁹ The father of the bride in relation to the father of the groom (and vice versa).

⁴⁰ (Persian, نوکر) Close servants of khans, sultans and *beks*, or in this case, the *bai*.

corruption and oppression, taking advantage of vulnerable people and breaking major societal rules.

In addition to the deals that Äben makes, his way of managing affairs show that it was not only him who was corrupt and oppressive, but a large group of people who cooperate with Äben and benefit from him. In resolving different issues, Äben is similar to the khan from Äldekei's story. He does not talk through his deals with Mamyrbai, Müsüräli and Imambai. Instead, his *bis* and *nökers* negotiate on his behalf. Once an agreement has been made, the *nökers* and *bis* tell the results to the *bai*, who either approves the decision or makes adjustments. In the case of Mamyrbai, Müsüräli and Imambai, each one of them talks to Äben's *nökers* separately, who establish the agreement. The narrator notes that Äben never asks anyone for a favor, and he does not talk about "small things". Considering the magnitude of Äben's deals and severity of their consequences for the people that are oppressed, it is clear that issues that involve lives of individuals and entire families are not "big enough" for Äben to talk about.

The comparison of entertainment of Äben and his guests to Qoiteke's suffering prepares the stage for the most extensive and open social critique that the narrator makes throughout the novel. The narrator points out that the exact people who are in a position to help and protect vulnerable people and who can uphold societal order are the ones that use and abuse the vulnerable for their own benefit, while bending rules to serve their purpose.

In vain do Kazakhs say "*qūda* is for a thousand years" when they are full of meat. If it is "for a thousand years," why does Mamyrbai separate from his *qūda*?

The strong ones, when they benefit from it, say "For the tears of the widows and orphans... Justice is needed... There is pity... There is God..." If that is the case, why is Orık punished? Why do her two children suffer? Why does Qoiteke pour his tears to the ground? Why do Aqbilek and Bekbolat — the couple in love, in harmony — separate?

Where is the truth? Where is justice? Where is humanity? Where is God? Where is the Day of Judgement? (Аймауытов 2003, 217-218)⁴¹

The narrator's critique shows that marital rites are being employed as a tool of oppression. *Qalyñ mal*, or bride price which is meant as a gift of the groom to the bride's family, is being used for trading the woman against her will. Widows like Örik, instead of being protected, are sold. Orphans like Qoiteke, who are vulnerable, are being employed under harsh conditions. The narrator disagrees with Äben's guests praising him "He is the one who was given by God!"⁴² and says, sarcastically, "Yes... He is the one who was given by God!"⁴³ (Аймауытов 2003, 211). From the interactions and deals that Äben has, it can be seen that, if anything, his wealth does not come from God or other good source, but from oppressing those in need and taking advantage of them.

It is worth noting that the author does not depict any of the characters or character categories as intrinsically good or bad. Corruption and oppression come from all sources in the novel. The soldiers of the White Army kidnap Aqbilek, but the one who helped them find Aqbilek was a fellow Kazakh, Mūqaš. Örik shamed Aqbilek and spread rumors about her, but she herself was sold to Aqbilek's father. Qoiteke suffers oppression both from the rich Äben and from his fellow shepherds. One can see grown men oppressing a young boy and adult women oppressing a young girl. Either Russian or Kazakh, either man or woman, rich or poor, old or young, corruption and oppression is ever-present in the interactions of these characters.

⁴¹ Етке тойғанда, "құда мың жылдық" деп қазақ босқа шатады. "Мың жылдық" болса, Мамекен құдасынан неге айрылды?

Күштілер өз тамағына бірдене түсірерде: "Жетім-жесірдің көз жасы... Әділдік керек... Обал бар... Құдай бар..." деп көлгірсінеді. Олай болса, Өрік неге жаза тартады? Екі баласы неге зарлайды? Қойтеке неге жасын жерге шыра етеді? Сүттей ұйып отырған, шын сүйіскен асық жарлар — Ақбілек пен Бекболат неге айрылады?

Қайда шындық? Қайда әділдік? Қайда адамгершілік? Қайда құдай? Қайда қиямет?

⁴² "Құдай берген кісі ғой!"

⁴³ "Ия... Құдай берген кісі ғой!"

In depicting bringing forth the negative aspects of male characters, Aimauytov relies on Äldekei, a character who both persuades Mamyrbai to get married and entertains guests at Äben's house. Äldekei is a storyteller with a versatile repertoire, who tells stories as a means of having a place in the society and providing sustenance for himself. Äldekei is a poor old man who travels often and always tries to get to the places where meat is served. The narrator notes that Äldekei received education by old standards and knows many stories of the past. Kazakh traditional education was cosmopolitan in the sense that it was built on literary works of different cultures. Äldekei knows the typical repertoire of someone educated in a traditional way: *Myñ bir tün (1001 Nights)*, *Qyryq uäzür (Forty Viziers)*, *Totyñnyñ toqsan tarauy (Ninety Chapters of a Parrot)*, *Alty barmaq (Six Fingers)*, *Qysasyl änbie (Tales of the Prophets)*. *Qysasyl änbie* or *Qisas al-Anbiya* is a collection of stories from the lives of Prophets in Islam, mostly adapted from the Quran. Together with *1001 Nights*, it marks the Arabic influence on Kazakh literacy and literature. The Persian works mentioned include *Totyñnyñ toqsan tarauy* and *Alty barmaq*. *Totyñnyñ toqsan tarauy* is an alternative name of *Tutiname*, a collection of tales by Shaykh Ziyâoddin Nahshabi. *Alty barmaq* is a translation of a Persian book called *Miraj Nubua* dedicated to the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Lastly, *Qyryq uäzür* is a *dastan* narrating over 80 stories in more than 11000 lines. It was collected by Šaiqyzada Ahmet Mysyry in the 15th century and was republished in Kazan in 1911. Its plot is reminiscent of that of stories found in the *1001 Nights* and *Tutiname*. It is important that Äldekei knew these stories and poems by heart, some of which are extremely long: "This Äldekei was a knowledgeable man, who was educated in an old manner, who knew many sayings of the past, who recited *Myñ bir tün*, *Qyryq uäzür*, *Totyñnyñ toqsan tarauy*, *Alty barmaq*, *Qysasyl änbie* and others by heart."⁴⁴ The narrator, who does not give a positive

⁴⁴ "Бұл Әлдекей ескіше бірталай сауаты бар, ескі сөзді көп білетін, "Мың бір түн", "Қырық уәзір", "Тотының тоқсан тарауы", "Алты бармақ", "Қысасыл әнбиелерді" жатқа соғатын шежіре кісі еді."

treatment to Äldekei in general, still praises Äldekei's knowledge and the extent of his repertoire.

In addition to stories from world literature, Äldekei also knows stories from the Kazakh historical past. When he comes to the house of Aqbälek's father, Mamyrbai, to offer condolences after the death of Mamyrbai's wife, Äldekei recites surahs from the Quran and recounts stories from "Harun al-Rashid" and narrates stories about Äz Jänibek, Jirenše šešen and Lūqman äkim: "As soon as he sat down, Äldekei started to tell stories. He recited from "Aron Rašid". "Äz Jänibek", "Jirenše šešen" and "Lūqman äkim" were there too. The sayings of such and such noble men, of such and such *bis*⁴⁵ were recounted."⁴⁶ "Aron Rašid" could be referring stories about Harun al-Rashid, the caliph of Baghdad. The brother and student of Abai, Kökbai Janataiūly, wrote a *dastan* called "Aron Rašid qissasy" which was inspired by the stories about Harun al-Rashid. Äz Jänibek is a Kazakh khan and a founder of Kazakh khanate, who lived in the 15th century. Jirenše šešen is a historical Kazakh figure, who was known for his talent in *šešendik söz* — his title *šešen* recognizes him as a master of *šešendik söz*. Stories about his life and sayings are abundant in Kazakh oral literature. Similarly, Lūqman äkim is also a figure known for his wisdom — the Arabic word "hakim" in his name means "wise". He is a religious figure, who appears in the Quran as either a prophet or a pious believer who was divinely granted wisdom.

Äldekei recounts the stories of Harun al-Rashid, Äz Jänibek, Jirenše šešen and Lūqman äkim as a part of his *köñil aitu*. *Köñil aitu* is a social practice, in which people come to visit the family of the deceased to express their condolences. These could be close or distant relatives of the family, the people from the same village or the family's acquaintances

⁴⁵ *Bi* is a social position in a traditional Kazakh society held by a person who acts as a judge in resolving conflicts.

⁴⁶ "Отырысымен-ақ Әлдекей әңгімені шерте бастады. "Арон Рашидтен" қозғады. "Әз Жәнібек" те, "Жиренше шешен" де, "Лұқман әкім" де кіріп кетті. Сол елдегі пәлен "жақсы", түген билердің сөздері де еске алынды".

from other villages. In *köñil aitu*, people can recite poems or tell stories in order to ease the suffering of the family members and persuade them to let go of their grief. In *Aqbilek*, Äldekei recounts the story of a grieving khan, who was consoled by a *bi* (Аймауытов 2003, 190). The khan was overwhelmed with his grief and did not participate in his day-to-day activities. Only after the *bi's köñil aitu*, the khan is able to regain his strength. Through this story, Äldekei offers condolences for Mamyrbai, but this *köñil aitu* can also be interpreted as an embedded *köñil aitu*: this is a *köñil aitu*, in which another *köñil aitu* is recounted. Through revoking the historical or literary instance of *köñil aitu*, Äldekei uses oral literature to offer condolences. This is by no means unique to Äldekei — poetry and music were also part of *köñil aitu*. By telling these stories, Äldekei is able to not only offer condolences, but also to let Mamyrbai leave the distressing reality and wander in the world of fantasies. Mamyrbai feels as if he left the village, the grief about his wife and shame about *Aqbilek*, entering a new world.

Another reason Äldekei is able to make Mamyrbai's mood brighter is due to the analogy that he draws between the khan and Mamyrbai, between the *bi* and himself. Even though the Kazakh khanate no longer existed and Äldekei's social status was not nearly as high as that of a *bi*, the hierarchical relationship between the two is still emphasized. Mamyrbai is a *bai* of his village and is an influential person of high status. In relation to Mamyrbai, Äldekei is at a lower social status. In fact, Äldekei does not have the respect of his people or power comparable to the respect and power that *bis* used to have in the eyes of the people. The narrator notes that Äldekei was a promising, talented, all-rounded person in his youth, but in his old age, he is an unlikeable man, who has lost all his talent, who always gets in scandals and only seeks to eat meat. When Äldekei comes to Mamyrbai's house to console him about the loss of his wife, the narrator questions the sincerity of Äldekei's intentions. The narrator says that Äldekei could have arrived only to be fed, using the offering of

condolences as an excuse. Mamyrbai himself is at first not happy to hear that Äldekei has arrived, and he criticizes Äldekei for rambling too much. Considering the reputation of Äldekei, as flattering as it may be for Mamyrbai to be compared to a khan, it is even more flattering for Äldekei to be compared to a *bi*.

Äldekei incorporates a quote from Abai's poem into his *köñil aitu*: "He told a line from Abai's word, "If misery comes, stand against it, don't keep falling!"⁴⁷ (Аймауытов 2003, 190) The fact that Äldekei recites a line from Abai to Mamyrbai in a casual manner, without any introductory comments implies that the quote was easily recognizable to the average Kazakh. This speaks of the popularity of Abai and his poems among the characters. However, just like Äldekei assumes Mamyrbai to be familiar with Abai, the narrator, too, assumes that the readers should know who Abai is and know his poetry. On these two levels, on the narrative level and within the plot, the author assumes that both the readers and the characters are familiar with Abai.

It is notable that Äldekei quotes only one line from Abai's poem instead of reciting it fully. This line is taken from his poem called "*Senbe jurtqa, tursa da qanša maqtap*" ("Do not trust people, even if they praise you"), in which the speaker urges the reader to not trust the crowd, even if they praise them, to not trust everyone, to not be prideful and to not chase fleeting pleasure. The speaker encourages the reader to only trust themselves, to rely on their intelligence and hard work to have a better life, to look inside and stay true to their heart. Äldekei omits these lines and only quotes one line. At first glance, such short quotation may seem justified, given the relevance of the line for Mamyrbai's situation. However, it is ironic that Äldekei is exactly the type of person that the speaker in the poem urges the reader against. Äldekei tells flattering stories to Mamyrbai, entertains him and seeks to benefit through him. After offering condolence, Äldekei persuades Mamyrbai to get married once

⁴⁷ "“Қайғы келсе, қарсы тұр, құлай берме!” деген Абай сөзінен де бір ауызды айтып жіберді.”

again, even though it has only been several months since the passing of Mamyrbai's wife. According to Kazakh traditions, it is too soon to marry within a year after the death of one's spouse. For this same reason, Aqbilek later resents her father marrying so soon. Äldekei does not only persuade Mamyrbai to ignore this tradition and arranges a marriage for him. As the readers learn from later chapters, the woman that was selected for Mamyrbai was a widow with two kids who was forced to separate from her children, lose her money and be sold to Mamyrbai. Following Äldekei's advice, Mamyrbai violates core Kazakh moral standards and follows exactly the trajectory that the speaker of Abai was warning against.

Äldekei's references to Abai is not the only time when the reader sees the discrepancy between his repertoire and his performance. Later in the novel, he tells stories similar to *šešendik söz* stories to entertain the guests at Äben's house. His choice of stories shows that he knows the likes and dislikes of his audience. Despite knowing surahs from the Quran and prominent works of world literature by heart, Äldekei chooses to tell belittling stories that are focused on entertaining the audience and making fun of Müsüräli. Even the stories that mimic *šešendik söz* imitate only a fraction of a variety of *šešendik söz* stories. *Šešendik söz* is a genre in Kazakh oral literature, which presents the sayings of famous people uttered in a witty manner in particular social contexts. Therefore, *šešendik söz* is often accompanied by an envelope story, which specifies where, why and who said the particular *šešendik söz*. A person whose wit and wisdom is acknowledged by people receives the title *šešen* and is respected in society. *Šešendik söz* is often uttered in response to a certain challenge, a joke or a question testing the person's knowledge. These words, which are often presented in verse, are memorized by the people in the room and told in other social gatherings. In addition to being entertaining, *šešendik söz* can include words of wisdom that are meant to educate the audience and increase their ethical reasoning. However, the stories narrated by Äldekei focus only on the examples of *šešendik söz* that are entertaining, but offensive and at times vulgar.

The fact that Äldekei chooses these stories show that he knows the tastes of his audience and is willing to entertain them with accessible stories, even when he has better stories to offer.

At Äben's house, Äldekei chooses stories to make fun of Müsüräli and thereby entertain other, more esteemed guests. In this meeting, the hierarchy of relations is emphasized again: the guests take seats around the table in a traditional manner, with older and more respected people sitting further away from the entrance. Mamyrbai sits near Äben, then Imambai, Äldekei and Müsüräli take seats in order. Before discussing their deals, the guests spend time eating and having fun. Here, Äldekei again starts to tell stories. However, in contrast to his *köñil aitu* stories, these stories are specifically meant to mock Müsüräli. As can be seen from his place in the room, Müsüräli is even less respected than Äldekei, although they are both of the same age. Müsüräli, who is unable to talk back and protect himself, makes a perfect target for Äldekei to make jokes at someone's expense. One of the stories that Äldekei narrates about Müsüräli is the following one:

Back then, he was *qūda* with Böket. Böket was a witty person. At that time, Müsüräli kept talking separately with Kalmyk Isabai. People joked with Böket, saying "Your *qūda* does not need you!" That's when Böket, having smoked his chewing tobacco, said: a *batyr* and a *batyr* meet in battle against an enemy, a *šešen* and a *šešen* meet in a witty debate, a *molda* and a *molda* meet on the prayer mat, a dog and a dog meet near an open oven⁴⁸. That one is the dog of Kalmyk Isabai, this one is the dog of the one with wolf hat⁴⁹. This must be the place the two dogs met. (Аймауытов 2003, 208)⁵⁰

Even though this story is from the life of Müsüräli, a regular Kazakh, the story has typical features of a *šešendik söz* story. As in stories of *šešendik söz*, someone is put on the spot about a particular topic. In this case, Böket, who is Müsüräli's *qūda*, is put in the spot. In Kazakh culture, if a person's son or daughter marries the daughter or the son of another

⁴⁸ Dogs would try to steal food being cooked in the oven.

⁴⁹ The man mentioned here is Müsüräli

⁵⁰ Бұл онда Бөкетпен құда ғой. Бөкет бір тілді адам еді. Сонда Мүсірәлі қалмақшы Исабаймен оңаша сөйлесе беріпті. «Құдаңыз сізді керек қылмай кетті-ау!» деп, жұрт Бөкетке қалжыңдаса керек. Сонда насыбайын атып болып, Бөкет айтқан екен: батыр мен батыр маңдайласқан жауда бас қосады; шешен мен шешен таңдайласқан дауда бас қосады; молда мен молда жайнамазда бас қосады; ит пен ит жер ошақта бас қосады. Анау - қалмақшының иті, мынау - қасқыр тымақтың иті. Екі иттің бас қосқан жері осы болды ғой, - деген екен.

person, these two people become *qūda*. The relationship between the two *qūda* is considered very important and not just because their children are involved. In fact, there is a saying “*Qūda* is for a thousand years, // Groom is for a hundred years”⁵¹, which emphasizes the fact that the relationship between the two *qūda* is more lasting and important than the relationship of the groom to his in-laws. In the story of Äldekei, Müsiräli spends more time with a man named Isabai than with his *qūda*, Böket. People around Böket point this out, saying that Böket’s *qūda* does not need him and laugh, putting Böket in an uncomfortable position.

Similarly to *šešendik söz* stories, the person who is put on the spot, Böket, accepts the challenge and gives a witty response. Upon hearing the jokes of people around him, Böket answers by making a series of parallel statements: a hero and a hero meet in a fight; a *šešen* and a *šešen* meet in an argument; a *molda* and a *molda* meet on the prayer rug; a dog and a dog meet near an open oven (Аймауытов 2003, 208). He then calls Isabai the dog of a Kalmyk and Müsiräli the dog of a Kazakh. By this, Böket is defending himself from the mockery and asserting that Müsiräli is no match for Böket to spend time with. Even though the *šešendik söz* are not classified as examples of poetry, they nevertheless share similar attributes, like parallelism. The technique of drawing multiple parallels before reaching the bottom line is frequently used in *šešendik söz*. Part of its function is to draw attention to the bottom line, by creating anticipation as one moves from one parallel to another. In addition, it serves an aesthetic purpose of making one’s words beautiful, impactful and easy to memorize.

Feeling embarrassed, Müsiräli struggles to reply back, when Äldekei proceeds with another story. This time, it is a story about a good khan and a bad khan. These types of stories comparing a good figure and a bad figure are common in Kazakh oral literature and they often serve didactic purposes.

⁵¹ “Құда – мың жылдық, // Күйеу – жүз жылдық”,

- This was when Tänti myrza had flames going out of his mouth. Seems to have been trying to get our Särseke's attention. Stayed at Qozyke's. Qozyke kept saying "Spread [food] in front of Särseke, spread in front of Särseke". At that moment, Tänti myrza turned the table upside down. The people sat in shock. Omaräli was a religious person, so he started speaking:

- A long time ago, a good khan came to visit a bad khan. As the bad khan immediately started, "Hey, khan, are the women of your nation pregnant? Does the livestock shit thick?" His wife, who was sitting in the neighboring room, pulled the rope. The bad khan went away, holding his inner thighs. The bad khan had a genius vizier. The good khan asks the vizier, "Why did your khan leave? Why did he say 'Are the women pregnant? Does the livestock shit thick?'" The vizier said, "Are the women pregnant?" is his way of saying: "What is the name of your nation?"; "Does the livestock shit thick?" is his way of saying "Is the household prospering?" He says, "Because you did not understand these words, he left." After the good khan leaves, the bad khan asks his vizier "What did he say about me?" The vizier repeats his previous response and says, "He praised you." That's when the bad khan said, "Ah! If she did not pull the rope earlier! I had even tastier words."

Just like that, the one that used to pull the rope for this person was his first wife. There is no value in Qozyke's words. Tänti myrza smirked, the people laughed, celebrating, and proceeded to eat. When [Äldekei] said, "Our Müsiräli is just like the bad khan. His wife is a better person than him," people laughed again. (Аймауытов 2003, 210)⁵²

Despite the presence of the traditional dichotomy between a good khan and a bad khan, this story lacks didactic value, which is one of the central attributes of *šešendik söz*. Similar to the previous story, this story involves a witty response that is meant to make fun of someone. In this case, Qozyke, who fails to show proper acknowledgement for Tänti myrza, gets mocked by Omaräli, who tells the story of the good khan and the bad khan. The wife in the story saves the khan from humiliating himself, by interrupting him whenever he starts to ask his

⁵² - Тәнтi мырзаның аузынан жалыны шығып тұрған кезi. Біздің Сәрсекеңе қырындап жүрсе керек. Қозыкеге келiп түсiптi. Қозыке: «Сәрсекең алдына жай, Сәрсекең алдына жай» дей берсе керек. Сонда Тәнтi мырза дастарқанды серпiп жiберiптi. Жұрт аңтарылып отырып қапты. Омарәлi дiлмар адам екен, сөздi со кiсi бастапты:

- Ертеде бiр хан жаман хандiкiне қонаққа келген екен. Жаман хан салған жерден: «Е, хан, елiңiздiң қатыны буаз ба? Малы жуан тыша ма?»- деп келе жатқанда, ана бөлмеде отырған қатыны шыжымды тартып қапты. Жаман хан борбайын ұстай-мұстай тұра жөнелiптi. Жаман ханның данышпан уәзiрi бар екен. Жақсы хан уәзiрден: «Ханың неге кетiп қалды? Қатыны буаз ба? Малы жуан тыша ма» дегенi қай сөзi?» - деп сұрайды. Сонда уәзiр отырып: «Қатыны буаз ба?» дегенi - «елiңiздiң есiмi қалай?» дегенi едi; «малы жуан тыша ма?» дегенi - шаруасы берекелi ме?» дегенi едi. Сiз сол сөзiне түсiнбеген соң, кетiп қалды дептi. Жақсы хан аттанған соң: «Менi не деп кеттi?» деп, жаман хан уәзiрiнен сұрағанда, уәзiр манағы жауабын айтып: «Сiздi мақтап кеттi», - дептi. Сонда жаман хан: «Уай, әттеген-ай! Шыжымды ерте тартпағанда, одан да дәмдi сөздерiм бар едi», - деген екен. (209)

Сол тәрiздi бұ кiсiнiң шыжым тартып отыратын бәйбiшесi едi. Қозыкенiң сөзiнде нарық жоқ, - деген соң, Тәнтi мырза мырс етiптi, жұрт та күлiп, қошемет қып, тамақ жеуге кiрiскен екен. - Бiздiң Мүсiрәлi де жаман хан секiлдi. Өзiнен қатыны тәуiр адам,- дегенде, жұрт тағы күлiстi.

guests explicit and vulgar questions. Äldekei narrates this story to make a point that similar to the bad khan's wife, Müsiräli's wife is a better person than Müsiräli himself. It is also implied that Müsiräli's wife controls and governs his actions, meaning that Müsiräli has no authority in his marriage. The story lacks a takeaway and a moral standpoint – important characteristics of *šešendik söz*.

Having mocked Müsiräli for his relationship with his *qūda* and with his wife, Äldekei mocks Müsiräli once again for calling Äldekei stupid. Each time one of the stories is narrated, the people in the room laugh and Müsiräli gets more and more embarrassed. He tries to defend himself and says, “You are stupid,” but Äldekei tells another story, in which an imam called Taptazani loses a debate over the pronunciation of a word from the Quran and is embarrassed at the end:

Slambek of Alšybai came to Äkimbek myrza's. Janabıl qoja and Aseke were also there. Slambek seems to have talked negatively about Janabıl being a *qoja*. At that moment Janabıl said:

- Imam ... Taptazani and Qojan Bahaudden were sitting in one gathering, when someone said “Yazıljalal!” Taptazani was a scholar, so when he says “Not Zuljalal, Zaljalal is the right way”, Qojan Bahaudden gets agitated and says, “Let's see in Läuqylmaqṗüz⁵³.” When they look, it turns out to be “Zuljalal.” That's when Taptazani whines, “Oh, God! It used to be Zaljalal! Should I cross out this comma?” and God says, “Yours is correct too, it used to be “Zaljalal”, but this Bahaudden is an amazing slave of mine, I did not want to embarrass him, so I corrected it to “Zuljalal”.”

Slambek embarrasses Janabıl, by saying, “Does God lie?”

Janabıl stops Slambek: “When Qazybek of goose-like voice died, Begi Mysyq Äulie beat the corpse three times with his stick. When he was about to beat for the fourth time, someone stayed his hand, saying “Are you crazy?” At that moment, Begi Mysyq Äulie said, “Oh, in vain you took hold of my hand! Now wealth and prosperity will only reach three generations of his lineage.” Slambek connects to Qazeke after three generations, so he lost the argument⁵⁴.”

- This Müsiräli, indeed, is a scholar like Taptazani. Apart from the words gathered here and there, we don't have knowledge like his, mocked Äldekei harshly in response to [Müsiräli's] “you are stupid.” The people laughed again. (Аймауытов 2003, 210)⁵⁵

⁵³ Kazakh pronunciation of “al-Lawh al-Mahfuz” (or “Lawh Mahfuz”). In Islam, this is an original scripture that is stored in Heaven, from which all religious scriptures were extracted, including the Quran (“Lawh Mahfuz,” n.d.). Here, it is used to refer to the Quran.

⁵⁴ The implication is that Slambek is not in the first three generations of Qazybek bi's descendants.

⁵⁵ Әкімбек мырзаныкіне Алшыбайдың Сламбегі келіп отыр екен. Жанабіл қожа, осы Асекеңдер де бар екен. Бір сөздің кезегінен Сламбек Жанабілдің қожалығына тиіп сөйлесе керек. Сонда Жанабіл отырып:

Unlike the previous two stories, this story merges the real and the imagined. While the story about Böket was based on the real life of Müsüräli, the story of a good khan and a bad khan, in which a claim to reality is not made, could be a hypothetical story that is meant to provide a context for a joke. The story about Taptazani makes a claim to being historically accurate, but it also incorporates God as a character, who responds to the questions of characters and makes changes in the Quran in favor of the two people in debate. Slambek challenges Janabıl, who narrates this story, by asking him “Does God ever lie?” To this Janabıl points at the lineage of Slambek to say that he lost the debate. However, Janabıl still does not openly answer Slambek’s question. Ascribing an act of lying could be wrong from an Islamic viewpoint, but both the audience of Janabıl and audience of Äldekei are not concerned about this fact, making the reader question their level of spiritual engagement. While religion can be brought up in a *šešendik söz* with a purpose of encouraging ethical reasoning, in this case, a story about the religious debate of two people is yet another tool with which Äldekei makes fun of Müsüräli.

The absurdity and vulgarity of Äldekei’s stories is further taken up by Jyndy Qara in his performances. The word “jyndy” in his name means “crazy” or “mad” and “qara” could refer to the color of his skin or his origin as a commoner. He first starts his performance with an *aitys* between a Kazakh and a Sart, accompanying his performance on a *dombyra*. The

- Имам... Таптазани мен Қожан Баһаудден бір мәжілісте отырса, біреу: «Язилжалал!» депті. Таптазани ғалым кісі екен: «Зұлжалал емес, залжалал деген дұрыс» десе, Қожан Баһаудден қызып кетеді: «Лауқылмақпұздың өзінен қарайық» дейді. Қараса, «Зұлжалал» екен. Сонда Таптазани назаланып: «Ей, тәңірі! Залжалал еді ғой! Мынау үтірді сызып тастайын ба?» дегенде, құдай тағала: «Сенікі де дұрыс: «залжалал» еді, бірақ мына Баһаудден кереметті құлым еді, осыны ұялтпайын деп, «Зұлжалал» қып түзетіп қойып едім» деген екен, - депті.

Құдай өтірік айта ма?- деп, Сламбек Жанабілді ұялтты.

Жанабіл Сламбекті тоқтатқалы: «Қаз дауысты Қазыбек өлгенде Бегі Мысық әулие өлікті асасымен үш салып, төртінші сала бергенде: «Жындымысың?» деп, біреу қолын ұстай алған екен. Сонда Бегі Мысық әулие: «Өй, қолымды бекер ұстадың-ау! Енді бақ-дәулет үш атасына шейін-ақ барар» деген екен дейді. Сламбек Қазекеме үш атадан соң келеді екен: сөзден жығылыпты.

- Бұл Мүсірәлі, рас, Таптазани сияқты ғалым адам. Одан-бұдан жинастырған сөз болмаса, бізде мұныкіндей ілім жоқ, - деп, Әлдекей «надансың» дегенге тағы оңдырмай кекетті. Жұрт тағы қарық болысты.

exact text or details of the *aitys* are not provided in the text, but it is implied that the *aitys* was funny and people listening to him laughed. As his next performance, Jyndy Qara imitates an eagle:

The young man Jyndy Qara made the guests laugh by performing an *aitys* between a Kazakh and a Sart. When they [Aben and his guests] got bored of poetry, by the hint of the *bai*, Jyndy Qara narrowed his cheeks, pouted his lips, put his hands at his back, lifted his robe as wings, crawled, jumped, and, imitating an eagle, threatened the ones sitting closer to the entrance, snatched their chewing tobacco from between their legs. (Аймауытов 2003, 211)⁵⁶

Here again, the image of an eagle is used in a negative sense, which is unexpected given the symbolic meaning of an eagle in Kazakh culture. In the previous chapter, I analyzed the eagle as a part of the discussion about similes. Here, the eagle is depicted by one of the characters and is watched by the rest.

Similar to Äldekei's stories, Jyndy Qara's performances get more explicit, with him depicting a pregnant Russian nurse, a *mätüşke*. What is peculiar about this performance is the fact that it depicts the way the *mätüşke* urinates in a field.

When the fun of that calmed down, Jyndy Qara left, tied an apron, put a white scarf on his head, becoming a pregnant *mätüşke*. The *mätüşke* mumbled, spoke in Russian, squealed to each one of them, bowed with her back, poured the water that he had in-between his legs on guests. That was his portrayal of a pregnant *mätüşke* urinating out in the field. Müsiräli received most of *mätüşke*'s "blessing" Mamyrbai, Imanbai, Äldekei, who were sitting further from the entrance did not get the *mätüşke*'s "blessing". (Аймауытов 2003, 211)⁵⁷

The word "buaz" used in the phrase "buaz *mätüşke*" means "pregnant", but this word, when used for women, has a derogatory connotation. The word "buaz" is not the usual word that is

⁵⁶ Жынды Қара деген жігіті қазақ пен сарттың айтысқанын айтып, қонақтарды ду күлдірді. Өлеңнен жалыққан кезде, байдың бір ым қағуымен Жынды Қара ұртын кушитып, ернін шүртітіп, екі қолын артына жіберіп, шапанын көтеріп қанат қылып, еңбектеп, секектеп, бүркіт болып, төменгі жақтағыларға төніп, екі аяғының арасынан насыбайын саңғыды.

⁵⁷ Оның қызығы басыла бергенде, Жынды Қара кетіп қалып белдемше байлап, басын ақ орамалмен тартып, буаз мәтүшке болды. Мәтүшке былдырлап, орысшалап, әрқайсысына бір шарылдап, артымен еңкейе беріп, бұтының арасындағы қуыққа құйған суын қонақтардың үстіне шашты. Онысы буаз мәтүшкенің түзге отырғанын салғаны еді. Көбінесе буаз мәтүшкенің құты Мүсірәліге түсті. Тәрдегі Мамырбай, Иманбай, Әлдекей ақсақалдар «мәтүшкенің сыйынан» қағыстау қалды.

used for pregnant women – it is reserved specifically for livestock, while the words used for humans are the terms “jükti” or “ekiqabat.” For example, in the part of the novel, where the news of Urqia being pregnant become known, it is phrased as “The news about Urqia’s pregnancy soon spread across the village.”⁵⁸ When speaking of Aqbilek’s pregnancy, the narrator uses the same word. Even the words “jükti” or “ekiqabat” may come across as too explicit and descriptive, so people can also use more polite euphemisms, such as “boiynda bar” or “ayağy auyr.” As one can see, there are varying degrees of euphemisms used to describe a pregnant woman, with “buaz” being the least polite and therefore used only for livestock. For this same reason, in the story of a good khan and a bad khan, when the bad khan asks, “Eliñizdiñ qatyny buaz ba?” (“Are the women pregnant in your nation?”) it is considered to be a rude and tactless question. Describing a pregnant woman as “buaz” has a derogatory connotation, which is in line with the negative depiction of the *mätüşke*.

Laughter in this case can be a way of asserting power over the Russian people. The depiction of a Russian woman in an inferior position is in line with the generally negative portrayal of the Russians in the novel. In this scene, Mamyrbai, the man, whose daughter was kidnapped and abused by a Russian man, laughs at the Russian woman’s urination. It is important that the object of laughter is not a Russian man, but a Russian woman, and specifically a pregnant Russian woman. Out of the various scenes in her life, specifically her urination is emphasized and portrayed by Jyndy Qara. Being a woman, being pregnant and urinating make the Russian woman the most vulnerable and harmless Russian, who can be easily made fun of. Her vulnerability makes it easy for the spectators to feel superior.

As has been shown in this chapter, Aimauytov’s use of Kazakh oral literary genres achieves different results when used in relation to female characters and when used in relation to male characters. In relation to Aqbilek, the oral poetry emphasizes the discrepancy

⁵⁸ ““Ұрқия екіқабат” деген хабар кешікпей-ақ ауыл арасына жайылды”.

between her inner self and the behavior or performance that was expected of her. The poem of the young girls signals the resolution of the novel, in which Aqbilek is finally accepted back into the society from which she was isolated. By invoking Qoiteke's suffering side-by-side with Ädekei's mocking of Müsüräli and Jyndy Qara's depiction of *mätüşke*, the author makes a social critique of the corruption and oppression that the poor and the vulnerable suffer from. These instances serve to not only depict his vision, but also to persuade the reader emotionally, by invoking the feeling of disdain through contrasting the blissful entertainment of Äben's guests and the palpable suffering of Qoiteke.

Conclusion

Aimauytov brought together Kazakh oral literature and the novel form, which at the time was a new genre for Kazakh literature. Combining verse and prose, oral literature and written literature, Aimauytov adapted the novel form into Kazakh literature. Similar to the canonization of Abai in which the author participated, Aimauytov's style makes a claim for the prestige and aesthetic worth of Kazakh literature through *Aqbilek*, by showcasing the artistic achievements of Kazakh oral literature. He therefore fulfills the demands of the apparition from "Eles," by keeping the best of the old literature and making it a part of the new form.

In bringing together polarities, *Aqbilek* is similar to Aimauytov himself, who enjoyed both Kazakh literature as well as the works of world literature, be it poets of the East or the writers of the West. His education, which started with a religious Kazakh education combined Russian secular education. Aimauytov himself being the bridge between Kazakh and the global, the Kazakh and Russian, religious and secular, creates a bridge consistent with his background with his *Aqbilek*.

The continuity of *Aqbilek* with Kazakh oral literature has been shown in chapter 2 through the analysis of the style of the novel. The performers of oral epic poems relied on devices like parallelism and formulaic systems that facilitated their improvisation. These elements that serve not only an aesthetic purpose but a functional one, are no longer needed in the realm of written text. A writer is left to himself to write his novel, in solitude of the night after he comes back from teaching. There is no need to figure out the substance and composition of the next line before finishing the previous line — one can put down the pen. The audience who would follow every turn of phrase is not there. Aimauytov still uses these devices and by doing so, he invokes stylistic features that are familiar to the reader and are a part of the Kazakh oral literature. In addition, by using versed narration exhibiting

parallelism, alliteration, end-rhyme in emotionally heightened moments as well as creating vivid images through the use of both existing and new similes, the author uses the stylistic elements of oral epic poems to create an intense experience for the reader.

Aimauytov treats Kazakh oral literature not only as a stylistic choice, but also a part of the plot, a part of the daily life of the characters. As has been shown in chapter 3, the author uses the performances of characters to reveal more information about them as well as to communicate his own views on the behavior of the characters. He portrays the social isolation of *Aqbilek* through her shame about not knowing poems to recite in *körüsü* or her struggle to express herself in a *joqtau*. Describing the male characters through their entertainment and stories and contrasting it to the suffering of the young boy Qoiteke, he makes a social critique, condemning the powerful and the rich for taking advantage of the vulnerable. Aimauytov portrays class and interethnic conflict in the plot of the novel, but it is his use of stylistic features that makes these depictions persuasive.

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