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VERSATILE

AND COLORFUL LYRICS BY ABAY KUNANBAYEV

LETRA VERSÁTIL Y COLORIDA DE ABAY KUNANBAYEV

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ABSTRACT

This academic work focuses on the study of the work and creativity of the prominent Kazakh poet Abay Kunanbayev and his influence in Azerbaijan, exploring the literary relations that this outstanding author established between the two peoples. To this end, it examines some of the research carried out by this author, highlighting the opinions and viewpoints of Azerbaijani academics on the Kazakh writer. Overall, his literature has been widely known and valued in this country, where various translations of his works have been made. His poetic style, characterized by the exaltation of universal human values and the defense of social justice, has deeply penetrated Azerbaijani society, due to its parallels with other national referents. Through the analysis of the perspectives of Azerbaijani scholars, the article reflects the interpretations and assessments of the Kazakh poet's work in the cultural context of Azerbaijan. It is demonstrated how the figure of Abay Kunanbayev is considered a reference in the literary field of Azerbaijan, and his legacy remains relevant and current today.

Keywords:

Abay Kunanbayev, Poet, Azerbaijan, Kazakh, Literary relations.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo académico se centra en el estudio de la obra y creatividad del destacado poeta kazajo Abay Kunanbayev y su influencia en Azerbaiyán, explorando las relaciones literarias que este destacado autor estableció entre los dos pueblos. Para ello, se examinan algunas de las investigaciones realizadas por este autor, destacando las opiniones y puntos de vista de académicos azerbaiyanos sobre el escritor kazajo. En conjunto, su literatura ha sido ampliamente conocida y valorada en este país, donde se han realizado diversas traducciones de sus obras. Su estilo poético, caracterizado por la exaltación de los valores humanos universales y la defensa de la justicia social, ha calado profundamente en la sociedad azerbaiyana, por sus paralelismos con otros referentes nacionales. A través del análisis de las perspectivas de los académicos azerbaiyanos, el artículo refleja las interpretaciones y valoraciones de la obra del poeta kazajo en el contexto cultural de Azerbaiyán. Se demuestra cómo la figura de Abay Kunanbayev es considerada un referente en el ámbito literario de Azerbaiyán, y su legado sigue siendo relevante y actual en la actualidad.

Palabras claves:

Abay Kunanbayev, Poeta, Azerbaiyán, Kazajo, Relaciones literarias.

INTRODUCTION

The Azerbaijani literary tradition dates back centuries, blending Persian, Turkish, and Arab influences into a rich and unique cultural expression. For example, epic poetry, known as “dastan,” has been a fundamental part of narrating the feats of heroes and the glories of bygone eras (Dadashzade, 1995; Paksoy, 1990). Poets like Nizami Ganjavi, Fuzûlî, or Mirza Fatali Akhundov, have left an indelible mark on Azerbaijani literature and the world (Huseynov, 2018). Their works not only have been a source of inspiration for generations of poets and writers but also have been vital in preserving and promoting Azerbaijani cultural identity amidst diverse historical influences (Hajiyeva, 2020). This literary legacy continues to this day, with contemporary authors like Anar Rzayev, whose works explore the complexities of modern Azerbaijani society with a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Modern poetry, narrative, and theater are also thriving in Azerbaijan, reflecting the concerns and aspirations of contemporary society (Muradoglu, 2021). Through their writings, Azerbaijani authors not only entertain but also challenge, educate, and connect the public with the rich history and cultural evolution of this nation at the crossroads of East and West.

In addition to poetry and prose, Azerbaijan has also a rich oral tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. Folk tales, legends, and orally transmitted stories have enriched the cultural fabric of the country, offering a vivid glimpse into the everyday life, values, and beliefs of the Azerbaijani people (Aliyev, 2022; Kayhan, 2023). These narratives, often imbued with symbolism and wisdom, are a testament to the creativity and imagination that have been fundamental to shaping Azerbaijan’s cultural identity throughout the centuries. In general, it can be said that the influence of the Azerbaijani literary tradition extends through several key aspects of Azerbaijani culture. For example, in the development of the language, this tradition has been fundamental to enriching the Azerbaijani language over the centuries. Classical poets like Nizami Ganjavi and Fuzuli have left an indelible mark on the structure and beauty of the language (Nariman et al., 2021), but this linguistic influence has been reflected not only in poetry or prose (Jeyran, 2023), but also in theater (Ahmadova, 2023), or even the way Azerbaijanis communicate daily, thereby preserving a living connection with their literary legacy.

In terms of national identity, Azerbaijani literature has played a crucial role in affirming and strengthening the collective identity of the Azerbaijani people. As mentioned before, many works celebrate legendary heroes, folk tales, and cultural values, and in that way, literature

has served as a powerful link between past and present generations (Ergun, 2022). This connection with the literary heritage has been essential for the preservation of a strong national identity and resistance against external influences (Iloba, 2011). In addition, in the field of education and literacy, Azerbaijani literature has been an invaluable tool. Classic works have been used for centuries as study material in schools, teaching the young not only language and grammar but also the cultural and ethical values embedded in these stories (Maharramov, 2020). This educational tradition has significantly contributed to the literacy and intellectual development of the Azerbaijani people, ensuring that literature continues to be a fundamental part of the process of formation of young minds and the promotion of education in the country.

From an academic and artistic perspective, many Azerbaijani writers have been the subject of tribute and analysis of their works. Among them, we can mention classics such as Nizami Ganjavi, Fuzuli, and Nasimi (Habibbayli, 2020a; Shukurova, 2022), as well as modern Azerbaijani writers like Mirza Fatali Akhundzade (Adishirinov, 2022), Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev, Jalil Mammadguluzade (Jamalov, 2020), and Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli (Aliyev, 2018). In the 20th century, Azerbaijani writers such as Samed Vurgun, Huseyn Javid, Sabir, and Jafar Jabbarli have received significant attention (Guliyeva, 2016), as have important female Azerbaijani writers like Banine, Sevinj Nurugizi, and Leyla Begim. However, in our opinion, there are also brilliant authors who have yet to receive the recognition they deserve, like Abay Kunanbayev. Although Abay Kunanbayev is not Azerbaijani by birth, he did have and has had a great impact on the country. Taking this into account, the objective of this work is to analyze the most important elements of the work of this important author and its influence on future generations.

DEVELOPMENT

The versatile and colorful lyrics of the great Kazakh poet and thinker Abay Kunanbayev are part of the national spiritual wealth of the Kazakh people, acquired in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although he wrote three poems and 45 prose works, Kunanbayev is considered a great lyricist of the Turkic people. His lyrics contain unique themes of world poetry from the 19th century, reflecting real and traditional Kazakh folk life with its contradictions and complexities. Highlighting this aspect, academician Isa Habibbayli writes: “Abay’s poems presented difficult and harsh scenes of working life, and the people were saved from suffering. The idea of the necessity of saving the people from suffering was put forward.” The poems “Iskandar,” “Maksud,” and “The Fairytale about Azim” were popular in

19th-century Kazakh literature. These were a new type of poems reflecting the true meaning of the development of storytelling towards a poetic form. Abay, who interpreted ignorance and injustice in a poetically generalized form in his poems, described these motives through vivid and instructive life events (Habibbayli, 2020b).

Abay was a great master and powerful personality of the 19th century, and the art of Abay, was immortalized by the novels of Mukhtar Auezov "Abay" (Book I) and "The Path of Abay" (Book II) in the 20th century. Russian literary critic Zoya Kedrina writes: "The image of Abay was the ideal of the author. Behind this image, you can see the features of his portrait, thoughts, dreams, and desires. Like Abay, he wished for the enlightenment of his people." Auezov vividly connects the stories he witnessed in his childhood and youth with the Abay era, creating real artistic scenes. Mukhtar Auezov's epic "Abay" describes not only Abay's environment, greatness, and the fate of his generation, but also records the events that took place in the life of Kazakhs at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, both "Abay" books are artistic encyclopedias of Kazakh folk life, spiritual richness, ethnic and ethno-psychological features, as well as an artistic and historical chronicle. It is no coincidence that "Abay" and "The Path of Abay" were awarded the prestigious Lenin Prize in the USSR at the time - they are a sad and artistic-philosophical masterpiece about the Great Steppe, a Turkish literary treasure (Kedrina, 1960, p. 76). Professor called his article about Kunanbayev the "rising star of Abay literature" (Kedrina, 1960, p. 43). He really was the star of the literary world, and this star became the star of the Kazakh national culture exactly a century after him because he was on top.

Doctor of philological sciences, professor of Baku State University Firuze Agayeva made a great contribution to the study of the life, environment, and heritage of Abay Kunanbayev in general, in terms of studying Azerbaijani-Kazakh literary relations. Her monographs "Personality and Literary Heritage of Abay" and "Abay and Azerbaijan," published successively during the independence period, are valuable steps in this field. Academician Isa Habibbayli writes about this:

The people of Azerbaijan had the opportunity to get more detailed acquaintance with the life and creativity of Abay Kunanbayev during the period of state independence thanks to the monograph 'Abay: personality and literary heritage' published in Baku in 2010 by the publishing house Doctor of Philological Sciences Firuze Agayeva. In the monograph, the living environment, personality, and rich creativity of Abay were studied and revived with high appreciation. (Habibbayli, 2020b).

Goyerchin Mustafayeva's articles "Abay Kunanbayev in Azerbaijani Literature" and Professor Firuze Agayeva's "Poems of Abay in Azerbaijani Language" are valuable facts not only about Abay but also about Azerbaijani-Kazakh literary relations in general. Goyerchin Mustafayeva's article was written thanks to extensive research and great painstaking work. Therefore, the international reputation of Abay Kunanbayev is sufficiently reflected. The author puts forth specific ideas:

Abay wrote a special page in the history of Kazakh-European literary relations with poetic translations of Russian, Polish, German and English classics. Lermontov's subtle lyrics, the sweet language of Pushkin, the satire of Krylov, the grace of Volonsky and Mickiewicz were subordinated to the poetic genius of Abay (Aliyev, 2020).

The introduction of the famous work of Michel Montesquieu "Experiences" and "Black Word" of the great poet Abay Kunanbayev are almost identical (Aliyev, 2020).

Works of Abay Kunanbayev appeared at the literary level of foreign countries from the 1950s of the last century. In 1958, a collection "Abay Kunanbayev. Three Poems" with a foreword by Ha Huangsan was published in China (Aliyev, 2020). Such kind of ideas were reflected highly in the mentioned book of Goyerchin Mustafayeva. On the other hand, Turan Teymur, a modern researcher of Abay Kunanbayev's heritage in Azerbaijan, and Doctor of Philosophy in philology, in his monograph "Issues of Mastery in Mukhtar Auezov's novel 'Abay'" and the above-mentioned article, shows at what level Abay is reflected in Azerbaijani literary thought. Such a methodological guide contained in the article: "Abay Kunanbayev's connection with Azerbaijan, problems of interaction with his literature and culture can be divided into the following groups: first, translation of his works into our language; second, study of his life and creativity in the science of folk philology; third, studying his works from a typological point of view on similar samples of Azerbaijani literature (Aliyev, 2020). Turan Teymur writes:

In 1970, regarding the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the birth of the great Kazakh writer and thinker Abay Kunanbayev, a commission was established under the chairmanship of Mir Jalal Pashayev and a plan of major events in the republic was approved. (Aliyev, 2020).

This fact shows how close the Kazakh-Azerbaijani literary ties are.

The novel of the great writer and scientist Mukhtar Auezov's "Abay" was translated into our language by Alakbar Abbasov in 1954. This opened a new page and began a new stage in the history of Azerbaijani-Kazakh

literary ties in the second half of the 20th century. The readers accepted "Abay" as a native book in the literary environment and it became a favorite book for the readers. The image of Abay had a deep impact on the Turkic Azerbaijani reader. He was an interesting example of a literary historical personality who closed a great era with his name, and he did not remain unaffected by the arrival of historical themes in our literature. Thanks to the novel "Abay", Azerbaijani readers were able to get to know Abay, the great poet, and thinker of the Kazakh people, as well as the environment, everyday life, customs, and ethnopsychology of the Kazakhs.

In 1954, the article by Mukhtar Auezov "Great Poet of the Kazakh People" was translated and published in the newspaper "Communist" (September 5th). It was a very valuable initiative in terms of acquainting Azerbaijani readers with Abay Kunanbayev. The newspaper "Literature and Art" (May 14th, 1970) published a review of the informative article "Jubilee of the Great Kazakh Writer". In 1970, according to the plan of the commission dedicated to the 125th anniversary of his birth, the book "Abay Poems and Works" was published in Azer Nashr. Most of the poets of the time were engaged in translating his poems and works, which was one of the main factors and literary trends of the literary relations. While speaking about the role of translation in the Azerbaijani-Kazakh literary ties, we can remember the poets who had translated the poems and works of Kunanbayev in the 1970s, such as Suleyman Rustam, Mammad Rahim, Aliaga Kurchayli, Mammad Araz, and Mirvarid Dilbazi. The works done by Aliaga Kurchayli should be especially mentioned.

For Abay's book published in the 1970s, the poem "Iskander" was translated into Azerbaijani by Novruz Ganjali, the poem "Maksud" by Gasim Gasimzade, and the work "The Tale of Azim" by Alakbar Ziyatay. Of course, the artistic quality of these translations was not the same. But all of them together can be considered valuable facts of Azerbaijani-Kazakh literary relations. We must also mention some research. One of them is the book "Abay Kunanbayev," published in 2020 in Ankara on the project of TURKSOY, authored by Professor Elman Guliyev, a systematizer of Turkic peoples' literature. His monograph "Literature of Turkic Peoples" is known to the literary world. This work, published on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of Abay's birth, consists of chapters "Introduction," "Life of Abay Kunanbayev," "Lyric Abay Kunanbayev," "Poems of Abay Kunanbayev," and "Prose of Abay Kunanbayev." In these comprehensive chapters, the author carefully identifies the ideological and poetic features of Abay's lyrics, the relationship of his poems with Kazakh folk life and folklore, the connection of his prose

with Turkic epic culture, fairy tales, and folk legends, and notes the priorities of Abay's creativity on the Kazakh culture of the 19th-20th centuries.

The research of Professor Nizami Mammadova Tagysoya has scientific significance in terms of studying the literary contacts of Azerbaijan with the Turkic peoples in general and the relations with the literary and cultural life of Kazakhstan in particular. He also worked as a translator, a translation theorist, and a poet. There are notable facts recently published in this direction. Abay Kunanbayev's three poems - "Iskander," "Maksud," and "The Tale of Azim" in the poetic format of this genre, both in Kazakh and in translation, do not remain unaffected by the Azerbaijani poem genre after the 1970s. There are the most perfect examples of poetry in Azerbaijani literature: five magnificent poems included in the genius Nizami's "Khamsa," Fuzuli's divine love epic "Leyli and Majnun," Samad Vurgun's "Mugan" and "Aygun" in the 20th century, Mammad Rahim's "Leningrad Skies," Rasul Reza's "Lenin," Bakhtiyar Vahabzade's "Mugam" and "Martyrs," Nariman Hasanzade's "Emerald Bird," etc. These are artistically exhausted examples of this genre.

Abay's "Iskandar" poem was dedicated to the historical figure Iskandar (Alexander the Great). The first masterpiece about the famous Iskandar was written by the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi. Nizami's aim in his work consisting of two parts called "Iqbalname" and "Sharafname" was not at all to glorify the invader Alexander. Likewise, Abay Kunanbayev, following in the footsteps of his predecessor, conveys the message to people in his work that regardless of where it takes place, bloodshed, murder, and looting - wars are the tragedy of humanity.

The works "Maksud" and "The Tale of Azim" were written following traditional Eastern motifs. In all three essays, Abay's poetry sounds wise. All the events in the poem take place in Baghdad, ruled by Harun al-Rashid. As it is known, this work refers to the time of Harun al-Rashid, the 5th caliph of the Abbasid dynasty (750-1256), who ruled for more than 500 years. As a thoughtful artist, Abay brings distant history to modernity, to the 19th century, transfers the contradictions of his era onto history, and produces the result. The hero of this poem is not only an intelligent, decent, honest young man named Maksud but also Agil. There, the poet considers the lack of intelligence to be a problem for mankind.

CONCLUSIONS

Abay Kunanbaev is a relevant intellectual, revered as the pioneer of Kazakh written literature. His enduring impact

on modern Kazakh literary and intellectual life is profound, offering invaluable insights into the evolution of Kazakh national identity. Abay's literary legacy, marked by a blend of rationalism, social critique, and a call for education, continues to resonate through his works, often presented in the form of 'words of edification' and moral exhortations. Abay's significance is multifaceted and transcended frontiers, being especially relevant in Azerbaijan as pointed out in this research. His works not only reflected the moral and spiritual essence of Kazakh life but also provided a guiding light for societal progress, then resonated in the literary world.

Amidst the challenges of the Russian Empire's absorption of Kazakh lands, Abay's sharp and critical mind delved into the pressing issues of his time, addressing the erosion of nomadic life, the loss of political autonomy, and the declining status of Kazakh society. Through his poetry and prose, Abay endeavored to revive the spirit of inquiry, knowledge, and unity among his people, advocating for a path towards a culturally enriched and educated society. Despite facing the tumultuous transition of Kazakh society from the khanate to colonial rule and later capitalist influences, Abay's vision remained steadfast. In this regard, his call for free education and his aspiration for a flourishing Kazakh culture continue to resonate, illustrating his enduring relevance in the cultural tapestry of Kazakhstan. This way, Abay Kunanbaev stands as not just a literary figure but a beacon of enlightenment, guiding Kazakh society through periods of identity crisis towards a future steeped in knowledge, culture, and unity.

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