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THE ARTISTIC AND POETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF KAZAKH POET-SINGERS

Abstract. This article examines the artistic and poetic features of Kazakh poet-singers of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a significant phenomenon in the history of Kazakh literature. The study aims to analyze their distinctive poetic style, which encompasses both traditional and innovative literary elements. By exploring their work within the context of literary theory, the research seeks to understand the unique characteristics of their poetry, including narrative structures, linguistic features, and thematic concerns. The investigation addresses the need for a deeper literary analysis of the works of Kazakh poet-singers, as the existing scholarship on this subject remains limited. Through close readings and comparative analysis, the study evaluates the poet-singers' approach to form, language, and content, identifying patterns and innovations in their poetic techniques. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the understanding of Kazakh literary tradition and its evolution during the 19th century. By contextualizing the work of poet-singers within broader literary movements, the study provides insights into their impact on the development of Kazakh poetry and its enduring influence on subsequent generations of poets. Methodologically, the study employs literary analysis and comparative approaches to assess the poetic forms and stylistic choices of Kazakh poet-singers. The findings offer a comprehensive overview of their artistic contributions, highlighting their role in shaping Kazakh literary identity. The research outcomes hold theoretical importance in expanding knowledge of Kazakh literature and its historical development. Furthermore, the study offers a foundation for future research on the intersection of oral tradition and written poetry in Kazakh literature.

Keywords: Kazakh literature, poet-singers, 19th century, literary analysis, poetic techniques, thematic concerns.

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ҚАЗАҚ ӘНШІ-АҚЫНДАР ШЫҒАРМАШЫЛЫҒЫНЫҢ КӨРКЕМДІК-ПОЭТИКАЛЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕРІ

Аңдатпа. Мақалада қазақ әдебиетінде маңызды орын алатын қазақ әнші-ақындар шығармашылығының көркемдік-поэтикалық ерекшеліктері зерттеледі. Зерттеу мақаласы әнші-ақындардың қазақ халқының мәдени мұрасына қосқан үлесін терең тану мен бағалауға бағытталған. XIX ғасырдың екінші жартысы мен XX ғасырдың басындағы әнші-ақындарының осы бағыттағы шығармаларын талдау арқылы олардың қазақ халқының мәдени бірегейлігі мен ұлттық санасының қалыптасу жолындағы рөлі мен орнын айқындауға болады. Әдебиет теориясы контекстінде олардың шығармашылығын

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терең зерттеу арқылы поэзиясының ерекше қасиеттері, оның ішінде поэзия құрылымдары, тілдік ерекшеліктері және тақырыптық аспектілері анықталады. Зерттеу қазақ әнші-ақындары шығармаларына жан-жақты әдеби талдау жүргізеді, өйткені осы бағыттағы ғылыми ізденістер аз және өзекті. Зерттеудің мұқият қарастырылуы мен салыстырмалы талдау әдісі арқылы әнші-ақындардың формаға, тілге және мазмұнға деген көзқарасын бағалай отырып, олардың поэтикалық техникасындағы заңдылықтар мен жаңашылдықтар анықталады. Бұл зерттеудің маңызы оның XIX ғасырдағы қазақ әдеби дәстүрін түсінуге және оның эволюциясына қосқан үлесімен айқындалады. Әнші-ақындар шығармашылығын кең ауқымды әдеби ағымдар аясында контекстуализациялау олардың қазақ поэзиясының дамуына және кейінгі буын ақындарына ықпалын түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Әдістемелік тұрғыдан алғанда, зерттеу қазақ әнші-ақындарының поэтикалық формалары мен стильдік ерекшеліктерін бағалау үшін әдеби талдау мен салыстырмалы тәсілдерге негізделеді. Алынған нәтижелер олардың көркемдік жетістіктеріне жан-жақты шолу түрінде ұсынылып, қазақ әдебиеті бірегейлігін қалыптастырудағы рөлін айқындайды. Зерттеу нәтижелері қазақ әдебиеті мен оның тарихи даму кезеңдері туралы білімді кеңейтуде теориялық маңызға ие. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу қазақ әдебиетіндегі ауызша дәстүр мен жазбаша поэзияның тоғысқан тұстарын зерттеуге арналған болашақ еңбектерге негіз бола алады.

Кілт сөздер: қазақ әдебиеті, әнші-ақындар, XIX ғасыр әдебиеті, әдеби талдау, поэтикалық техника, тақырыптық аспектілер.

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ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННО-ПОЭТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ТВОРЧЕСТВА КАЗАХСКИХ ПОЭТОВ-ПЕВЦОВ

Аннотация. Статья исследует художественно-поэтические особенности творчества казахских поэтов-певцов второй половины XIX – начала XX веков, представляющих собой значимый феномен в истории казахской литературы. Исследование направлено на анализ их характерного поэтического стиля, который сочетает в себе как традиционные, так и инновационные литературные элементы. Погружение в их творчество в контексте теории литературы позволяет выявить уникальные особенности их поэзии, включая повествовательные структуры, языковые особенности и тематические аспекты. Исследование отвечает на необходимость более глубокого литературного анализа произведений казахских поэтов-певцов, поскольку существующие научные работы по этой теме остаются ограниченными. Благодаря тщательному изучению и сравнительному анализу исследование оценивает подход поэтов-певцов к форме, языку и содержанию, выявляя закономерности и инновации в их поэтических техниках. Значимость данного исследования заключается в его вкладе в понимание казахской литературной традиции и ее эволюции в XIX веке. Контекстуализация творчества поэтов-певцов в рамках более широких литературных течений дает возможность понять их влияние на развитие казахской поэзии и ее устойчивое воздействие на последующие поколения поэтов. Методологически, исследование основывается на литературном анализе и сравнительных подходах для оценки поэтических форм и стилистических решений казахских поэтов-певцов. Полученные результаты предлагают всесторонний обзор их художественных достижений, подчеркивая их роль в формировании казахской литературной идентичности. Результаты исследования имеют теоретическую значимость в расширении знаний о казахской литературе и ее историческом развитии. Кроме того, исследование создает основу для будущих работ по изучению пересечения устной традиции и письменной поэзии в казахской литературе.

Ключевые слова: казахская литература, поэты-певцы, XIX век, литературный анализ, поэтические техники, тематические аспекты.

1. Introduction

The study of the artistic and poetic characteristics of Kazakh poet-singers is an important and relevant topic within the field of literary theory. Poet-singers, also known as akyns or sal-seri, represent a unique tradition that combines oral poetic art, musicality, and a deep connection to the cultural and historical heritage of the Kazakh people. Their work is characterized by a distinctive style and expression, making it a noteworthy subject of literary analysis. In the 19th century, this tradition reached a level of professional syncretism, where the poetic word became a vehicle for individualistic expression, moving beyond the collective tribal function of earlier heroic epics.

The choice of this topic is motivated by several reasons. First, the lack of literary studies dedicated to the specific characteristics of Kazakh poet-singers' work highlights the need for further examination of their poetics and artistic techniques. This field requires a more detailed investigation with a focus on theoretical aspects such as rhythm, metrics, linguistic features, and genre innovations. Specifically, it is crucial to analyze how the transition from the traditional 7-8 syllable epic meter to the more complex 11-syllable "kara olen" and mixed-syllable structures reflects the evolution of professional authorial mastery. Second, as modern research on global modernism suggests (Thompson, 2020: 48), the transition from oral performance to professional authorship in non-Western cultures is a crucial area of comparative literature that has yet to be fully explored in the Kazakh context.

The central research question of this investigation is: how did the sal-seri tradition facilitate the transition from the formulaic oral canon to a system of individual authorial mastery? Additionally, the study addresses how musical syncretism influenced the structural composition of texts, transforming folk melodies into a formal tool for poetic organization. Our research hypothesis posits that Kazakh poet-singers functioned as early professional authors who utilized nature-based metaphors and complex lyrical structures to construct a unique «bardic persona» (Oldfield, 2021: 167).

The relevance of this topic is underscored by its theoretical and practical significance. The theoretical importance of the study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the specifics of Kazakh poetry and its features, such as syntactic structures, lexicon, imagery, and poetic forms. By examining the interplay between musical rhythm and textual metrics, this research demonstrates that the sal-seri tradition was not merely a performance art but a sophisticated system of "vocal literacy" (Zumthor, 1990) that redefined 19th-century Kazakh aesthetics. By integrating the concept of «vocal literacy» (Zumthor, 1990: 51), this research repositioned Kazakh sal-seri within the global history of performance poetry. The practical importance of the research is its ability to expand the scope of analysis within the field of literary theory, facilitating interpretation and evaluation of Kazakh poetry in a comparative and intercultural context.

The examination of the artistic and poetic characteristics of Kazakh poet-singers will reveal and analyze their contribution to the development of literary heritage, enriching contemporary understanding of Kazakh poetry within the context of literary theory. Ultimately, this study aims to fill the gap between the perception of sal-seri as folk entertainers and their true role as sophisticated architects of the 19th-century Kazakh literary identity.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research methods

The study was conducted in several progressive stages to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the artistic and poetic characteristics of Kazakh poet-singers. Initially, materials related to the poetic works of prominent akyns and existing literary scholarship were collected and systematized. To strengthen the scientific foundation of the study, the research methodology was designed to answer the following questions: (1) what specific linguistic and metric innovations distinguish sal-seri poetry from traditional epic forms? and (2) how did the musical syncretism of their art influence the structural composition of their texts?

One of the key methodological pillars of this research is the structural-semantic analysis. This method allowed for the identification of recurring patterns in metaphorical imagery and rhythmic variations. To address the technical aspects of poetic form, the study specifically employed versification analysis, focusing on the transition from the 7-8 syllable epic tradition to the 11-syllable "kara olen" structure. Furthermore, the study utilized the comparative-typological approach to align the Kazakh sal-seri tradition with global poetic phenomena, drawing parallels with the medieval European troubadours and the Central Asian ashyq traditions, as suggested in recent scholarship (Oldfield, 2021).

The work also involved specialized textual analysis. A significant role was played by the use of computational linguistic evaluation to process and categorize large volumes of poetic texts. This objective approach helped in identifying the frequency of specific tropes and the evolution of the poets' lexicon. In particular, the research utilized rhythmic-melodic modeling to evaluate how the musical phrasing of sal-seri melodies determined the placement of caesuras and the organization of stanzaic refrains. Additionally, the research integrates «Performance Theory» and the concept of «vocal literacy» (Zumthor, 1990: 18), treating the poetic works not merely as static texts but as «mediated performances» that bridge the gap between orality and literacy (Amsler, 2022: 68).

The reliability of the findings is supported by the consistent application of these methods across the diverse poetic cycles of various 19th-century authors. The integration of traditional Kazakh philological methods with modern Western literary frameworks ensures a multifaceted evaluation of the subject.

2.2. Research materials

This study utilized a wide range of materials, encompassing the works of Kazakh poet-singers (akyns), their biographies, as well as scholarly research in the fields of literature and arts. The core of the research consisted of collections of akyns' works published over different years, literature about their lives and creativity, as well as monographs, defended dissertations, and individual articles. The works of scholars such as A.Zhubanov, Y.Ismailov, A.Margulan, S.Kaskabasov, Y.Tursynov, I.Zhakhanov, Z.Kospakov, S.Kerim, S.Negimov, and others, who have made significant contributions to the study of the poetic heritage of sal-seriler, played an important role. These materials served as both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. To align the study with contemporary academic discourse, the research materials also included recent international publications (2020-2024) and digital databases of Central Asian oral literature (Drompp, 2023: 85). A representative corpus of over 100 poetic texts was selected for detailed metric and stylistic examination, specifically focusing

on the most influential works of Akan Seri, Birzhan Sal, Ukili Ybyrai, and Segiz Seri. The selection criteria for these texts included their relevance to the 11-syllable "kara olen" tradition and the presence of verified musical transcriptions, allowing for a comparative analysis of textual rhythm and melodic structure. Over 100 poetic texts were selected for detailed metric and stylistic examination.

3. Discussion

The poetry of the singer-akyns, as one of the rich heritages of Kazakh literature, is a vivid reflection of national spiritual values. This genre of poetry, depicting the everyday life of the Kazakh people, their traditions, and harmony with nature, preserved the artistic means of a culture formed over centuries and passed them down from generation to generation. A unique feature of the creativity of the singer-akyns is the combination of deep emotional richness in their poetry with a high artistic style. From the perspective of modern «Performance Studies,» this tradition can be defined as a «mediated muse,» where the vocal delivery and the poetic text form an inseparable aesthetic whole (Amsler, 2022: 348). They not only composed verses but also embellished their works with song, performing them before the people, which closely tied this poetry to the national musical culture.

The works of such prominent akyns as Akan Seri, Birzhan Sal, Ukili Ybyrai, and Mukhit Sal constitute an important part of Kazakh literature. Their poetry is mainly devoted to lyrical and landscape themes, conveying the inner feelings of individuals. Artistic techniques such as metaphors and similes are frequently used.

The artistic mastery of Akan Seri is vividly demonstrated in his descriptions of female beauty, where nature serves as the primary aesthetic scale. For instance, in his portrayal of Aktoty, he uses precise portrait metaphors:

«Ey, qalka, tiliñ tätti, lebiñ balday,
Qalam qas, itelgi көз, jazıq mañday» (Qoramsauly, 2013: 59).
(Oh, my dear, your speech is sweet, your breath is like honey,
Pen-like eyebrows, falcon-like eyes, and a broad forehead).

These lines demonstrate a shift to the 11-syllable "kara olen" meter, where the rhythm is dictated by the melodic phrasing of the song. The use of "itelgi көз" (falcon eyes) and "totı qustıñ taraūınday" (like the combing of a peacock) illustrates a high level of individual authorial mastery, transforming traditional nomadic symbols into a refined "bardic persona".

Birzhan Sal's poetry further explores musical syncretism, where the textual structure is inseparable from its vocal delivery. In his famous songs, he employs sophisticated nature-human isomorphisms:

«Şahardıñ İranbağı gülındaysıñ,
Zaytunday erte pıskın külındaysıñ» (Qozhagululy, 2013: 67).
(You are like a flower in the Iranian garden of the city,
You smile like an early-ripened olive).

The introduction of non-native imagery such as "olive" and "Iranian garden" suggests a transition toward a more individualistic and cosmopolitan poetic language, departing from the formulaic oral canon. The meter in Birzhan's lyrics often exhibits a delicate balance between the 11-syllable structure and the rhythmic requirements of the melody, where the "ash belıñ qumırsqaday" (your slender waist like an ant) metaphor aligns perfectly with the musical caesura.

The works of Ukili Ybyrai also highlight the deep connection between landscape and spiritual state. He frequently turns to ornithological metaphors:

«Ey, qalqa, sen aq qoyan qumnan qaşqan,
Aspanda men aqiyıq şabit quşqan» (Sandybaiuly, 2005: 37).
(Oh, my dear, you are a white rabbit escaping from the sands,
And I am a white-headed eagle soaring in the sky).

This binary opposition (predator/prey) is a common trope in Kazakh folklore, yet Ybyrai individualizes it through complex internal rhymes and the melodic flow of his "Gakku" cycle. The repetition of natural symbols like the swan (aqqu) and the gray duck (qoñır qaz) functions as an aesthetic refrain that reinforces the song's emotional intensity.

Segiz Seri's contribution to the "sal-seri" genre is marked by a rich inventory of nature-based epithets that emphasize the grace of the heroine: «Ajarñ aq tülkiday qaşqan qumnan» or «Maraldıñ qolğa tücken ılağında». (Your face is like a white fox escaping through the sands) (Segiz Seri, 2013: 98) His poetry exemplifies the "vocal literacy" concept, where the nomadic landscape (the steppe, mountains, and saigas) acts as a metaphysical character. The precise rhythmic organization of lines such as "Külim köz, oymaq auız, jazıq mañday" (Smiling eyes, thimble-like mouth, broad forehead) provides a structural stability that allowed these works to be preserved accurately through oral transmission before being recorded in written form.

As noted by Levi Thompson, such poetic systems in non-Western cultures often prefigured individualistic modernism by shifting the focus from collective tribal history to the subjective experiences of the poet. A significant contribution to the study of the works of the singer-akyns was made by literary scholar Y.Ismailov in his monograph «Akyns». In this work, he examines the creativity of the «sal» and «seri» as syncretic art, pointing out the connection between Kazakh singers and Russian skomorokhs as well as European troubadours and knights.

Y.Ismailov classifies poets into several groups, such as the «improvising poet», «zhyrau», «zhyrshy», «singer-poet» and «olenchi». Special attention is given to the differences and similarities between the singer-poets – «sal» and «seri». He notes that poetic expression in their creativity does not exist without music and singing, where vocal and musical mastery dominate the text (Ismailov, 1956: 56). This aligns with Paul Zumthor's concept of «vocal literacy,» where the voice itself acts as a sophisticated literary medium. Sh.Kerim thoroughly explored the historical prerequisites for the formation of the singer-poets, noting that they freely use traditional imagery while introducing new metaphors. In the context of recent nomadic studies (Drompp, 2023: 42), this is viewed as a «coexistence of orality and literacy,» where the nomadic landscape serves as a metaphysical character that mediates the poet's inner world.

Y.Ismailov views the creativity of singer-poets as a new trend in Kazakh oral folk art, emphasizing that the central themes of their poetry are love, freedom, and individual independence. Another significant contribution is the monograph by scholar Sh.Kerim, who thoroughly explored the historical and social prerequisites for the formation of the singer-poets, as well as their artistic features, such as syncretism and the synthesis of folk elements with individual innovations. He notes that the poets freely use traditional imagery while introducing new metaphors and associations, making their work unique. The individuality

of each poet is manifested in the melodiousness of their verses, where form and musical tone play a crucial role in the development of Kazakh song (Kerim, 2017: 101).

The poetry of the singer-akyns holds a special place in Kazakh literature due to their celebration of life's beauty, spiritual richness, and personal freedom. However, it is essential to recognize that the complex historical conditions in which they lived also influenced the development of lyrical motifs and philosophical reflections in their works. Scholar Alua Temirbolat wrote about 19th-century poets, emphasizing their reflections on historical processes, traditions, and the way of life of the people. The poets highlight the importance of recognizing national identity, both at the societal level and for the individual.

When discussing the artistic features, one cannot overlook the close connection to folklore. Each work of the singer-akyns abounds with vivid imagery, yet they rework these images individually. This individualization can be explained through the concept of "liminality" (Turner, 1969: 74). Being social outsiders, the *sal-seri* gained the artistic freedom to innovate beyond societal norms. One of the central themes is the celebration of feminine beauty. Female beauty is often compared to natural phenomena, creating complex poetic metaphors. For instance, akyns describe a girl's face as "radiant and bright like the sun". This use of nature-human isomorphism is not merely decorative; as Michael Drompp argues, it is an essential tool for preserving cultural memory while expressing personal identity during periods of social transformation.

One of the central themes of their poetry is the celebration of feminine beauty. This tradition, widespread in Kazakh poetry, found a special reflection in the works of the singer-akyns. Female beauty is often compared to natural phenomena such as flowers, birds, and animals, creating complex poetic metaphors and epithets. For instance, the akyns describe a girl's eyes as "brown like berries," her face as "radiant and bright like the sun," and her hair as "silken braids." These images not only depict physical appearance but also emphasize inner spiritual beauty, which is an integral part of the folk ideal of beauty.

Moreover, the akyns frequently use metaphors and epithets that give feminine beauty not only a physical but also a spiritual dimension. In their verses, a girl's beauty is closely intertwined with her virtues – kindness, gentleness, and purity. For example, akyns may compare a girl to a "heavenly star", her face to "moonlight", and her gait to "a gentle breeze". Such imagery highlights not only her external attractiveness but also her inner harmony with the surrounding world.

It is important to note that in the poetry of the akyns, feminine beauty is perceived as a symbol of supreme harmony, where physical and spiritual elements merge. In their works, women are often depicted as embodiments of the ideal, of beauty and love, which is also connected to the Kazakh cultural tradition, in which the image of the mother-earth as a source of life and inspiration holds a central place.

Thus, the use of natural imagery to describe feminine beauty in the poetry of singer-akyns enriches the language and adds layers of meaning to the images. The metaphors and epithets associated with nature not only visually embellish the poems but also reveal the depth and complexity of the perception of beauty, harmony, and love.

Literary critic and folklorist Y. Tursunov regards the works of the "sal" and "seri" as a "lyrical bohemia", where love, youth, and the joy of life are celebrated (Tursunov, 1976: 32).

Additionally, nature plays a vital role in the poetry of the singer-akyns. For them, nature is not only the surrounding world but also a means of expressing human emotions and feelings. By describing natural phenomena, the akyns simultaneously convey the inner state of a person. In poems dedicated to young women, the akyns often use comparisons with natural elements to highlight the beauty of their heroines. For example, in the works of Birzhan, one can find lines like: "Your beauty is like that of a white fox" and "Your slender waist, like that of an ant". Ukili Ybyrai uses metaphors such as: "You are like a swan on a calm lake" and "You are like a gray duck in the river". Similar imagery is found in the works of other "sal" and "seri" poets.

These comparisons and metaphors related to nature enrich the poetic language of the akyns, creating vivid and colorful images. For instance, Akan Seri describes a girl with the lines: "Like a falcon, satisfied with its prey", while Segiz Seri employs comparisons like: "You are like a playful gazelle in the mountains" and "You are like a white saiga running through the steppe" (Segiz Seri, 2013). Such imagery conveys not only external beauty but also emphasizes the grace and lightness of the heroines.

Beyond comparisons with animals, the akyns often turn to elements of nature, such as rivers, mountains, and stars, to convey the emotional states of their heroines. In the poetry of the "sal" and "seri", images like a clear sky or the swift flow of a river often symbolize the purity and constancy of feelings. Nature becomes an integral part of the narrative, enhancing the lyrical mood and adding philosophical depth to their works.

In the work of G.Orda, issues related to the depiction of women in Kazakh literature are also examined. The study analyzes works of both folklore and written literature, including poetry, prose, and drama. Special attention is given to the changes in the portrayal of female images in Kazakh literature of the 20th and 21st centuries, linked to the transformation of sociocultural and political realities (Orda, 2021: 653). In this context, the image of the Kazakh girl in the poetry of the "sal-seri" also stands as a singer of feminine beauty, revealing new facets of the traditional image of women in Kazakh literature. The poetry of the "sal-seri", through its distinctive artistic techniques and metaphors, enriches the depiction of Kazakh girls, imbuing this image with depth and emotional intensity.

According to S.Negimov, "the language of poetry is a magician. Poetic association and the art of complex combinations of many techniques are instantly revealed before you. All poetry encompasses and contains all phenomena, states, movements, forms, and colors of the boundless expanses, the world of nature, and human society" (Negimov, 2015: 163). This statement emphasizes not only the significance of poetry in general but also the mastery of poets who create intricate and multi-layered images.

Textual studies also play a crucial role in the exploration of the poetry of the "sal" and "seri". Noted writer and composer I.Zhakhonov meticulously analyzes the history and textual study of Kazakh songs from the 1920s and 1930s. He points out that during this period, songs became "instruments of Soviet propaganda, losing their original meaning and significance." His research mentions such songs as "Birlan," "On Sausak", and "Kozikosh" by Birzhan Sal, "Balkadisha" by Akan Seri, "Shalkyma", and "Tolkyn" by Ukili Ybyrai, among many others. Zhakhonov highlights that the texts of many songs were distorted or attributed to other authors. For example, it was discovered that the song "Syrgakty" originally belonged to Asyet, although for a long time, it was believed to be by Ybyrai.

The textual challenges and questions of authorship concerning the works of the singer-akyns are thoroughly examined in the works of Z.Kospakov, who also analyzes songs such as “Zhyirma Bes”, “Kyzyl Asyk” and “Shynar-ai” (Kospakov, 2017: 15).

Thus, the poetry of the singer-akyns represents a unique synthesis of the oral and written traditions of Kazakh literature. Their works, reflecting the cultural and historical features of the people, hold a prominent place in the artistic realm of Kazakh literature. The metaphors, comparisons, and epithets used to describe nature and human beauty have enriched the literary language of Kazakh poetry, contributing to its further development. By integrating modern theoretical frameworks (Oldfield, 2021; Thompson, 2020: 43), we can see that the sal-seri were not merely folk performers but sophisticated architects of a new, individualistic poetic language that continues to define Kazakh literary identity.

It is noteworthy that, based on the content, thematic focus, and genre features of their works, the poets can be considered representatives of both oral and written literature. However, as an analysis of their poems shows, neither of these directions is fully inherent in their works. Researcher B.Omarov, in his study of the poet Aset, emphasizes that some of his works show a mixture of eleven-syllable lines and lines with seven or eight syllables, indicating a closer connection to the oral tradition of poetry performance (Omarov, 2022: 36). This conclusion can similarly be applied to the works of other representatives of the «sal-seri» genre.

The study of the poetry of the singer-akyns also includes textual and historical-cultural aspects, which underscore the syncretic nature of their creativity. Folkloric elements in the works of the singer-akyns intertwine with their personal innovative techniques, making their poetry unique within the context of Kazakh literature.

The works of the “sal” and “seri” poets often focus on themes of beauty, love, and the harmony between humans and nature. Alongside these, their poems also exhibit profound philosophical undertones. Many akyns reflect on values, traditions, the social structure of the Kazakh people, and the quest for inner freedom. This lends their poetry a philosophical depth, expressing the thoughts and feelings of both individuals and the nation as a whole.

Akyns such as Akan seri, Birzhan sal, and Ukili Ybyrai did not simply sing about love and beauty; they also pondered human destiny, social inequality, and the challenges posed by their times. Their lyrics often had a personal tone, yet they also reflected the social sentiments and changes in the life of the Kazakh people.

Contemporary studies of the creativity of the singer-akyns highlight the importance of their contribution to the formation of national identity. The poetry of these akyns not only preserves the rich cultural traditions of the past but also continues to play a key role in the understanding of the historical path of the Kazakh people.

The works of the “sal” and “seri” poets remain subjects of study and reinterpretation in literary scholarship. Their poetry offers a deeper understanding of not only the artistic achievements of Kazakh literature but also the spiritual and cultural values of a people who, despite all trials, have preserved their distinctiveness and strength of spirit.

4. Results

In the course of the study of the artistic and poetic features of Kazakh poet-singers, several key aspects have been identified that significantly influenced the development

of 19th-century Kazakh literature. The synthesis of traditional nomadic aesthetics with individual authorial innovation resulted in the following findings:

First, the research established that the use of natural motifs and imagery in sal-seri poetry functions as a sophisticated system of nature-human isomorphism. Nature in the poetry of the akyns is not merely a background but an active participant in the narrative, influencing the characters' emotions and behaviors. Our analysis confirms that natural elements serve as conceptual metaphors for expressing the inner emotional states of the characters. This aligns with the "ecology of sound and word" (Harris & Pease, 2021: 52), where the landscape is utilized as a metaphysical tool to convey spiritual beauty and inner purity. The poets often use natural phenomena as metaphors to express the inner states of individuals. This allows them to create vivid and colorful images that convey not only the external beauty of the world but also the emotional depth of their works. Natural elements serve as an important tool in conveying spiritual beauty and the inner world of the characters.

Second, the investigation revealed that the depiction of female beauty in the poetry of the akyns represents a shift from collective folklore ideals to individual aesthetic perceptions. This motif, which is traditional for Kazakh literature, acquires special meaning in the works of the poet-singers. Female beauty is often depicted through natural metaphors, highlighting the harmony between women and the surrounding world. The image of a woman in the poetry of the akyns is not limited to physical beauty but also encompasses a spiritual dimension, which is a central part of the popular ideal. The woman symbolizes not only outward attractiveness but also inner purity, virtue, and harmony. As demonstrated through comparative analysis, the image of a woman symbolizes a fusion of physical attractiveness and inner virtue, functioning as a central pillar of the 19th-century Kazakh «bardic persona (Oldfield, 2021: 29).

Thus, natural imagery in the poetry of the akyns becomes a tool not only for describing the physical appearance of the heroines but also for expressing their inner world, feelings, and emotions. Metaphors and similes associated with nature play a crucial role in creating multifaceted images, allowing the akyns to explore themes of love, beauty, idealism, and harmony more deeply.

Another notable characteristic of the work of Kazakh poet-singers is the close connection between their poetry and the folklore traditions of the people. The akyns actively borrowed various genres and images from folklore, which gave their works a special expressiveness and depth. Folk poetry, epics, songs, and legends served as important sources of inspiration for the akyns, and they used these elements as the foundation for creating their own works. Characters from folk tales, epic plots, folk expressions, and proverbs were employed in the poetry of the akyns, making their art a vivid reflection of the wisdom and experience of the people.

The akyns' works represent a unique interpretation of folklore motifs, which, being reinterpreted, were enriched by the poets' personal experiences and reflections. It was precisely this folklore foundation that allowed the akyns to combine traditional forms with innovative elements, creating works that both preserved the national identity and introduced new aesthetic and philosophical ideas. These connections with folklore lend

depth and nuance to the poetry of the akyns and provide insights into Kazakh worldviews and values that were passed on to subsequent generations through their art.

Additionally, the use of various poetic forms and genres in the works of the akyns is an essential component of their artistic style. The akyns mastered a wide range of poetic forms, which enabled them to effectively convey various emotions, reflections, and philosophical ideas. Their poetry features both lyrical verses and more complex narrative works, which often address life's realities and philosophical questions. These forms allow the akyns to express not only personal experiences but also reflect the social, historical, and cultural contexts of their time.

Particular attention should be given to the musicality of the akyns' poetry. Musicality is a vital characteristic of their work, as their poems were often performed with musical accompaniment. This creates a special harmony between text and music, giving the akyns' works additional expressiveness. The rhythmic structure of the poems, the use of sound repetitions, alliteration, and assonance make their works vivid and emotionally rich.

All these aspects – the use of natural imagery, the depiction of female beauty, the active borrowing of folklore motifs, the variety of poetic forms and genres, and the musicality of the verses characterize the art of Kazakh poet-singers as a highly developed form of artistic expression. The results affirm that the sal-seri tradition played a decisive role in the evolution of Kazakh literary identity during the 19th century, serving as a precursor to global modernist movements in Central Asian verse (Thompson, 2020: 124).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the artistic and poetic features of 19th-century Kazakh poet-singers (akyns), with a focus on their distinctive poetic style, which combines traditional elements with innovative literary techniques. The research aimed to analyze the poetic devices, thematic aspects, and linguistic features, with particular attention to the use of nature, metaphors, and folklore. By applying the comparative-typological method and performance theory, the study successfully demonstrated how these artists transitioned from collective improvisation to professional authorship. The study employed methods of literary analysis and comparative approaches, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the key elements of their poetry.

The results of the study revealed several significant findings. First, it became evident that Kazakh poet-singers were closely connected with nature, which served not only as a backdrop but also as a means of conveying human emotions, particularly in depictions of beauty, love, and inner spiritual states. Frequently used natural metaphors – such as comparisons with animals, plants, and landscapes – created rich, multilayered images that reflected both external beauty and internal emotional conditions. This nature-human isomorphism, supported by recent theories of media ecology (Harris & Pease, 2021: 59), allowed the poets to express individual spiritual states. Moreover, the akyns actively utilized elements of Kazakh folklore, infusing their works with the collective wisdom and cultural identity of the people. Through folklore, they preserved and transmitted traditional themes while adapting them to express personal and social values.

Additionally, the study showed that the poetic form of the akyns was characterized by flexibility and variety. Their skill in using various poetic genres and their ability to adapt

traditional forms to new contexts enabled them to explore complex themes, such as social issues, existential reflections, and personal experiences. This versatility of form and content significantly contributed to the development of Kazakh literature, positioning the poet-singers as central figures in its evolution during the 19th century. This versatility confirms our hypothesis that the sal-seri tradition represents a form of “vocal literacy” (Zumthor, 1990: 37) that prefigured the modern Kazakh written tradition. Ultimately, the integration of specific textual examples from Akan Seri, Birzhan Sal, and Ukili Ybyrai proves that the “sal-seri” tradition was the primary vehicle for the professionalization of Kazakh verse. By moving from the 7-8 syllable epic tradition to the 11-syllable lyrical structure, these poet-singers created a new aesthetic system that combined musical syncretism with individual authorial mastery.

The conclusions of the research affirm the importance of Kazakh poet-singers as key figures in the formation of Kazakh literary identity. Their works, filled with metaphors, folklore, and innovative poetry, not only reflect the cultural and spiritual essence of their time but also made a significant contribution to the development of Kazakh literature. By combining traditional forms with personal expression, the akyns created a unique literary voice that continues to resonate in modern times. Their use of natural imagery and folklore remains a cornerstone of Kazakh poetry and continues to influence contemporary literary processes.

The prospects for further research in this field are vast. Future studies could explore the social and historical contexts in which the akyns created their works, examining how their poetry responded to the political and cultural changes of the 19th century. There is also potential to analyze the influence of Kazakh poetry on neighboring Central Asian literary traditions, as well as its impact on contemporary Kazakh literature. Additionally, studying the connection between the oral traditions of the akyns and the written literature of later periods represents a promising area for future investigation.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the artistic and poetic achievements of Kazakh poet-singers, highlighting their role in shaping the literary culture of Kazakhstan. It confirms the significance of their works as reflections of cultural heritage and as a dynamic force in the evolution of Kazakh literature.

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