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### Almat Izbambetov\*

1st year Doctoral Student, Musicology and Composition Department,  
Kazakh National University of Arts (Astana, Kazakhstan)

ORCID ID: 0009-0009-1802-2834  
email: i.almat.88@mail.ru

### Toizhan Yeginbayeva

PhD in Arts, Professor, Musicology and Composition Department,  
Kazakh National University of Arts (Astana, Kazakhstan)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6738-6137  
email: toizhan\_2710@mail.ru

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# Features of Intertextuality in the Vocal Part of Abai from the Opera by Akhmet Zhubanov and Latif Hamidi

\* Corresponding author  
email: i.almat.88@mail.ru



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**Keywords:** traditional culture, opera art, intertextuality, vocal part, Abai, cultural context, cultural heritage.

**Abstract.** The presented article is devoted to the analysis of the vocal part of Abai from the same-name opera by Latif Hamidi and Akhmet Zhubanov using the method of intertextuality. The study is conducted in the context of the rich traditional culture of Kazakhstan, including musical, literary and semantic aspects of the opera part. The authors of the article turn to modern theoretical concepts of intertextuality to analyze the connections between the musical elements of opera and various cultural texts. Special attention is paid to intertextual references in Abai's vocal part, which makes it possible to understand the deep context and semantic load of the musical utterances of the main character. The authors turn to numerous sources, including contemporary studies in the field of musicology, opera and culture, to present a deeper analysis of the "Abai" opera and its place in cultural context. The results of the study help not only to understand the complex structure and content of opera, but also to expand the awareness of how the intertextuality method can contribute to a deeper analysis of musical works.

The work is based on the theory of intertextuality and includes the analysis of musical, literary and cultural aspects of the opera. A comparison of Abai's vocal part with folk songs, poetic works and historical plots is carried out. Also, intertextual connections were revealed, as well as its correlation with the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan. The influence of the national musical heritage on the creation of the opera is discussed. The results of the analysis are presented, which make it possible to expand the understanding of the "Abai" opera in the context of the opera art of Kazakhstan.

The conclusions of the study emphasize the importance of using the intertextuality method for in-depth analysis of opera music. The article contributes to the development of the research direction and fosters to a deeper comprehension of the cultural significance of the "Abai" opera.

#### Contribution of the authors

*Almat Izbambetov* – significant contribution to the theoretical basis of the study, focused on intertextuality and its application in musical analysis, active participation in the comparative analysis and study of intertextual connections.

*Toizhan Yeginbayeva* – responsible for the initial conceptualization of the study, conductor of the initial data collection and contributor to the analysis of Abai's vocal part.

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### Алмат Каскырбаевич Избамбетов\*

Қазақ ұлттық өнер университетінің музыкатану және композиция кафедрасының  
1-ші курс докторанты (Астана, Қазақстан)

ORCID ID: 0009-0009-1802-2834

email: i.almat.88@mail.ru

### Тойжан Жылкайдаровна Егинбаева

Өнертану кандидаты, Қазақ ұлттық өнер университетінің музыкатану  
және композиция кафедрасының профессор (Астана, Қазақстан)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6738-6137

email: toizhan\_2710@mail.ru

Мақала

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# Ахмет Жұбанов пен Латиф Хамидидің «Абай» операсындағы Абай партиясының интермәтіндік ерекшеліктері

\* Жауапты автор

email: i.almat.88@mail.ru

**Тірек сөздер:** дәстүрлі мәдениет, опера өнері, интермәтіндік, вокалдық партия, Абай, мәдени контекст, мәдени мұра.

**Аңдатпа.** Ұсынылып отырған ғылыми мақала Латиф Хамиди мен Ахмет Жұбановтың «Абай» операсынан Абайдың вокалдық партиясын интермәтіндік әдісі арқылы талдауға арналған. Зерттеу жұмысы Қазақстанның бай дәстүрлі мәдениеті, оның ішінде опералық партияның музыкалық, әдеби және мағыналық аспектілері контекстінде жүргізіледі. Мақала авторлары операның музыкалық элементтері мен әртүрлі мәдени мәтіндер арасындағы байланыстарды талдау үшін интермәтіндіктің заманауи теориялық тұжырымдамаларына жүгінеді. Абайдың вокалдық партиясындағы мәтінаралық сілтемелерге ерекше көңіл бөлінеді, бұл басты кейіпкердің музыкалық тұжырымдарының терең контекстін және мағыналық маңызын түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Авторлар «Абай» операсын және оның мәдени контекстіндегі орнын тереңірек талдау үшін көптеген дереккөздерге, соның ішінде музыкатану, опера және мәдениеттанудағы заманауи зерттеулерге сүйенеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері операның күрделі құрылымы мен мазмұнын түсінуге ғана емес, сонымен қатар интермәтіндік әдістің музыкалық шығармаларды тереңірек талдауға қалай ықпал ететіні туралы түсінікті кеңейтуге көмектеседі.

Зерттеу жұмысы интермәтіндік теориясына негізделген және операның музыкалық, әдеби және мәдени аспектілерін талдауды қамтиды. Абайдың вокалдық партиясын халық әндермен, поэтикалық шығармалармен, тарихи тақырыптармен салыстыра талдау жүргізіледі. Абайдың вокалдық партиясында мәтінаралық байланыстар, сондай-ақ оның Қазақстанның мәдени мұрасымен байланысы анықталды. Операның жасалуына ұлттық музыкалық мұраның әсері сөз болады. Талдау нәтижелері Қазақстанның опера өнері контекстінде «Абай» операсы туралы түсініктерін кеңейту үшін ұсынылған.

Зерттеу нәтижелері опералық музыканы терең талдау үшін интермәтіндік әдісті қолданудың маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Мақала ғылыми саланың дамуына ықпал етіп, «Абай» операсының мәдени мәнін тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді.

#### Авторлардың үлесі

**А. К. Избамбетов** – зерттеудің интермәтініне және оның музыкалық талдауда қолданылуына назар аудара отырып, теориялық негізіне айтарлықтай үлес қосты, салыстырмалы талдауға және интермәтіндік байланыстарын зерттеуге белсенді қатысты.

**Т. Ж. Егинбаева** – зерттеудің бастапқы концепциясын құруға жауапты болды, алғашқы деректерді жинады және Абайдың вокалдық партиясын талдауға өз үлесін қосты.

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### Алмат Каскырбаевич Избамбетов\*

Докторант 1-го курса кафедры музыковедения и композиции  
Казахского национального университета искусств (Астана, Казахстан)

ORCID ID: 0009-0009-1802-2834

email: i.almat.88@mail.ru

### Тойжан Жылкайдаровна Егинбаева

Кандидат искусствоведения, профессор кафедры музыковедения и композиции  
Казахского национального университета искусств (Астана, Казахстан)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6738-6137

email: toizhan\_2710@mail.ru

Статья

# Особенности интертекста в партии Абая из одноименной оперы Ахмета Жубанова и Латыфа Хамиди

*Для цитирования:* Избамбетов, Алмат, и Тойжан Егинбаева. «Особенности интертекста в партии Абая из одноименной оперы Ахмета Жубанова и Латыфа Хамиди». Saryn, т. 12, № 2, 2024, с. 40–53.  
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\* Корреспондирующий автор  
email: i.almat.88@mail.ru

**Ключевые слова:** традиционная культура, оперное искусство, интертекстуальность, вокальная партия, Абай, культурный контекст, культурное наследие.

**Аннотация.** Представленная научная статья посвящена анализу вокальной партии Абая из одноименной оперы Ахмета Жубанова и Латыфа Хамиди с использованием метода интертекстуальности. Исследование проводится в контексте богатой традиционной культуры Казахстана, включая музыкальные, литературные и смысловые аспекты оперной партии. Авторы статьи обращаются к современным теоретическим концепциям интертекстуальности для анализа связей между музыкальными элементами оперы и различными культурными текстами. Особое внимание уделяется интертекстуальным отсылкам в вокальной партии Абая, что позволяет понять глубокий контекст и смысловую нагруженность музыкальных высказываний главного персонажа. Авторы используют многочисленные источники, включая современные исследования в области музыковедения, оперного искусства и культурологии, чтобы представить более глубокий анализ оперы «Абай» и ее места в культурном контексте. Результаты исследования помогают не только понять сложную структуру и содержание оперы, но и расширить представление о том, как метод интертекстуальности может способствовать более глубокому анализу музыкальных произведений.

Исследование базируется на теории интертекстуальности и включает анализ музыкальных, литературных и культурных аспектов оперы. Проводится сопоставительный анализ вокальной партии Абая с народными песнями, поэтическими произведениями и историческими сюжетами. Выявлены интертекстуальные связи в вокальной партии Абая, а также ее соотношение с культурным наследием Казахстана. Обсуждается влияние национального музыкального наследия на создание оперы. Представлены результаты анализа, позволяющие расширить понимание оперы «Абай» в контексте оперного искусства Казахстана.

Выводы исследования подчеркивают важность использования метода интертекстуальности для глубокого анализа оперной музыки. Статья вносит вклад в развитие научного направления и способствует более глубокому пониманию культурного значения оперы «Абай».

#### Вклад авторов

**А. К. Избамбетов** – формирование теоретической базы исследования, сравнительный анализ материалов, изучение интертекстуальных связей.

**Т. Ж. Егинбаева** – концептуализация исследования, первичный сбор данных, анализ вокальной партии Абая.

## Introduction

The concept of intertextuality has become firmly embedded in academic discourse, providing scholars with great scope for analysis and interpretation of various works of art. Intertextuality, based on the idea of interrelationship and mutual influence of texts, allows us to trace the complex ways of interaction between works of different eras, genres and cultural contexts. In the context of opera art, where music, word and stage performance are combined into a single artistic image, intertextual analysis opens up new perspectives for understanding the history of opera, its role in society, as well as for comprehension of the semantic depth of musical works.

**The relevance.** The study of the male parts in the "Abai" opera using the method of intertextual analysis is an urgent task for modern musicological science. The "Abai" opera by A. Zhubanov and L. Khamidi, dedicated to the life and work of the outstanding Kazakh poet, philosopher and musician Abai Kunanbayev, occupies a special place in the musical heritage of Kazakhstan. The composers managed to combine folklore, literature, as well as the musical component in one piece, presenting a work that was able to meet the requirements for operas both in Kazakhstan and on the world stage. The authors managed to put into the opera not only musical, but also cultural codes, as well as intertextual references that require careful review and interpretation.

**The purpose** is to identify intertextual connections and influences in the male parts of the "Abai" opera, as well as to analyze their role in shaping the image of the characters and the general aesthetic perception of the work.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are set:

1. to analyze the textual and musical features of male roles;
2. to identify intertextual allusions and quotations in the opera;
3. to investigate the influence of intertextuality on the perception and interpretation of the "Abai" opera.

This study is important for understanding not only a specific piece of music, but also broader aspects of opera, its role in shaping national identity and cultural heritage.

**The main subject** is the use of Abai Kunanbayev's song heritage in opera and the interaction of classical opera structure and traditional Kazakh musical culture.

## Materials and Methods

To carry out this work, a wide range of materials was used, including libretto, sheet music, previously conducted studies and academic work in the field of opera music as well as the method of intertextual analysis.

Intertextual analysis involves identifying connections between texts and the techniques used to create connections, known as figures of intertextuality. This class of techniques includes various types of quotation, textual application, textual allusion, as well as paraphrase of a text, quotation, or well-known expressions (Moskvin 116).

The scope of intertextual analysis. The question of the scope of intertextual analysis, and thus its subject matter, is complex. Mikhail Gasparov notes, that "intertextual analysis still remains more an art than a science. Partly because the fundamental question remains unresolved: where does intertextuality end and accidental coincidence begin" (3).

We will use the method of intertextual analysis only when dealing with specific correspondences, such as discussing the utilization of traditional motifs in arias, and the incorporation of works by A. Kunanbayev as a foundation.

The main sources of information for the analysis of the male roles in the "Abai" opera were musical materials, the libretto of the opera, as well as video and audio recordings of performances. In addition, the work used academic articles, monographs and books on opera, methods of intertextual analysis and the history of music.

According to Diana Rakisheva, Manifa Sarkulova and Nilfar Agzamova, "the distinctive positioning of opera at the intersection of musical and theatrical domains fundamentally shapes its morphological composition. Situated amidst the disciplines of theater studies and musicology, opera poses a classification challenge, as each field approaches its analysis from distinct vantage points. Within theater studies, opera is often relegated to a subset of theatrical productions, with a focus primarily on its performative and staging aspects, thereby sidelining considerations of musical dramaturgy. Conversely, within musicology, opera is predominantly studied within the context of musical art history, with a primary emphasis on the examination of musical scores, thereby overshadowing investigations into performance dynamics, the creative contributions of librettists, and other theatrical elements. Consequently, opera's evolutionary trajectory is frequently conceptualized as an autonomous progression of musical forms, which, despite their symbiotic relationship with stage action, are frequently appraised in isolation for their inherent artistic merits" (289).

All this allow to analyze opera as an intertextuality object. In this study, the method of intertextual analysis in opera is used as the main tool.

The term intertextuality was introduced in 1967 by a scholar Julia Kristeva, who based her theory on the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes. Intertextuality is a common property of texts or works of art, which is expressed in the presence of common features between two or more works (quotations, allusions, images). Thus, different works of literature and art refer to each other. In the context of opera, intertextuality is particularly relevant, since opera works are usually created on the basis of other ones, and also include references to folk melodies and other compositions.

The method of intertextual analysis entails studying a text (in this case, an opera work) while considering its connections and interrelationships with other texts, whether there are literary works, musical compositions, historical events, or cultural symbols. In opera, where music, words, stage performance and costumes are combined, intertextual connections can manifest themselves through musical motifs, quotations from other operas or musical works, literary images and symbols, as well as the visual design of the performance.

The method of intertextual analysis makes it possible to reveal the depth and versatility of an opera work, as well as to trace its cultural and aesthetic roots. In the context of the studying the Abai's role in the opera, this method allows not only to analyze the musical and textual aspects of the roles, but also to identify their connection with the cultural context, literary images and musical traditions.

Thomas Sebeok used intertextuality in a general sense to describe the degree to which a work of art "becomes distorted, opaque even, a darkly specular reflection



of actuality – as, for instance, a myth. It becomes a lattice of signposts, regressing into, effectively, infinity, and thus capable of sustaining many alternative interpretations. Yet it may become a dialectical (versus insequential) tool for furthering the study of typological goals far more tellingly than the more indeterminate conception of ‘influence’, and, as such, may assume various shapes, including, notably, allegorical” (658).

According to Dinda Gorlée, “when we apply it to opera, the fusion of external influences (from outside the opera) and the intricate web of references within the opera itself creates a dynamic entity that lacks a definitive conclusion. This gap in meaning and cultural context between the original text’s time and space is evident in the allegorical progression of contemporary opera as an open artwork” (593).

To apply the method of intertextual analysis in the study of Abai’s vocal part, an integrated approach is used, including the analysis of musical and textual materials, contextualization of the opera work in a cultural and historical perspective.

## Results and Discussion

For several years, starting with the creation of the first Kazakh opera, the national opera art of Kazakhstan has passed through the main stages of evolution that were characteristic of the world opera art. Starting with the quoted dialogized model, it gradually moved on to performances with a numbered structure, and ended this development path with the creation of operas with end-to-end dramaturgy. After decades of searching, the work “Abai” was presented, which marked a number of innovations related to the development of the national intonation system and stylistic diversity, enriched with quotation material. The inclusion of this material was due to specific plot points. In this opera, there is an application of more complex musical forms, the principles of end-to-end drama, as well as a desire for subtle psychological feature of the characters.

The “Abai” opera has been an integral part of the repertoire of the leading opera houses of Kazakhstan for more than 60 years. Such durability is explained by the high artistic merits of musical and scenic drama. Eternal themes are relevant in this work – the struggle of good and evil, old and new, as well as the theme of love and fidelity. Also, an excellently structured plot, rich event content and pronounced national specificity, manifested both in music and in the characterization of the characters’ images should be noted.

This lyric-dramatic opera differs from other works of the same genre in its focus on the dramatic context. Although the entire score of the opera is imbued with deep lyricism, its dynamism and intensity are closer to dramatic works.

As Dina Beisaliyeva wrote in her article “Some Dramatic Principles of the ‘Abai’ Opera by A. Zhubanov and L. Hamidi”, is a classic example of a synthetic musical and dramatic composition combining the patterns of numbered and end-to-end types of development. An integral system in it consists, on the one hand, of the dramaturgy of “emotional states”, manifested through relatively isolated musical numbers with a characteristic concentration of image development, and on the other hand, the dramaturgy of conflict collisions, in which the main compositional unit becomes an expanded, dynamically developing scene” (Beisaliyeva 146–147).

Intertextuality is a powerful tool that allows composers and librettists to create rich and multifaceted works full of references to other artistic texts and cultural contexts. In the "Abai" opera one can observe the significant influence of intertextuality on the formation of musical images and storylines.

Intertextual elements in the "Abai" opera may include quoting musical themes from other operas, using literary images and motifs, as well as references to historical events and cultural symbols. For example, in the musical motifs of the main character of the opera, one can find references to the national musical tradition of Kazakhstan, as well as quotations from folklore works.

It is important to note that intertextual elements in the "Abai" opera play an important role, determining the characters' features and the development of the plot. They help to create a deeper and multidimensional musical world.

There are a large number of intertextual references in the opera, however, this article will only talk about intertextuality in male roles using the example of Abai's vocal part.

The "Abai" opera was conceived as a deep reflection of the musical heritage of the great *akyn*. The composers perfectly inscribed a number of Abai's songs, using them as quotations, which gave the work special depth and significance. One of the key arias, in which the use of the song "Kozimnin Karasy" (*The Light of My Eyes*) as a basis is clearly traced, is the first act aria of Abai. The uniqueness of this aria lies in the fact that it is based on a version of the song not widely used in performing practice.

Another famous song of Abai, "Aittym Salem, Kalamkas" (*Said Hello to You, Kalamkas*), sounds in Aidar's aria in the fourth act of the opera, which perfectly conveys the emotional state of the hero and his love and admiration for Azhar. However, the use of Abai's songs is not limited to solo numbers. In the chorus of the fourth act, "Karangy tunde tau kalgyp" (*A Mountain Slumbers in the Night*), become the basis for a philosophical epilogue, which gives additional depth and semantic saturation.

In the academic literature, attention is focused on the use of the song "Men kordim uzyn kaiyn kulaganyn" (*I've Seen a Big Birch Fallen*) in Abai's aria "Kai talky kur aldyna kurylmagan" (*Just what a Conversation a Slave Can Be Engaged into*) from the first act (Ketegenova, Omarova "Akhmet Zhubanov"; Omarova, "Latif Hamidi"). However, the analysis shows that although the aria has a common intonation structure with the vocal lyrics of Abai himself (using the example of songs from Boris Yezakovich's collection), it does not reproduce the integral song structure of the original source (Yezakovich, "Some Comments on the 'Memoirs'"). Nevertheless, these quotations embody an objectification form of melodic sources, which indicates that this opera is intertextual both from the point of view of the libretto and from the point of view of the melodic structure.

The "Abai" opera was conceived by L. Hamidi and A. Zhubanov with special attention to intonation unity, which was based on the characteristic melodic turns inherent in Abai's song style. The collaboration of the composers resulted in the creation of arias with a unique melodic content in harmony with the Kazakh musical heritage. The composers highlight the characteristic intonations from Abai's work, integrating them into their own melodic narrative.

To verify the melodic unity, an analysis of the opera's melodic material was conducted. As a result, intonation correspondences were identified, which align with the typical rhythmic patterns found in Abai's work. The prevalence of the size 6/8 in the opera (a monologue and two arias from the first act, as well as one aria from the fourth) and the reflection of the three-syllabic structure in the temporal unfolding reflect one of the main elements of the musical and poetic form of Kazakh poetry.

In various fragments of the opera, similarities are found with characteristic melodic formulas. These include a gradual ascending and descending movement spanning a third, leaps by a sixth, and a dotted rhythm in three-dimensional size. These melodic formulas are also present in Abai's songs.

Ex. 1: "Kozimnin karasy" (*The Light of My Eyes*)



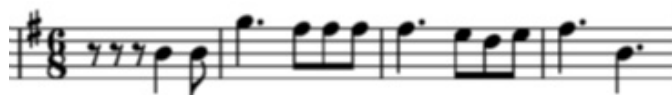
In the aria "Kai talky kur aldyna kurylmagan" (*Just what a Conversation a Slave Can Be Engaged into*) from the first act of the "Abai" opera, attention is attracted by the intonation base, which combines several songs, the themes of which are compassion and mercy. Abai, while expressing his emotional state, transmits to listeners a general sensual uplift and fortitude. The aria is dominated by affirmative intonations, that give it a meaningful depth thanks to its connections with Abai's songs. There is a similarity with the song "Men kordim uzyn kaiyn kulaganyn" (*I've Seen a Big Birch Fallen*), but the structure of the song itself is not reproduced. This is a classic example of a three-part aria with a developing middle in the minor key of the same name. In the main part, unlike the equally complex repeated four phrases of the song, the melody develops from repetitive phrases to variant ones. The climax is on the upper stable sound, which gives the aria an individual originality, a life-affirming character.

At the melodic level, there are noticeable parallels with akyn's songwriting, particularly in the ascending leap to a sixth interval, accompanied by a dotted iambic rhythm. This melodic pattern is prominent in Abai's rich musical legacy. The melody of the aria forms parallels with songs of a mournfully solemn or exalted nature, such as "Men kordim uzyn kayin kulaganyn" (*I've Seen a Big Birch Fallen*), "Aittym salem, Kalamkas" (*Said Hello to You, Kalamkas*), "Bireuden bireu artylsa" (*If Someone is Better than Someone*).

Ex. 2: "Kai talky kur aldyna kurylmagan" (*Just what a Conversation a Slave Can Be Engaged into*)



Ex. 3: "Men kordim uzyn kayin kulaganyn" (*I've Seen a Big Birch Fallen*)



Ex. 4: "Bireuden bireu artylsa" (*If Someone is Better than Someone*)



Ex. 5: "Aittym Salem, Kalamkas" (*Said Hello to You, Kalamkas*)



In this aria, we see how the composer uses intertextual elements related to Abai's musical legacy to expand the semantic context and emotional content of the work.

**Quoting musical motifs:**

In the aria, elements reminiscent of Abai's songs are noticeable, such as the initial ascending leap to a sixth interval, accompanied by a dotted iambic rhythm. This motif is one of the main ones in Abai's song heritage and gives the aria a special intonation.

**Semantic associations:**

The melody forms parallels with Abai's songs, which have a mournfully solemn or sublime character. These semantic associations help to create emotional depth and expressiveness in the performance of the main character, enhancing the effect of musical expression.

**Intertextual references:**

The aria contains references to the themes of compassion and mercy, which are important motifs in Abai's song heritage. These themes are rooted in the culture and history of the people, which makes intertextual connections deeper and more meaningful.

Thus, through the use of intertextuality in this fragment of the "Abai" opera, the composer achieves not only musical beauty, but also deepens the semantic context of the work, enriching it with cultural and historical associations.

Another noteworthy aria by Abai is the final aria from the fourth act's finale. Abai here appears as a folk *akyn*. A special dramatic impact is reflected in the melody of the aria, of the aria's melody, particularly its tense opening with high-pitched notes. This resemblance to the emotional introductions by *akyns*, characterized by energetic exclamations, indeed captures the listeners' attention.

This aria of Abai is distinguished by originality and uniqueness, having no direct intonation links with the songs of Abai himself. The composers managed to rethink the song motifs as much as possible and create an aria summarizing the features of Abai's melodic style. The intonations of the extreme parts of the aria are based on a constant alternation of ascending and descending movements, reminiscent of the song "Kor boldy zhanym" (*My Soul is Humiliated*), and its middle is structurally close to the song "Segiz ayak" (*Six Legs*).

As Saule Musakhodzhayeva notes, "The innovation of Zhubanov and Khamidi lies in the fact that they, by breaking the characteristic turns of Abai's songs in the original

melody, created a classic sample of the aria. It is significant in scale and in the completeness of the feelings conveyed. The image of Abai here is so dramatically convincing that his oratorical pathos and inner energy affect the audience, creating a sublime impression of the entire opera" (77).

Let's take a closer look at this aria using the method of intertextual analysis.

#### ***The symbolism of the national akyn:***

In this aria, the image of Abai symbolizes the national akyn, a poet and performer who draws inspiration from the cultural and historical legacy of his country. Therefore, the use of the aria as a symbolic appeal to the people creates an intertextual connection with the tradition of the akyns and their role in Kazakh culture.

#### ***Rethinking song motifs:***

The opera's composers have successfully reinterpreted the motifs of Abai's song, integrating them into the aria and giving them a new sound and meaning. While there are no direct quotes from Abai's songs in the aria, its melodic and rhythmic elements evoke intertextual references to the hero's musical heritage.

#### ***Structural analogies with Abai's songs:***

In the aria, one can distinguish structural analogies with Abai's songs, such as the constant alternation of ascending and descending movements, which gives a special musical intonation characteristic of his songs. These structural analogies are rooted in tradition and help to preserve the authenticity and cultural value of the opera.

Thereby, the intertextuality of this aria in the "Abai" opera is manifested through the symbolism of the folk akyn, the reinterpretation of song motifs and structural analogies with the songs of Abai himself. These elements not only enrich the musical content of the opera, but also deepen its connection with the cultural legacy of Kazakhstan.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study should emphasize the importance of the "Abai" opera in the context of the Kazakhstan's opera art and its deep connection with the cultural heritage of the people. The analysis of the opera using the method of intertextual analysis allowed to reveal its musical, literary and cultural layers, as well as to identify its role in the preservation and transmission of cultural values and traditions of the Kazakh people.

The "Abai" opera is an important object of study in the context of Kazakh musical culture. The use of an intertextual approach allowed us to see how A. Zhubanov and L. Khamidi skillfully incorporated elements of cultural heritage into the music of the work. That created a deep and multifaceted connection between opera and folk culture, allowing it to become not only a work of art, but also a mirror of Kazakhstan's history, traditions and values.

The analysis of the intertextuality in Abai's arias also allowed us to assess the level of organicity and synthesis of musical and textual elements. In the final aria, which is a powerful chord, we see the highest manifestation of this intertextual organicity, where the image of Abai symbolizes the national akyn, a contemporary that faces the audience. This is an example of a successful rethinking of Abai's song motifs

and their integration into a new musical context, while preserving cultural and semantic value.

In this regard, the study of the Abai's vocal part, using the method of intertextual analysis, made it possible to better understand its significance for the culture and art of Kazakhstan.

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