

Transformation of Literary Translations of the Literary Classics by Abai Kunanbayev

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ABSTRACT

Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayuly has a dualistic heritage as the father of modern Kazakh literature, and as an educator who translated Russian literary classics into Kazakh language and performed as a vital bridge between the two cultures. The Abai's reputation was built primarily due to the writer, critic and scientist of the 20th century Mukhtar Auezov, whose biographical works about the poet created the standard narrative about his life and work.

The objective of the article is to examine the life, work, and enduring influence of Abai

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Kunanbayuly, with a focus on his efforts to connect Kazakh and Russian cultures through his literary contributions and translations. Additionally, it aims to analyse the changing understandings of his significance in Kazakh literature and cultural history. It was established that Abai's efforts led to the discovery of a real Kazakh literary voice, as evidenced by his successful adaptation of Pushkin's "Evgeniy Onegin" into the traditional form of Kazakh song. The "conquest" of Central Asia by Russian literature was, in fact, a multidimensional dialogue, where writers founded distinctive national literary traditions by appropriating of its literature, and, by reading, translating, displacing, domestication and "disorienting" the figure of Pushkin in particular. It has been established that Abai does not retain all the names of the main characters but uses Kazakh analogies. The Abai's translation of Krylov's fables is associated primarily with elements of creativity such as landscapes, everyday life pictures and scenes.

KEYWORDS: fiction; genre scenes; translations by Abai Kunanbayuly; adaptations; Krylov's fables; Kazakh literature

1. Introduction

Abai Kunanbayuly, a seminal figure in Kazakh culture, is renowned for his dual role as the progenitor of modern Kazakh literature and a crucial link between the Kazakh oral tradition and its subsequent written form (Khammatova and Ibyatova 2019). His significance lies in his ability to bridge Kazakh and Russian cultures during the late 19th century, a period marked by Russian expansion into Central Asia. This essay explores Abai's life and work, his impact on Kazakh literature, and his translation efforts, with a particular focus on the evolution of his legacy and the scholarly debate surrounding his relationship with Russian culture.

Abai's literary and philosophical contributions are often characterized as a reflection of the Kazakh people's mentality and their struggle for independence (Witt 2017; Sadykova et al. 2018; Bayekeyeva et al. 2021). Post-Soviet assessments, such as those by former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, emphasize Abai's embodiment of Kazakh national pride

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and resistance to rule (Rarenko 2020). However, pre-Stalin era evaluations offer a contrasting perspective, with Soviet scholar Akhmetov in 1923 attributing Abai's poetic awakening to Russian cultural influence (Asemzhan 2016; Urazaeva and Rakhymbai 2020).

Abai's literary contributions, including his poetry and philosophical writings, significantly shaped Kazakh literature. His work is notable for its exploration of modernization and enlightenment themes, challenging traditional Kazakh norms (Asemzhan 2016). The debate surrounding Abai's exposure to Russian literature and culture highlights the complex dynamics of influence and indigenous agency.

Some critics, like Akhmetov, argue that Abai's achievements were contingent upon Russian cultural exposure (Akhmetov and Myrzakhmetov 1995). This perspective, however, has been challenged by later scholars who emphasize Abai's agency in appropriating and transforming external influences to serve Kazakh cultural needs (Asemzhan 2016). The comparison of Abai to Pushkin, for instance, reflects a hagiographic narrative that connects Abai's genius to his engagement with Russian literature, exemplified by his translation of *Evgenii Onegin* (Asemzhan 2016).

Abai's translation of fables into Kazakh is a notable aspect of his literary legacy. These translations served a dual purpose: they enriched Kazakh literature and functioned as a vector for cultural modernization. By translating foreign literary works, Abai facilitated the transfer of new ideas and genres into Kazakh culture, fostering its evolution and adaptation in the face of pressures.

Abai Kunanbayuly's legacy is marked by a complex interplay between Russian cultural influence and Kazakh agency. While his work faced criticism from both Soviet and traditionalist quarters during his lifetime, his contributions to Kazakh literature and culture are now widely celebrated (Rarenko 2020; Tazhitova et al. 2024). The changing interpretations of Abai's legacy mirror the wider socio-political transformations in Kazakhstan, encompassing governance, Soviet assimilation, and, ultimately, post-Soviet autonomy. Further research could explore the nuances of Abai's engagement with Russian

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culture, the agency of peoples in cultural exchange, and the role of literary figures in cultural modernization and resistance.

In this essay, we have employed a chronological and thematic approach to analyse Abai's life, work, and legacy. By contextualizing Abai within the broader framework of nationalism, and cultural exchange, we aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of his significance in Kazakh cultural history.

By integrating a thorough analysis of his life, work, and legacy, with a specific emphasis on his role as a cultural bridge between Kazakh and Russian traditions, this research provides a unique and pertinent perspective on Abai Kunanbayev. The study's originality resides in its multidisciplinary methodology, which integrates historical background, literary examination, and cultural studies to offer a sophisticated comprehension of Abai's profound importance. Its significance is emphasised by the current focus on cultural interchange, and the processes of national identity development, making Abai's narrative a relevant case study for comprehending the intricate interaction between Indigenous autonomy and external forces in shaping contemporary cultural environments.

2. The life and work of Abai Kunanbayev in the literature of Mukhtar

Auezov

Abai was born into an aristocratic Kazakh family in 1845 in the countryside outside the Russian outpost of Semipalatinsk, where Fyodor Dostoevsky spent several fateful years in exile in the 1850s. Abai received a regular Islamic education, first from a village mullah, then at the Akhmet-Riza madrasah in Semipalatinsk, before enrolling in a city Russian school for a short period (Khlebnikov 2019). Here, according to the testimony of his Soviet biographers, he first felt a taste for the Russian classics, even though he achieved fluent Russian only later in life, after many years of independent study (Info-Tses 2018). Like his father before him, Abai spent most of his adult life as an administrator for the tsarist government in the Semipalatinsk district, rising to the ranks of the volost chief and then the governor.

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Soviet biographers emphasise his involvement in the Russian cultural life of Semipalatinsk, especially his acquaintance with exiled Russian intellectuals Yevgeny Petrovich Michaelis (1841-1893) and Nifont Ivanovich Dolgoplov, who allegedly encouraged Abai in his studies and work. In his 40s, he began a career as a writer and akyn (poet-improviser and singer among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia), and became known for his contributions to the Kazakh oral song tradition (Ayagan 1995). However, during his lifetime, Abai published only a few works in the bilingual Russian-Turkish bulletin of the tsarist administration “*Kirghiz Stepnaya Gazeta*” (“*Kirghiz Stepnaya Gazeta*”/“*Dalaywalyayati Gazeta*”). Only after his death, the pre-revolutionary Kazakh intelligentsia, and then Soviet folklorists and literary critics, took upon themselves the task of rewriting, editing and publishing his most famous works in Kazakh language, including the philosophical treatise “*Words of Edification (Qara sozder)*”, lyric poems and long poems, compositions in oral song tradition, translations and adaptations of Goethe, Schiller, Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Krylov (Musabekova 2016). Starting with his contemporaries in the Kazakh intelligentsia and continuing to the present day, scientists (such as Akhmetov and Myrzakhmetov 1995; Zhumay et al. 2020; Akkaliyeva et al. 2021) attribute to Abai’s works significant innovations of modern, written Kazakh literature, with their introduction of Russian themes and poetic forms, the philosophical preponderance of the value of the Russian language in Kazakh society and, above all, the spread of Russians and Westerners progressive ideas in the steppe. Abai advocated for the importance of education and literacy among the Kazakh population (Lee and Chung 2025). He believed that access to knowledge and modern education was crucial for the intellectual and social development of his people. He emphasized the preservation and promotion of Kazakh language and culture while embracing elements of modernity. He encouraged the revival of traditional Kazakh poetry, music, and storytelling, contributing to a cultural renaissance. Abai encouraged critical thinking and enlightenment among his fellow Kazakhs. He believed that questioning traditional beliefs and embracing new ideas were essential for societal advancement.

The legend of Abai and the origins of the Kazakh literary tradition as it is known today was carefully cultivated in the early Soviet period by the Kazakh writer and literary critic Mukhtar

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Auezov, who was a younger distant relative from the same region. The main episodes of Abai's life, as well as most of the published editions of his works, were the result of Auezov's resourceful efforts to document, preserve and disseminate the legacy of his ancestor (Kunanbaev 1945). Auezov began this project in the pre-revolutionary era, but his work became widely known only in the late 1930s. In 1937, at the height of the Stalinist repressions and the all-Union Pushkin jubilee, Auezov again turned to the Soviet literate audience with an article titled "How Tatiana sang in the steppe", in which Abai's translations of excerpts from Pushkin's "*Evgeniy Onegin*" into Kazakh were presented. Auezov portrayed these translations as an awakening of Kazakh culture to the majestic potential and universal appeal of Russian literature, as well as a turning point in the development of the Kazakh literary tradition (Satpayeva and Auezova 1988). "How Tatiana Sang in the Steppe" became a background for Auezov's longest-lasting contribution to the legend of Abai: a semi-fictionalised multivolume biographical novel called "*Abai's Way*" ("*Abai Zholy*"). From 1942 to 1959, it was published in both Kazakh and Russian, and in 1948 it received the Stalin Prize. Described by Auezov himself as an epic novel, the work brings Abai's life story to mythical proportions, leading the reader through a dramatic story about the victories and hardships of the emerging Kazakh people from the perspective of their most famous son (Khasanov 2000). The work is also highly regarded as a repository of Kazakh cultural information, since Auezov's prose is intertwined with fragments from traditional songs, poetry and stories, which are filled with geographical and ethnographic details (Dadebaev 2015; Cüme 2019; Cüme 2019). This work emerged as a prototype for subsequent narratives about Abai's life and is regarded as the definitive depiction of Kazakh life during the significant transition at the close of the 19th century, when Russian influence intensified and instigated irreversible cultural, social, and economic transformations.

The success of "*Abai Zholy*" in the Kazakh and Russian languages, both within the Kazakh SSR and at the All-Union level, gave Auezov the status of a national representative. According to M. Ruland, he became "the main mediator for Kazakh culture" (Ruland 1975:123).

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Abai was fluent in both Kazakh and Russian, a rare skill during his time. His proficiency in both languages allowed him to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between Kazakh and Russian-speaking communities. This made him uniquely positioned to communicate and collaborate with individuals from both linguistic backgrounds. Abai was deeply committed to preserving and promoting Kazakh culture, language, and traditions. He used his bilingualism and familiarity with Russian literary forms to create works that appealed to both Kazakh and Russian-speaking audiences. Abai actively engaged in cultural exchanges between the Kazakh and Russian communities. He facilitated communication and understanding between these two groups by translating Russian literary works into Kazakh and vice versa. This helped to bridge cultural gaps and promote mutual appreciation.

Contemporaries during Abai's time were engaging with literature in both Russian and Kazakh, but there were challenges and complexities in these interactions. The language barrier between Russian and Kazakh speakers often limits direct communication and mutual acknowledgement between writers of each language (Nusubalieva et al. 2023). This was especially true for those who were not bilingual like Abai. Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking literary circles tended to operate separately due to differences in language and cultural context. This separation sometimes hindered recognition and appreciation of each other's works. The Russian influence in Kazakhstan created a complex backdrop. While it facilitated exposure to Russian culture and literature, it also posed challenges to the preservation of Kazakh identity and the development of Kazakh literature. Abai Kunanbayev's role as a mediator and cultural bridge was instrumental in fostering understanding and cooperation between these distinct linguistic and cultural communities. He not only promoted Kazakh culture but also helped Russians gain insight into Kazakh traditions and perspectives. Through his efforts, Abai played a pivotal role in shaping the literary landscape of the steppe region and advancing the cause of cultural exchange and mutual acknowledgment between Kazakh and Russian writers (Doszhan 2023).

Ruland also notes that "*Abai Zholy*" was more than just a biography, since Auezov "saw his own life through the experience of his predecessor" (Orynbekov 1995:112). Thus, the epic novel simultaneously functions both as a Soviet rewriting of the modern cultural history of

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Kazakhstan and as a self-portrait of its author. The focus of this study is Auezov's portrayal of one of the key moments that ties together all the disparate functions of the novel, which is Abai's discovery of the Russian language and literature through the works of A.S. Pushkin. Several excerpts from "*Abai Zholy*" that focus on Abai's emerging fascination with Russian culture are contrasting with the conservative and reactionary views of his family and friends. In one of the early exchanges, a friend jokingly suggests that Abai's mastery of the Russian language emasculates: "So, perhaps, having immersed yourself in Russian books, you yourself became Russian? You know they cannot have two wives" (Trakhtenberg 2019:43). But an even greater subtext of this struggle is contained in another memorable passage detailing the conflict between Abai and his conservative father, who warns him that "clinging to the Russians" (Anastasiev 2008:78) will lead to his rejection from the Muslim community: "If your soul goes to them, [...] every Muslim will be a stranger to you" (Anastasiev 2008:78). In an impassioned response, Abai defends his decision to learn Russian in terms of his all-encompassing pursuit of enlightenment and learning. He describes enlightenment as a "treasure" that only Russians can bestow upon him.

3. Abai Kunanbayev's creativity and his role in Kazakh literature

The most valuable thing for me and for our people is knowledge and enlightenment... And all this is in the hands of the Russians. And if the Russians give me that treasure that I have been looking for all my life in vain, how can they be far from me, how can they be strangers? (Auezov, 2004:137).

Making the alien to the familiar and the distant to the loved ones, the "treasure" of enlightenment causes, in his view, a personal transformation of Abai. The Russian language as a means of education makes this transformation possible. Auezov spends several chapters, describing Abai's learning of the Russian language in detail, as well as the significant change in consciousness that occurs as a result of his contact with the Russian literature. While books in Chagatai, Persian, and Arabic transport Abai to the enchanting landscapes of historical Islamic centers, including lush gardens, scholarly madrassas, majestic mosques, fairy-tale

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palaces, and repositories of knowledge, Russian literature provides him with a fresh and contemporary outlook on these regions (Kaliyen 2023). Kazakh intelligentsia at the beginning of the twentieth century was in search of national identity and prospects for cultural survival of the Kazakh people in Central Asia and offered useful information about the region (Zhumatay et al. 2024).

Abai Kunanbayev freely studied Chagatay, along with books in Arabic and Persian that presented significant challenges in comprehension. Surprisingly, it was Russian literature, the most challenging for him to grasp, that unveiled the hidden mysteries of Middle and Central Asia, Arabia, and the vibrant existence within bustling trading cities. Abai studied the modern life of these countries. While studying, he made notes about trade routes on land and water, and cities and markets. This was valuable information for a traveller going to distant lands (Tukeyev and Karibayeva 2020). Although Abai was dissatisfied with him missing the opportunity to learn Russian as a child, Russian books soon became his “inseparable friends”, and he began to collect them carefully, despite the reaction of his fellow villagers, who react to the strange, impenetrable Russian writing with superstitious fear (Tukeyev and Karibayeva 2020).

4. Translating Fables into Kazakh

In the process of searching for poetic forms, Abai came close to translating fables by I.A. Krylov such as “The Crow and the Fox” and “The Wolf and the Lamb”, which were a standard for the disclosure of new social concepts and morality. Folk art of Kazakhstan is rich in fairy tales and fables about animals. During Abai’s life, the works of Arab and Persian medieval poets were very popular, which prompted Abai to use plots from the famous collection *A Thousand and One Nights* and many others in Kazakh translation. This approach did not quite correspond to the “educational” tasks of Abai. Therefore, in his further work he uses Krylov’s fables (originally written in Russian) as a standard of “everyday poetry of a universal language” (Tukeyev and Karibayeva 2020:747).

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V.G. Berlinsky provided insightful commentary on Abai's translations from Russian into Kazakh, which sheds light on Abai's approach to this task. Berlinsky noted the challenge of translating Krylov's fables into Kazakh due to the presence of numerous linguistic idioms in the Russian text. However, it's important to understand that Abai did not merely aim for a literal translation. His primary objective was to convey the fable's ideological meaning by adapting the text and moral lessons to align with the Kazakh worldview at that time (Tukeyev and Karibayeva 2020). Abai accomplished this by using allegorical imagery to personify human qualities and behaviors. For instance, in the fable "Eagle," Abai adapted it to reflect the lifestyle and values of the Kazakh people. In comparison to Krylov's version, where the Donkey becomes arrogant after donning an official order and wreaks havoc in the garden until being driven away, Abai's rendition presents the Donkey as envisioning himself as an honorable figure solely because he carried gold. However, when the Donkey delivers the gold, he reverts to being an ordinary and foolish creature—essentially, a donkey. This approach allowed Abai to make Krylov's fables resonate with Kazakh audiences by aligning them with the cultural and moral context of the time. Abai's adaptations of these fables served as a bridge between Russian and Kazakh literature, offering valuable moral lessons that could be readily understood and appreciated by the Kazakh people of his era.

Abai Kunanbaev began translating the fables of I.A. Krylov in 1882. Abai valued Krylov's fables for their deep wisdom and easy creative adaptability, even though he was not himself an admirer of this genre. He said that although he loved fables, he would not write them himself. The interpretation of Krylov's fable "A peasant in trouble" by Abai is worth mentioning. In the original, the main character was an ordinary Russian man, while in Abai's version he was a rich merchant. The moral that Abai concluded in the translation is the severity of loneliness when getting into trouble, being rich, with contextual condemnation of greed. Abai successfully translated and adapted such fables as "The Eagle and the Kite", "The Poor Rich Man", "The Crow and the Fox", "The Oak and the Cane", "The Donkey", "The Dragonfly and the Ant", "The Donkey and the Nightingale", "The Musicians", "The Frog and the Ox", "The Motley Sheep", and "The Elephant and the Pug".

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The conversations between the Reed and the Oak are an interesting part of the translation of the fable “The Oak and the Cane”. After all, it conveys the idea of juxtaposing pride and modesty, boasting and virtue. And in Abai’s work, this motive is often encountered. In Abai’s creative work, philosophical and enlightening ideas were expressed. The repeated appeals to Allah and condemnation of the Cane by calling it “poor” and “sinful” are introduced into the conversation by the Oak. In the end of the fable, Abai mentions God as the source of life and death. Then, the oak falls after a strong hurricane, and the Cane is saved by bending down to the ground. Most of the borrowed ideas in the Krylov’s fables by Abai are rooted in Greek or French epics and are Kazakh adaptations of folk motives. The fables “The Crow”, “The Donkey”, “The Dragonfly and the Ant”, and “The Fox” are specific examples in this case. In the fable “The Elephant and the Pug” Abai did not use a reference to journalistic relations of the late 18th–early 19th century. Instead, the theme of arrogance and empty talk was used. It should be noted that Abai’s adapted fables are aimed not at criticising the social conditions of their time but at general and important issues of the Kazakh people, as well as at the everyday and interpersonal problems. M. Auezov explains it this way: “Abai, who always tried to reveal the immoral actions of people, used fables for doing this” (Auezov 2004:84).

According to T. Rysaev (2010), Abai has adapted thirteen fables. However, the scholars such as M. Khasanov say that they are still more adaptations than a translation. Using the core of the content, Abai processed it in the manner and life of the Kazakh people, using a consonant translation and adding criticism of the Kazakh people through allegorical images. The characters of the heroes are revealed due to recognizable images, familiar to the Kazakh mentality. 13 fables were published in 1933 and 1957 under Auezov’s leadership. It was thanks to Abai that Krylov became known to the Kazakh people (Khasanov 2000).

Abai also castigated arrogant ignoramuses and braggart-overheads in his verses:

Russian version:

Не хвастайся, коль не учен,
Будь скромностью наделен,
Зачем походить на тех,

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Кого зовем; «Пустозвон»? (Kunanbaev 1945:53)

English version (authors' translation):

Do not brag, if you are not educated,
Be endowed with modesty
Why be like those
Whom are we calling; “Windbag”?

Kazakh literature, as well as Russian, has its own features of folklore connected with the fables of the animal epic. In Kazakhstan, similar analogues are known among parables about a marmot, a bear, a hedgehog, a fox, a magpie, a donkey, etc. Due to this pastoralist life in the past Kazakhs understood allegories in the form of animals and people. The preservation of the metaphorical meaning in these images goes back to the animal epic of Greece and France, where the wolf is a predator, the fox is a symbol of deception and cunning, the bear is a simpleton, and the magpie is a gossip (Volkov 2017; Revita et al. 2024). We can say that these analogies are observed among other nations. Through Krylov's fables Abai presents these analogies as realistic as possible within social motives, introducing the people to the realistic tradition of the Russian fable at the same time, so that they are easy to understand and assimilate by the Kazakh people.

Abai also translated the literary works of some other Russian authors. Abai frequently translated from Russian the works of Bunin. For example, he performed the translation of Bunin's poem “Do not frighten me with a thunderstorm.” The translation of Abai created a lyrical image of the poet who is seeking painfully a way out of the hostile situation that emerged around him. Bunin wrote:

Russian version:

Не пугай меня грозою:
Весел грохот внешних бурь!
После бури над землею
Светит радостней лазурь (Bunin 1956:46)

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Abai translated these lines from Russian as follows:

Қорқытпа мені дауылдан
Дүрілдеп тұрса тау мен сай,
Шатырлап тұрған жауыннан,
Жарқылдап тұрса түскен жай (Kunanbayevich 2005:26)

English version (authors' translation):

Do not frighten me with a thunderstorm:
Merry roar of spring storms!
After the storm over the earth
The azure shines more joyfully.

Abai also translated the works of Lermontov. Abai translated Lermontov's poem "The Demon". In "The Demon", Abai selected verses that depict the confession of the demon Tamara. Abai's demon does not deny earthly life, does not condemn the rebellious land and its attractions. This is the image of a rebel, a proud, strong man, who is looking for a truth. In this regard, the image is close to Abai himself, who experienced significant worries and anxieties during those years. The poet almost does not endure the blows of fate, doubts the correctness of life, shows interest in the demonic image with his romantic aspirations. Abai is worried about the Demon's tragedy.

Abai's translation is very close to the original. In Lermontov's poem:

Russian version:

Печальный Демон, дух изгнания,
Летал над грешною землей,
И лучших дней воспоминанья
Пред ним теснились толпой (Lermontov 1936:74)

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Translated by Abai:

Мұңды шайтан – құдайдың қуған жаны,
Күнәлі жер кез келіп бір ұшқаны.
Өткен жақсы дәурені ойында оның,
Сондағы не көргені, не қылғаны (Kunanbayevich 2005:82).

English version (authors' translation):

Sad Demon, spirit of exile,
I flew over the sinful land
And better days of remembrance
They were crowded in front of him.

Abai in his translations uses epithets that are very close to the epithets of Lermontov, which were not previously encountered in Kazakh poetry. In Lermontov's lines:

Russian version:

Печальный Демон, дух изгнанья.
Душа моя мрачна... (Lermontov 1936:74).

Translated by Abai:

Мұңлы шайтан – құдайдың қуған жаны.
Көңілім менің қараңғы... (Kunanbayevich 2005:82).

English version (authors' translation):

Sad Demon, spirit of exile.
My soul is gloomy ...

When considering the kinship of motives and views on life that can be traced in the works of Lermontov and Abai, it is important to note the visible similarity of the personalities of the two poets. The idea of a kinship or similarity between Mikhail Lermontov and Abai Kunanbayev, despite their different cultural backgrounds, has been explored by scholars such as E. Canetta (2015), and N. B. Caffee (2013). Both Lermontov and Abai were seen as having a rebellious spirit in their respective contexts. Lermontov, in Russian literature, was known for his defiance of social norms and his criticism of the Russian aristocracy (Volkov 2012). Abai, on the other hand, challenged traditional Kazakh customs and advocated for social and cultural change within the Kazakh society. Despite their cultural differences, Lermontov and Abai addressed universal themes in their poetry, such as love, the human condition, and the search for meaning in life. This universality in their themes allowed their works to resonate with audiences beyond their own cultural contexts. Both poets were intellectuals who engaged in intellectual exploration. Lermontov's poetry often delved into philosophical and existential themes, while Abai's works explored philosophical questions and the relationship between tradition and modernity. It's important to note that the comparison between Lermontov and Abai is not without its complexities, as they belonged to different cultural and historical contexts. However, scholars have recognized similarities in their literary and philosophical approaches, suggesting that certain themes and motifs transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with a broader human experience. This recognition of kinship between the two poets is often seen as a testament to the universality of literature and the power of poetry to transcend cultural and linguistic differences.

Lermontov's strong poetry touched Abai by close and dear motives. In his adaptations, Abai does not preserve the Russian names of the main characters but uses Kazakh local analogs. For example, instead of a godfather, a neighbour, a matchmaker, Abai uses the common nouns "*doszharyn*", "*aqaiynyn*". What's even more interesting is the adaptation of Zhuchka to the Kazakh idiom Moinaktan.

The translation of Krylov's fables by Abai is primarily associated with elements of creativity such landscapes, everyday life pictures and scenes. For example, in his adaptation of the fairy tale "The Fox and the Grapes", Abai added picturesque descriptions of the Kazakh steppe,

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where the fox tries to reach the grapes. He introduced elements of nomadic life, depicting the determination of the fox in the context of the boundless steppes of Kazakhstan. The fairy tale “Screaming Fox” in the Abai performance emphasizes the beauty of a Cossack village or a tent camp where a smart fox lives. The interactions between the characters are seen in the context of everyday life in the Kazakh community, adding cultural saturation to the story. During that time, fiction had a dominant position, and fables were establishing as a genre (Kim and Chung 2025). Abai adapted landscapes and genre scenes precisely to the fictional prose of that time. Abai used a rather agitated and poignant model of communication with the reader. The seven-syllable size in translations allows Abai’s texts to be light and sonorous. Due to the preservation of Krylov’s style Abai leaves reasoning at the beginning and at the end of every fable; communicating satire to the Kazakh reader more intelligibly, and more sharply by shifting Krylov’s fables. By incorporating elements of Kazakh landscapes, everyday life, and scenes into his translations of Krylov’s tales, Abai added cultural depth and made the stories more accessible and relatable to Kazakh readers. This creative approach allowed him to adapt foreign literary works to the Kazakh context, while conveying the moral lessons and universal themes of the original fairy tales.

In collaboration with Abai, the famous writer Ispandiar Kubeyev began to translate Krylov’s fables into the Kazakh language. Their joint effort resulted in the publication of these adaptations in 1902. To this day, more and more adaptations of Krylov’s fables by various poets have been published in Kazakh literature while maintaining the general moral. Alongside Krylov’s fables, the satire of Khoja Nasreddin and works from other literatures of eastern nations have also made a lasting impact on Kazakh literature, extending up to the present day. Abai’s translating-adaptations of Krylov’s fables were of great importance for the development of Kazakh folk literature, revealing new storylines and moral principles. At the same time, there are not many connections to European literature that could be traced. A prominent classic of Kazakh literature, Abai is close to his spiritual brothers in the West, whose heritage he chose as the best examples of the world’s treasures. So similar and close to each other are great heights.

6. Conclusion

Abai Kunanbayuly is a significant character in the cultural history of Kazakhstan, and symbolises the intricate interaction between Russian cultural impact and Kazakh autonomy. His literary and philosophical contributions not only mirror the prevailing spirit of his day but also serve as drivers for cultural progress and intellectual illumination. Abai's capacity to effectively connect Kazakh oral traditions with the written medium of literature has made a lasting impact on Kazakh culture.

An analysis of Abai's interaction with Russian culture underscores the complex dynamics of impact and indigenous autonomy. While certain academics credit his literary emergence to his exposure to Russia, others highlight his active role in adopting and adapting external influences to meet the cultural requirements of Kazakhstan. The aforementioned dual viewpoint emphasises the ever-changing character of cultural interchange and the influence of literary personalities in moulding the sense of national identity.

Abai's renditions of literary works into the Kazakh language serve as evidence of his dedication to the process of cultural modernisation. By adapting foreign literary works, he successfully introduced innovative concepts and genres into Kazakh culture, thereby fostering its development and adaptation. Specifically, his translations of Krylov's fables not only enhanced Kazakh literature but also facilitated cultural modernisation by rendering intricate moral teachings easily understandable to the Kazakh population.

The changing interpretations of Abai's legacy mirror the wider socio-political transformations in Kazakhstan. Throughout different historical epochs, from governance to Soviet assimilation and post-Soviet autonomy, Abai's contributions have been reevaluated and praised in various contexts. Initially subject to criticism during his lifetime, his work is now universally acknowledged for its notable importance in Kazakh literature and culture.

In summary, the life and work of Abai Kunanbayuly epitomise the complex dynamics of cultural interchange and the development of national identity. His position as a cultural

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intermediary between Kazakh and Russian customs offers a distinct viewpoint on the interaction between native self-governance and external influences. Further investigation could explore in greater depth the intricacies of Abai's interaction with Russian culture, the autonomy of populations in cultural interchange, and the influence of literary personalities in cultural modernisation and opposition. By combining historical context, literary analysis, and cultural studies, this research provides a nuanced understanding of Abai's significant role and lasting impact on Kazakh cultural history.

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