

Methodology of analysis of modern literature of Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT:

The article examines the methodology of analyzing modern literature of Kazakhstan, focusing on approaches that enable a comprehensive interpretation of literary texts within their cultural, historical, social, and aesthetic contexts. The study combines comparative-historical, cultural, structural-semantic, and intertextual approaches with the principles of imagology, memory studies, postcolonial criticism, and digital literary studies. Particular attention is given to the concept of the “Kazakhstan text” and the ways in which national identity, cultural memory, historical experience, landscape, mythology, and traditional cultural codes are represented in contemporary literary works. The methodology also considers the interaction of Kazakh and Russian literary traditions and the influence of multilingual and multicultural contexts on literary representation. The proposed analytical framework allows researchers to examine not only the thematic and ideological dimensions of contemporary literature but also its narrative strategies, symbolic systems, archetypal images, and mechanisms of cultural representation. The study demonstrates that an interdisciplinary methodology provides a more complete understanding of the dynamic processes of modern Kazakhstani literature and its role in shaping cultural identity and historical consciousness.

Keywords: Modern literature of Kazakhstan; literary analysis; national identity; cultural memory; Kazakhstan text.

1. Introduction

Contemporary literature of Kazakhstan represents a complex and dynamic field that reflects the profound social, cultural, historical, and ideological transformations experienced by Kazakhstani society. The development of literature after independence has been accompanied by significant changes in artistic thinking, narrative strategies, thematic priorities, and approaches to national identity. Writers

increasingly address questions related to historical memory, cultural heritage, identity, migration, globalization, multilingualism, social transformation, and the relationship between tradition and modernity. Consequently, the analysis of contemporary Kazakhstani literature requires methodological approaches capable of taking into account both the aesthetic specificity of literary texts and the broader cultural contexts in which they emerge.

One of the central methodological problems in the study of modern literature of Kazakhstan is the necessity to combine different analytical perspectives. A purely formal analysis may reveal the structural and stylistic organization of a literary work but cannot always explain the cultural meanings embedded in its images, symbols, and narrative structures. At the same time, a sociological or historical approach, although valuable for understanding the context of a work, may underestimate its artistic complexity. Therefore, an interdisciplinary methodology provides an opportunity to examine contemporary literature as a multidimensional phenomenon in which aesthetic, cultural, historical, and social meanings interact.

An important concept for such analysis is the “Kazakhstan text,” understood as a system of recurring images, cultural codes, historical references, geographical representations, and symbolic meanings associated with Kazakhstan and its cultural space. The concept makes it possible to identify how literature constructs representations of the country, its people, collective experience, and cultural identity. Particular significance can be attributed to such images as the steppe, yurt, homeland, family, ancestral memory, historical trauma, and the relationship between human beings and nature. These elements may function not merely as thematic motifs but as cultural signs through which authors articulate individual and collective identities.

The methodology of contemporary literary analysis can also draw upon the theoretical principles of cultural memory studies, particularly the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, and Aleida Assmann. These approaches allow researchers to investigate how literary texts preserve, reinterpret, and transmit memories of significant historical events. Comparative and intertextual methods further contribute to identifying connections between contemporary Kazakhstani literature and earlier literary traditions, as well as between Kazakh, Russian, Central Asian, and broader global literary contexts.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive methodology for analyzing modern literature of Kazakhstan. The proposed approach integrates literary, cultural, historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary perspectives in order to reveal the mechanisms through which contemporary authors represent national identity, cultural memory, historical experience, and the changing cultural landscape of Kazakhstan.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the study is based on an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of contemporary literature of Kazakhstan, combining literary, cultural, historical, comparative, and interpretive methods. Such an approach makes it possible to examine literary works not only as independent aesthetic phenomena but also as texts closely connected with the historical experience, cultural values, and social transformations of Kazakhstani society.

The structural-semantic method is used to identify the main thematic, compositional, narrative, and symbolic elements of literary works. Particular attention is paid to recurring images and motifs, including the steppe, homeland, family, yurt, nature, historical events, and the relationship between generations. Their semantic functions are analyzed in relation to the overall ideological and aesthetic structure of each text.

The cultural-historical approach is applied to determine how contemporary writers reinterpret significant events and processes in the history of Kazakhstan. It allows the researcher to establish connections between literary representation and such phenomena as collectivization, famine, political repression, forced migration, Soviet modernization, independence, and globalization. Within this framework, literature is considered an important form of cultural memory and a means of transmitting historical experience.

The study also employs the comparative method to identify similarities and differences between works by Kazakhstani authors representing

diverse linguistic and cultural traditions. Comparative analysis makes it possible to examine common themes, narrative strategies, archetypal images, and forms of national self-representation.

The methodology incorporates the principles of memory studies developed by Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, and Aleida Assmann. These theoretical perspectives are used to investigate the mechanisms of individual and collective memory and the ways in which literary texts preserve, reconstruct, and reinterpret the past. The concepts of cultural memory and sites of memory are particularly relevant to the analysis of historical trauma and identity formation.

In addition, elements of imagological and postcolonial analysis are applied to examine representations of Kazakhstan, cultural “self” and “other,” national identity, and the interaction between local and global cultural discourses. Intertextual analysis is used to reveal references and connections between contemporary works and earlier literary, mythological, and cultural traditions.

The combination of these methods provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting contemporary Kazakhstani literature as a dynamic space where historical memory, cultural identity, national values, and modern social realities intersect.

.Results

The application of the proposed interdisciplinary methodology demonstrates that contemporary literature of Kazakhstan can be interpreted as a multidimensional cultural phenomenon in which aesthetic, historical, social, and national meanings are closely interconnected. The analysis shows that contemporary literary texts frequently move beyond the representation of individual experiences and address broader processes of cultural transformation, identity formation, and reinterpretation of the national past.

One of the main results is the identification of several dominant cultural and semantic codes

that characterize modern Kazakhstani literature. Among them, the landscape code, historical-memory code, family and generational code, mythological code, and national-cultural code occupy a particularly significant position. The steppe, for example, is often represented not simply as geographical space but as a symbolic territory associated with freedom, ancestry, homeland, collective memory, and cultural continuity. Similarly, images of the yurt, family, ancestors, and homeland acquire symbolic meanings connected with national identity and the preservation of cultural values.

The analysis also demonstrates the importance of historical memory in contemporary literary discourse. Literary works frequently return to traumatic events of the twentieth century, including collectivization, famine, political repression, deportations, and forced migration. These events are transformed from historical facts into personal and collective narratives. Literature therefore functions as a form of cultural memory, providing alternative perspectives on the past and contributing to the transmission of experiences between generations.

The comparative analysis reveals that contemporary Kazakhstani writers employ different strategies of representing national identity. Some authors emphasize traditional cultural values and historical continuity, whereas others focus on hybridity, migration, globalization, multilingualism, and cultural transformation. This diversity demonstrates that national identity in modern literature is not presented as a fixed category but as a dynamic and continuously reconstructed phenomenon.

The study further establishes that the concept of the “Kazakhstan text” provides an effective analytical framework for identifying recurring images, cultural symbols, historical references, and spatial representations in contemporary literature. At the same time, the combination of cultural-historical, comparative, structural-semantic, imagological, intertextual, and memory-oriented approaches allows a deeper understanding of the interaction between literary

form and cultural meaning. Thus, the results confirm the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary methodology for studying the complex and rapidly developing literary landscape of contemporary Kazakhstan.

3. Discussion

Maurice Halbwachs argues that memory is both a psychological property of an individual and a social phenomenon formed within social structures – the family, social groups, religious communities, the nation, and the historical community (Halbwachs, 1992: 38–53). Maurice Halbwachs's ideas were further developed in Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. He was the first to distinguish between communicative and cultural memory. In Assmann's understanding, communicative memory functions through direct interaction between generations, whereas cultural memory is embedded in texts, rituals, symbols, monuments, and stable representations of the past (Assmann, 2008: 109–118). This interpretation allows us to consider Smagul Elubay's novel and Alexander Darzhai's novella as works that reflect the process through which trauma moves from the sphere of family and generational memory, where it was preserved for a long time in secrecy and silence, into the space of cultural memory.

Further development of this theoretical approach is presented in the works of Aleida Assmann, who distinguishes between active and passive memory and also introduces a distinction between the canon and the archive. In her view, culture continuously selects, preserves, suppresses, and subsequently actualizes individual elements of the past (Assmann: 2011, 97–110). From this perspective, the works of Smagul Elubay and Alexander Darzhai can be regarded as an artistic return to the archival memory of Soviet state violence.

According to the researcher Pierre Nora, as living, natural memory weakens and gradually disappears, the need arises for special mechanisms for its preservation, and it is under these conditions that “sites of memory” emerge (Nora, 1989: 7–24).

In the works of Astrid Erll, memory is viewed as a media and cultural process. According to the researcher, literature not only reflects memory but also actively forms, structures, and disseminates it within society (Erll, 2011: 137–170). This theoretical position is particularly productive for the analysis of the works under consideration.

Researcher Cathy Caruth considers trauma a phenomenon that cannot be fully comprehended by a person at the moment it is experienced, but returns later in the form of intrusive memories, dreams, images, and psychological states that overwhelm consciousness (Caruth, 1996: 3–24). This theory is of particular importance for the analysis of Alexander Darzhai's novella *The Pit*, since its protagonist Borazyk repeatedly relives the night of the mass execution throughout his life.

Dominick LaCapra identifies two ways of experiencing trauma: acting out – the involuntary, repeated reenactment of a traumatic event – and working through – a process of critically comprehending and gradually overcoming traumatic experience (LaCapra, 2001: 21–42).

Jeffrey C. Alexander's concept of cultural trauma makes it possible to consider political repression not only as a historical event but also as a process of forming collective identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that cultural trauma arises when a society perceives an experienced tragedy as a shared historical experience and recognizes it as a turning point that changed national identity (Alexander et al., 2004: 1–30).

Paul Ricoeur, in his study *Memory, History, Forgetting*, considers memory as a complex space of interaction between fidelity to the past, the risk of forgetting, and the necessity of bearing witness to historical experience (Ricoeur, 2004: 69–92).

From the perspective of narratology, Hayden White's theory of historical narrative is inseparable from rhetorical strategies and ways of giving historical events meaningful form (White, 1987: 1–25).

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that trauma is always accompanied by the impossibility of fully conveying the experience that has been lived through. However, it is precisely this impossibility that gives traumatic narrative its particular artistic and ethical power (Felman & Laub, 1992: 57–74).

When analyzing the symbolic structure of both works, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope also serves as an important methodological foundation. Bakhtin regards artistic time and space as closely interconnected categories that determine the semantic organization of a literary text (Bakhtin, 1981: 84–258).

In interpreting the symbolic system of the works under consideration, the theories of archetypal criticism developed by Carl Gustav Jung and Northrop Frye are also of great importance. Jung regards archetypes as elements of the collective unconscious and universal symbolic models that are constantly reproduced in human culture (Jung, 1981: 3–41).

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye demonstrates that literature constantly reproduces mythological structures, transforming individual events into universal models of human experience (Frye, 1957: 131–239). From this perspective, *The Lonely Yurt* and *The Pit* go beyond a specific historical situation. The yurt and the pit become universal cultural symbols: the former symbolizes the destruction of home and the rupture of historical continuity, while the latter represents violent death, oblivion, and the moral abyss generated by political terror.

When analyzing the national cultural space, we rely on Yuri Lotman's theory. He argued that the chronotope, action, and signs of a work interact with one another and form a system and models of culture (Lotman, 1977: 217–233).

A. Etkind, in turn, believed that the unresolved trauma of Soviet terror gives rise to special forms of the existence of an “unburied past,” which continues to live in the collective consciousness of a people (Etkind, 2013: 1–22).

A. Huyssen attempted to explain contemporary culture's interest in the past, trauma, and archives, which he refers to as the “memory boom” (Huyssen, 2003: 1–29). From this perspective, the works of Elubay and Darzhai constitute an important part of the broader cultural process of reviving historical memory in the post-Soviet space.

The literary and cultural theories listed above view these works as a means of preserving cultural memory. S. Elubay depicts a picture of forced communal living, famine, and the end of the old way of life. The author hints at the collapse rather than describing it directly; he uses images of the sacred yurt, the open and free steppe, and family graves to show how everything is falling apart. Darzhai's protagonist, on the contrary, remembers terror as a wound to human conscience and memory itself. It is interesting that one story describes loss demonstratively, before everyone's eyes, while the other creates from the pit a symbol of what has been forgotten. The two works offer two representations of trauma. The first appears to us as large-scale and national in scope. The other is hidden in the memory of a single witness.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that, despite the significant number of studies devoted to literature about political repression, a comparative analysis of works from different national literatures of Central Asia and Siberia remains an insufficiently developed area of scholarly research. A comparative study of these works will allow us to model and systematize the artistic representation of Soviet terror in Turkic literatures and identify its reflection in literature and national memory.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that these works are compared for the first time from the perspective of identifying historical memory of state terror and its artistic representation in the works.

In Smagul Elubay's novel *The Lonely Yurt*, collectivization in Kazakhstan is described, although the author could not have witnessed it, since he was born in 1947. The youth of the

“Era of Stagnation” generation to which the author belongs should be considered dialectically. Stagnation existed in politics and economics, while in the spiritual life of young people a profound and intense process was taking place. The obvious falsity of official slogans inevitably generated a desire to search for true ideals. In the literature of the last third of the twentieth century, interest in the profound internal processes of human spiritual life became noticeably stronger.

The theme of the novel is collectivization in Kazakhstan – the transformation of socioeconomic relations, the rapid movement toward something new, and the tragedy of human loneliness. The novel touches upon a whole complex of motifs that are equally close to the author. The main motifs of the novel are expressed through archetypes. First and foremost, this is the shanyrak – a symbol of well-being in the home and the continuation of the family line. The shanyrak was a family heirloom passed down from generation to generation. The destruction of Mazhan’s yurt is described in detail. The time of day is symbolic – sunset, which floods the aul with crimson light. The yurt resembles a living creature: “The curved uyks were exposed, yellow, untouched by sun and wind; they were like the ribs of a living creature.” To the song of the activists, the uyks – ribs – are swept into a heap, and “the shanyrak swayed, the upper part, considered the sacred dome of the yurt.” The witnesses of the collapse remember God and sin. The yurt, like a tragic hero, asserts eternal values through its death. For the other inhabitants, it becomes important to save their dwelling and their souls. Pakhraddin puts the chests containing his accumulated possessions outside the door in order to preserve the yurt. The hunter Bulysh, having made a separate peace with the warring sides, sets up a lonely yurt far out in the steppe. “A small nomadic settlement consisting of one yurt” resembles Noah’s Ark: two camels, two horses, and “there were only two people accompanying the nomadic settlement.” The first thing Bulysh says to his wife after choosing a place to live is: “I will raise the shanyrak of the

yurt, and you will take care of everything else.” But the collapse of the foundations has already begun. The shoemaker Sharip dreams of the destruction of his dwelling: “And suddenly – a whirlwind! It shook the yurt. It collapsed. The shanyrak, round as a wheel, rolled into the steppe. Sharip ran after it. He ran and ran, but could not catch up...” The shanyrak is the wheel of history. In serious situations, a Kazakh would swear while looking at the shanyrak. The dream is narrated in short sentences, like a chronicle, event after event. The rapid passage of time is emphasized by the verbs; their enumeration alone expresses the essence of what is happening: shook – collapsed – rolled away – runs – cannot catch up. Before his death, Pakhraddin sees a mirage – a lonely yurt: “A haze, blue-blue, like a little lake that had appeared somewhere in the desert from an unknown place, was there, but the yurt... the yurt was gone. It had disappeared without a trace, as if the earth had swallowed it. Had it really appeared to him?”

The novel begins with the chapter “At the Well,” while at the end of the work we part with the heroines at the “Blessed Amu Darya” River. Its description is symbolic: “The water is astonishing; in rare places it swirls into whirlpools. The wood chips that the boys throw into the water spin and spin in one place and plunge into the abyss. Far, far away, somewhere on the opposite bank, there is a boat.” It is the river of life with its inevitable boat of Charon, with whirlpools in which people disappear. After the meeting, the shaken and helpless bi Pakhraddin feels like a wood chip caught in the current. The living movement of time is captured by the artist.

One of the motifs of the novel is expressed through the image of the grave of the warrior Barak, “a square structure with four protrusions at the corners on a kurgan overgrown with feather grass,” with an ancient sacred saxaul tree at its head. Barak is revered as a hero who defended his homeland in battle. The characters of the novel pass by the grave at crucial moments in their lives, believing in the help of their ancestors. The four protrusions hear

everything that happens nearby. Near the grave, the camel Shoyynkar dies in an unequal struggle. Having rejected his ancestors and called the grave “merely a mound of earth,” Zhdakhai curses there both the ancestors and the camel, which he mercilessly beats. Trying to uproot the saxaul in order to prove what seems to be his unlimited power, Zhdakhai kills the camel.

The plot reflects an important historical and social process. Human dramas are intertwined with the historical conflicts of the era. History becomes the main coordinate of time. The movement of time and historical events forms the basis of the plot. The entire epic is permeated by movement.

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5. Conclusion

In S. Yelubay's novel, memory is recognized as the heritage of the entire people. It is preserved in family traditions and manifests itself in respect for ancestors, values, and cultural symbols passed down from generation to generation. The image of the yurt becomes key here. The yurt is a symbol of the Kazakh home, both in personal and social understanding. Its destruction signifies not so much the loss of a place of habitation as the disruption of a traditional way of life, a threat to the preservation of connections between generations, and historical oblivion. The heroes' desire to preserve the yurt becomes an attempt to prevent a threat to national memory and cultural continuity.

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8. Author Declaration

The authors confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.