



Roza Khassenova* and Manifa Sarkulova

Abai's poetry in Eco's semiotic light

<https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2024-2016>

Abstract: The article explores the poetry of Abai Qunanbaiuly, a renowned philosopher and a founder of modern Kazakh literature, through the semiotic perspective of Umberto Eco. The study is a part of a broader research project in cultural studies titled “Semiotic Interpretation of Culture by Umberto Eco.” Specifically, the poem under analysis is “Allanyn özi de ras, sözi de ras” (“Allah is truth, His word is truth”), written in 1902. While Abai's works initially garnered great enthusiasm, they now provoke heated discussions within Kazakh society. By applying a semiotic approach, this study offers a fresh perspective on Abai's poetry, enabling new insights and interpretations.

Keywords: cultural studies; modern Kazakh literature; renowned philosopher

1 Introduction

The year 2020 was dedicated to celebrating the legacy of Abai,¹ the poet, philosopher, and cultural reformer in Kazakhstan. The recognition of his contributions to literature and his influence as an educator is commendable.

The translation of Abai's works into multiple languages has allowed people from various cultures to appreciate his literary achievements. Ainur Mashakova's comprehensive analysis of foreign translations of Kazakh literature highlights that the 1950s marked a significant milestone in introducing Abay's poetic works to international audiences. In her overview, Mashakova (2023) points out that, Mongolian publications played a pivotal role in this endeavor, as they began featuring a selection of his poems from 1951 to 1955. Mashakova also notes the crucial role played by Professor Ha Huanjian in translating Abay's works into Chinese. In 1950, he translated the poem “Iskander,” which was later published in the journal “*Literary*

1 The poet is frequently referred to simply as Abai (or Abay), and his surname is variously rendered as Qunanbaiuly, Kunanbaiuly, Qunanbayev, and Kunanbayev, among other variants, in works by or about him.

*Corresponding author: Roza Khassenova, Astana International University, Astana, Kazakhstan, E-mail: roza.tolengut.kz@mail.ru

Manifa Sarkulova, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, E-mail: manifa.s@mail.ru

Translations.” In 1994, Ha’s translation of “*The complete collection of Abay’s works*” was published by the National Publishing House in Beijing. In 1969, Abai’s poems were translated by Czech linguist and Turkologist Ludek Grzhebichek, and published in the Prague magazine “*New Orient*” (Mashakova 2023: 278–279).

The organization of conferences worldwide and the establishment of “Abai” centers demonstrate a global interest in the ideas and philosophy of the poet. The erection of monuments to Abai in different countries, including Turkey, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Egypt, signifies the international recognition of his importance. The placing of a bust of Abai (Telekanal 24kz 2020), a work by the prominent Kazakh sculptor Talgat Anarbekov, at the entrance to the Palais des Nations, the European Office and diplomatic conference center of the United Nations in Geneva, is a significant honor. It reflects the profound impact of Abai’s work beyond literature, acknowledging his message of enlightenment and the promotion of peace. Overall, these initiatives and acknowledgments contribute to the preservation and promotion of Abai’s legacy, allowing his ideas and teachings to reach a wider audience globally. The sharing of his philosophy and values provides a greater opportunity for cultural exchange and understanding among different nations and cultures.

When we examine Abai’s contributions within the framework of global intellectual movements, we must place his thought within a line of influence that stretches from the era of Socrates (around 470–399 BCE) up to the present (*Qara Söz* 27;² Abai 2016: 48). Regarding the expansive nature of his ideas, he not only incorporated European philosophies but also remained deeply rooted in Islamic and, more specifically, Kazakh cultural traditions (Schamiloglu 2021: 59).

Abai (Ibrahim) Qunanbaiuly was born on August 10, 1845, in Syrt Kaskabulak, located in the Semei region of Kazakhstan. “Abai” means ‘cautious’ in Kazakh, reflecting his thoughtful and reflective nature. His second name, Ibrahim, was given to him at birth, drawing inspiration from the 14th Ayah (verse) of the Quran. This verse refers to Ibrahim (Abraham), who was sent a holy book to guide his people from darkness to light. The choice of the name Ibrahim reflects the high regard and aspirations associated with Abai’s life and work. Abai’s upbringing was shaped by the influence of his father, Kunanbai, who held significant authority as both a volost and a senior sultan. Abai portrayed his father with great admiration in his poem *Abdrahman olgende* (On the death of Abdrahman): “No one among the Kazakhs was born with his character”³ (Qunanbayev 1957: 179, our translation). The influence of

² *Qara Söz* (known as *Words of edification* or *Book of wisdom*) is a collection of Abai philosophical and poetic writings. It is considered one of his most significant works and contains his reflections on various topics such as morality, spirituality, education, and the role of the individual in society. *Qara Söz* serves as a valuable source for understanding Abai’s philosophical and intellectual contributions. We refer to the individual works mentioned therein by their numbering in the collection.

³ “Ol sypatty kazaqtan/Duniege eshkim kelmepti.”

Abai's mother, Uljan, on his intellectual and poetic development cannot be overlooked either. As a woman with intelligence and mastery of words, she likely provided a nurturing environment for Abai's creative and intellectual growth.

Abai's literary contributions were significant in shaping Kazakh literature and language. He wrote poetry, prose, and critical essays that explored a wide range of themes, including love, nature, social issues, and spirituality. His works often highlighted the importance of education, enlightenment, and cultural progress. In 1914, ten years after Abai's death, the Kazakh poet Dulatov (2020: 1) wrote: "no doubt, the more we are further from the day of Abai's death, the more we will come closer to his soul." He expressed the belief that people would continue to draw closer to the essence of Abai's thoughts and values. This sentiment reflects the enduring relevance and influence of Abai's work, which continues to inspire and resonate with people in Kazakhstan and beyond.

Therefore, the article by Batayeva (2020) titled "Zagadka Abaya: Velichaishi neizvestni poet Kazakhstana" ("The puzzle of Abai: the greatest unknown poet of Kazakhstan") sparked a heated discussion in Kazakh society. The article presents a critical perspective on Abai's legacy and portrays him as a product of Soviet ideology. Batayeva blames one of Abai's first biographers, Alikhan Bokeikhan,⁴ for perpetuating Abai's ideas (Bokeikhan 1995: 307). The words *velichaishi* and *neizvestni* in the title of the article "Zagadka Abaya: Velichaishi neizvestni poet Kazakhstana," which translates as "Greatest-unknown," highlight the contradiction surrounding Abai's reputation. While he is widely recognized as the leading Kazakh poet (Baitursinuly 2013: 141)⁵ and referred to as a "Hakim" (a knowledgeable scientist serving people) (Jumabayev 1995: 40),⁶ there are criticisms emerging that question his greatness and bring attention to his relative obscurity.

It's important to note that the viewpoints presented in the article are part of an ongoing discourse and do not represent a consensus among scholars and the general public. Abai remains a highly respected figure in Kazakh literature and culture, and his works continue to be celebrated for their artistic and intellectual value. The criticism outlined in the article reflects a specific interpretation and perspective on Abai's writings and their societal impact.

The present research focuses on the poetry of Abai, employing semiotics inspired by Umberto Eco. This aims to provide methods and approaches to uncover the meaning of texts and elucidate the emergence of various interpretations. A key

4 Alikhan Bokeikhan (1866–1937): a prominent political and public figure, founder and leader of the national democratic party "Alash", head of the Alash-Orda National-territorial autonomy.

5 Akhmet Baitursynuly (1872–1937): Kazakh educator, Turkic scholar, linguist and politician, one of the leaders of the national liberation movement Alash.

6 Magjan Jumabayev (1893–1938): outstanding Kazakh poet, one of the leaders of the Alash movement.

aspect of Eco's work is the notion of intentionality within the text. The interpretation is not confined solely to the author's intention nor entirely open to individual interpretation. The specific poem under investigation is "Allayn özi de ras, sözi de ras" ("Allah is truth, His word is truth"), a well-known work, written in 1902 (Qunanbayev 1957: 244). We have provided an English translation of the poem for analysis.

Eco posits that texts are not created solely for the purpose of being believed, but rather to be examined and investigated. The key is not to focus on what is explicitly stated in the text, but rather to inquire into what the text itself strives to convey. He suggests that it can be challenging to determine whether these texts possess hidden meanings, multiple meanings, or no meaning at all. The very fact that we struggle to discern these meanings may indicate a vast darkness looming over us, casting its shadow on the familiar world (1981: 244).

Abai's poetry is rich in metaphors, and Umberto Eco, in his works, recognizes metaphors as a significant aspect of semiosis and a tool for constructing knowledge (Eco 2007; 2014 [1984]; 2016 [1968]). According to Eco, the purpose of a metaphor is to render things visible, to teach us to perceive and recognize the similarities between different objects. Language itself is inherently metaphoric, and it is through the mechanism of metaphor that every linguistic activity is activated, ultimately defining humans as symbolic beings (Eco 2014 [1984]).

In the present study, we propose that Umberto Eco's critical-theoretical model, which emphasizes the process of interpretation as a negotiation between the text's intention and the intention of the model reader, can contribute to understanding the role of the reader as an interpretive agent. While Eco emphasizes the importance of critical acceptance of facts, he argues that complete freedom in interpretation is not possible. Literary works can be approached from various perspectives, and each generation may interpret them differently. However, there should still be a level of respect for the intention of the text. We suggest that literary texts not only provide factual information but should also be regarded with a certain level of unquestionability (Eco 2003: 8).

Additionally, according to Eco, the textual strategy of a literary work functions like an instruction that generates a hypothetical reader. This hypothetical reader's profile is shaped by the text itself and can be deduced from it, independent of any actual empirical reader. In other words, the text constructs a model reader within its own structure, which can be described and analyzed even before considering the real readers (Eco 1994: 52).

Semiotics provides a valuable framework for analyzing Abai's poetry, as it delves into the study of signs, symbols, and their interpretations. Abai's poems are replete with signs and symbols that carry meaning and evoke multiple interpretations. By examining the poetic language and imagery used by Abai, one can explore the

signifying qualities inherent in his work and examine how they influence the reader's understanding and engagement with the poetry. The semiotic perspective offers a powerful lens through which to unravel the layers of meaning within Abai's poetic compositions.

In general, the semiotic perspective on culture is gaining popularity in Kazakhstan due to the growing interest in cultural heritage and the need to define a national identity. Shakhanova's research (1998) delves into the symbolic significance of such elements of the Kazakh culture as the yurt, food, and clothing. The works of Ibrayev (1980) and Karakozova and Hassanov (2011) explore the semantic content and protective functions of the Kazakh national costume and its close connection with the cosmogonic concept of the world. Aljanova's studies (2016) provide comprehensive insights into the semiotic and symbolic aspects of Kazakhstan's ancient traditional culture, shedding light on the nomadic lifestyle. Although the Eurasian Society of Semiotics was established in Kazakhstan several years ago, there is still much work to be done in expanding the field of sign theories (Tarasti 2009).

2 Umberto Eco's interpretative semiotics

Umberto Eco's interpretative semiotics has had a significant influence and has been widely studied and explored from various perspectives. It has become a subject of interest in philosophy, with studies by authors such as Farronato (2003), Mancino (2017), and Volli (2021). Semiotics itself has been a lens through which scholars like Caesar (1999), Lorusso (2015), Farronato (2009), Danesi (2015), Bianchi and Ghieri (2009), Brazgovskaya (2019), and Hoxha (2022) have examined and discussed Eco's theories.

Other studies have focused on the concept of signification, with works by Usmanova (2000) and Leone (2020). The poetics of openness has also been explored in relation to Eco's ideas, as seen in studies by Corry and Giovanolli (1992) and Campbell (2018). Furthermore, Eco's popularization of semiotic theories in his novels has been a topic of investigation in works by Sallis (1986), Hale (2011), and Schilling (2015).

Overall, Eco's interpretative semiotics has sparked significant scholarly discourse and continues to be a point of reference for numerous studies across various disciplines. Indeed, the mentioned works represent only a fraction of the extensive literature that has been written on Umberto Eco's theories and novels. Eco is considered a prominent figure in the "second generation of semiotics" (Mastroyani 2014) alongside scholars like Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Yuri Lotman. Together, they have made significant contributions to the development and elaboration of operational semiotic theories.

Eco's novels showcase various processes of decoding, the exploration of the "universe of semiosis" intricate semiotic structures, the concept of labyrinths, the idea of unlimited semiosis, and the role of the model reader. These elements are interwoven throughout Eco's literary works, highlighting his deep engagement with semiotic theory and its application to narrative storytelling.

Umberto Eco views semiotics as the science of sign systems, encompassing the study of various cultural phenomena as if they were sign systems. Eco's approach assumes that all cultural manifestations are essentially sign systems, and culture itself is a form of communication (2016 [1968]: 191). This perspective allows Eco to analyze and interpret cultural artifacts, practices, and expressions through the lens of semiotics.

By treating culture as a system of signs, Eco encourages readers to recognize the interconnections and symbolic nature of human communication and cultural expression. Through his works, he showcases how semiotics can be applied to unravel the profound significance and communicative power inherent in cultural phenomena. Eco's novels serve as compelling examples of how semiotics can enhance our understanding and interpretation of the world around us.

Eco's semiotic theory is intricate and incorporates the history of semiotics, semantics, pragmatics, and the interaction between the author and the reader through the text and concepts of the labyrinth and encyclopedia, which he explores in such works as *Opera aperta* (2000 [1962]), *La struttura assente* (2016 [1968]), *A theory of semiotics* (1976), *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi* (2018 [1994]), *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (2016 [1990]), *Interpretazione e sovrainterpretazione* (2002 [1995]). However, Eco's main focus lies in the dynamics of culture. He suggests that cultural phenomena, with their objects, behaviors, and values, can be better understood and studied from a semiotic perspective. Eco argues that culture, in all its complexity, adheres to semiotic laws and can be effectively analyzed through the lens of semiotics (2016 [1968]: 58). By applying semiotic principles to the study of culture, Eco seeks to unravel the intricate web of meaning and communication that underlies human cultural dynamics.

Regarding the key aspects of Umberto Eco's perspective on the production and reception of signs within cultural contexts, he emphasizes that understanding a message goes beyond merely interpreting its formal structure. It involves comprehending the choices made by both the author/artist and the receiver/recipient during the coding and decoding processes. He posits that human beings are shaped by culture, and their language and processes of constructing meaning are intricately linked to cultural constructions. In this sense, culture acts as an encyclopedia, encompassing a vast repository of shared knowledge, symbols, and codes that influence communication.

According to Eco, our perception of the world is heavily influenced by the cultural codes that govern communication. Semiology, as a general theory of communication, builds upon these conventional codes. These codes are deeply ingrained in memory and traditions, often accepted as natural and taken for granted. However, they can vary between individuals or change over time due to shifts in sociocultural circumstances. In some cases, these codes may even be forgotten and require restoration without altering their underlying ideology (Eco 2016 [1968]: 81).

Eco's insights highlight the crucial role of culture and its encoded systems of meaning in shaping our understanding and interpretation of the world. By delving into the dynamics of cultural codes and their impact on communication, Eco contributes to our understanding of how symbols, conventions, and shared knowledge influence the production and reception of signs within diverse cultural contexts.

The use of codes in communication can sometimes present challenges, as not all codes are familiar to us. Finding the most appropriate code for effective communication depends on understanding the logic of the signified, which is the result of the decoding process and the sense-making mechanism. Eco emphasizes (2016 [1968]: 266) that the fundamental codes are received at the moment we receive a message. The semiotic approach focuses on the meaning prescribed by a particular context, rather than describing signs solely based on the behavioral reactions they may stimulate or the real objects they refer to. The codified meaning within a given context is the essential aspect considered when characterizing a sign.

The intellectual biography of an author, including their education and philosophical influences, also plays a significant role in the use of codes to convey content. Cultural codes and signs should be understood in the context of the epoch when the text was produced. By examining signs and understanding the worldview of the author, we can uncover the key characteristics of a sign, which Peirce defines as something that allows us to know something more (1931: 58).

Emphasis on interpretability as a crucial aspect of signs aligns with Peirce's idea that signs provide us with additional knowledge. This notion underscores the importance of semiotics in unraveling the layers of meaning embedded within signs and understanding their significance in communication and interpretation.

Eco's exploration of the notions of openness and limits of interpretation is indeed significant. While a text may be open to multiple interpretations, these interpretations are still constrained by the semiotic strategies embedded within the text's intention. Eco's model reader is a textual strategy that requires a reader who possesses various codes to navigate the text as a labyrinth with multiple possible routes. However, the reader can only interpret the text within the boundaries set by the text itself. This concept emphasizes the idea of "conscious liberty" (Eco 2000 [1962]: 35), where readers have the freedom to engage with the text but are guided by its inherent structures.

By inviting the reader to actively participate in completing the work, the author acknowledges that the outcome of the interpretative dialogue between the reader and the text cannot be predicted. However, the author's desire is to see their work take shape and form through this dialogue. As Hoxha (2022) suggests, Eco's poetics of the open work allows readers to shape the work according to their own preferences while still aiming to please the author and maintain readability. This raises the question: How many plans and strategies exist, intertexts within the primary text, excerpts from religious texts, and more? We inquire about the purpose behind all of these matters. The reason is that the puzzle of the "absent structure" itself must be unraveled (Hoxha 2022: 129–138).

The reader plays a crucial role in connecting the text with intertexts, identifying codes, and decoding them to engage in the processes of unlimited semiosis. Eco draws upon C. S. Peirce's concept of semiosis, which involves a triadic relationship between a sign, its object, and its interpretant. Peirce's framework, further developed by Eco, highlights the dynamic and complex nature of signs and meaning. Semiotics, as a discipline, uncovers hidden meanings, establishes connections between culture and interpretation, and constructs knowledge based on collective understanding.

The meaning of signs evolves through the process of unlimited semiosis, wherein the interpretation of signs is not fixed or limited but continuously expands and develops. Peirce's theory is general and pragmatic, encompassing emotional and intellectual experiences in the interpretation of signs. Meaning emerges through a continuous process involving the representamen (the sign), the object (what the sign refers to), and the interpretant (the understanding or interpretation of the sign).

Within the space of semiosis, which Eco refers to as the encyclopedia, meaning is both stable and subject to alterations within the shared code. The concept of abduction, an inference that suggests possible explanations or interpretations, holds particular significance in Eco's theory. Abductive inference represents one of the initial steps in metalinguistic operations, enriching the code and contributing to the exploration and expansion of meaning (Eco 2016 [1968]: 211).

In summary, Umberto Eco's interpretative semiotics has had a profound impact on various disciplines, including philosophy, literature, and cultural studies. His approach emphasizes the understanding of culture as a semiotic system, with cultural phenomena being analyzed through the lens of semiotics. Eco's exploration of cultural codes, the role of the reader, and the dynamics of interpretation shed light on the complex relationship between signs, meaning, and communication. His works serve as exemplars of how semiotics can enhance our understanding and interpretation of the world, inviting readers to engage in the unlimited semiosis that expands and develops meaning.

3 Abai: Allanyñ özi de ras, sözi de ras – Allah is truth, his word is truth

Allanyñ özi de ras, sözi de ras,
 Ras söz eshuaqytta jalghan bolmas.
 Kop kitap keldi Alladan, onyn törti
 Allany tanytuğa söz aýrmas.

[Allah is truth, His word is truth.
 Truth can never be false.
 Many books came from Allah, and only four
 Help us understand Him more and more.] (Qunanbayev⁷ 1957: 244, our translation⁸)

The title of the poem, repeated in its first line, is a sign. It is like a declaration, which will be developed further in the text. Then we see oppositions of the words, like true–false, many–only four, but from the very beginning, we know the position of the author, on what side he stands. Any word has multiple meanings, an everyday sense and the meaning it gets in the context of a literary text, becoming a sign and getting a sense in the author's picture of the world. In combination with “Allah,” a symbol of Islam, books gain a sacred connotation. The poem deals with four books sent to the prophets, the *Torah*, the *Evangelie*, the *Zabur* and the *Qoran*. Mentioning them in the poem, the author sends us to the text of the *Qoran*, where in the surah Al-Isra, Ayah 55, we learn that the *Zabur*, meaning ‘book’ in Arabic, was given to the prophet Davud. The *Torah*, meaning ‘law, rules’ in Ivrit was sent to Moyses: “We are sending the *Torah*, containing the right way and the light” (surah Al-Maida, Ayah 44; our translation); *Evangelie*, meaning “good news,” sent to Jesus (surah Al-Maida, Ayah 46) as proof of the previous message, the Torah. And the *Qoran*, meaning ‘book, mostly read,’ was sent to the last prophet, Mohammad, that it is an eternal book, showing the right way to the whole of humanity.

The cornerstones of Islam are Allah and His words of truth, as well as the four books revealed to the Prophets. Abai skillfully employs signs, words, and symbols to contemplate religion and convey his profound thought. Every practicing Muslim not only possesses knowledge but also holds a strong belief in Allah and His four books. These verses touch upon the national values and the foundation of Kazakh culture, which, due to seventy years of Soviet ideology that propagated the notion that “Religion is the opium of the people,” suffered the destruction of mosques and

7 Abai's family name occurs in variant spellings for different publications. All the poems by Abai mentioned in this study are taken from a collection of works which uses the spelling “Qunanbayev,” which is the variant we use here. For the other work we reference, *Qara Soz*, only his first name is used to indicate his authorship.

8 All translations of Abai's poems throughout the text are ours unless otherwise noted.

national schools and the suppression of classical Kazakh poets and writers. As a result, these values have nearly been lost, making it challenging to grasp their true essence. Nonetheless, the sacred represents an understanding of existence as a whole, recognizing the supernatural essence of humanity and expressing a longing for social cohesion and solidarity. It serves as the very basis of human existence, guiding individuals to live their lives in accordance with higher values (Raimkulova et al. 2020: 185–193).

Abai's perspective on religion is unique. At first sight, he can be considered a devout Muslim, but he treats all four major religious books with equal respect in his poetry. This elevates him to the level of a global humanist. He values morality above all else.

The next verses are like the crown of the philosophical poetry of Abai:

Makhabbatpen zharatqan adamzatty,
Sen de süy ol Allany zhannan tätti.
Adamzattyń bärin süy baurym dep,
Jäne haq joly osy dep ädiletty.

[Love Allah, more precious than your soul,
Who created humankind with love.
Love all people, treating them as brothers,
Love also justice as the way of truth.]

In these verses, Abai skillfully juxtaposes the concepts of *makhabbat* and *suyu* to convey a deeper meaning. *Makhabbat* represents elevated and sacred love, particularly the love of Allah, while *suyu* signifies human love, the love between individuals. Abai emphasizes that while one is naturally born with the capacity for love (*makhabbat*), it is important to direct that love toward loving Allah and all of humanity (*suyu*).

By presenting these two words, Abai explores the idea of two worlds – the divine realm of Allah, characterized by boundless and infinite love, and the earthly world where human emotions and connections exist. The poet's message urges the readers to extend their love and treat every human being with love and kindness, regardless of their beliefs, race, or language. This perspective promotes a sense of justice and advocates for recognizing the shared humanity in all individuals. Abai's message aligns with the Kazakh proverb “Akesinin balasy bolma, Adamnin balasy bol” (Do not be the son of your father. Be the son of humanity) by encouraging people to transcend narrow identities and embrace a broader sense of belonging to the larger human family. It emphasizes the importance of embracing a universal love and recognizing the inherent value and dignity of every human being. Overall, Abai's verses highlight the significance of love, in both its spiritual and its human dimensions, promoting a

harmonious and inclusive society where every human being is treated with dignity and respect.

In Islam, Allah is believed to have 99 names, often referred to as the “Beautiful Names of Allah” or the *Asma-ul-Husna*. These names are considered attributes or qualities of Allah and serve to describe His nature, characteristics, and relationship with His creation. Many of these names convey love, kindness, mercy, and generosity, emphasizing the compassionate and benevolent nature of Allah. Some examples of these names and their meanings are as follows: *Ar-Rahman* ‘The Most Gracious,’ *Ar-Rahim* ‘The Most Merciful,’ *Al-Latif* ‘The Kind,’ *Al-Karim* ‘The Generous,’ *Al-Wadud* ‘The Loving, The Kind One,’ *Al-Wali* ‘The Protecting Friend, Patron, and Supporter,’ *Al-Muhyi* ‘The Giver of Life,’ *Al-Waali* ‘The Patron,’ *Al-Barr* ‘The Most Kind and Righteous.’ These names reflect the compassionate and loving nature of Allah and serve as a reminder of His attributes and the importance of embodying these qualities in one’s own life. Muslims often invoke these names in their prayers and supplications, seeking Allah’s mercy, guidance, and blessings.

In his works, Eco extensively discusses the concept of the encyclopedia, which represents the accumulation of all human knowledge and cultural expressions. It encompasses everything that has been said, written, and created by humanity, preserved in the form of books, pictures, and various forms of evidence. These diverse elements within the encyclopedia serve as interpretants, constantly interacting and generating new meanings through the endless chain of semiosis.

The encyclopedia is a vital tool that enables us to not only understand the functioning of individual semiotic systems but also grasp the broader cultural dynamics as a network of interconnected semiotic systems. According to Eco (2007: 61), every phrase or expression finds its explanation and relevance through its connection to other elements within the encyclopedia. This interconnectedness allows a rich and multidimensional interpretation of cultural phenomena. Furthermore, the encyclopedia is not a static entity but a dynamic and ever-expanding source of knowledge. When encountered in new contexts, the encyclopedia reveals new layers of meaning and facilitates fresh interpretations. Its boundless nature arises from its ability to adapt and generate new insights as cultural circumstances evolve.

However, Eco also acknowledges that the encyclopedic conception is not a universal or global framework. Its interpretation and significance can vary depending on specific conditions and circumstances. It is a local understanding that reflects the cultural context in which it is applied. In Eco’s view, the encyclopedia represents a reservoir of knowledge and intertextual references that enrich our understanding of the world and contribute to the continuous process of interpretation and meaning-making. It is a dynamic and indispensable resource for exploring the complexities of culture and language.

Abai's other works can be seen as an encyclopedia of his thoughts and experiences, inviting readers to engage in a dialogue with him. In his first poem "Abaidyn alifbi öleñi" (Abai's ABC), Abai writes:

Alif bi dep ai jüzine ğibrat ettim,
 Bi, bälây därtine nisbät ettim.
 Ti – tilimnen shyġarıp türli äbiyat,
 Si – sänai mädhýña khurmat ettim.

[Alif, the Moon I adored,
 Bi, I fell in love and found a cure,
 Ti, I wrote many beautiful songs,
 Si, I showed deep respect and glory.] (Qunanbayev 1957: 13)

The term "*Alif*" signifies the beginning of a word, while the moon is recognized as one of the symbols associated with Islam. Words such as *bälây* and *därtine* convey the notions of trouble and illness, whereas *äbiyat* represents poetry and songs, *sänai* denotes beauty, *madhiya* signifies glory, and *hurmat* relates to respect. All these words come from Arabic and serve as symbols, expressing the poet's profound emotions and devotion to Islam. The poet describes a deep sense of reverence for profound knowledge, starting from the very first letter. The verses also depict the poet's experience of love, finding a remedy for it, embarking on a journey of poetic creation, and praising the Creator.

To understand the poem, which was written by the poet at the age of 19, one should know the cultural context in which it was produced. Growing up in a family of respected administrators and individuals with a strong Islamic background, Abai was exposed to the teachings of Islam and inherited a legacy of social responsibility and philanthropy from a young age. He wrote about his father: "He is a man of mercy, never tolerates injustice, delivers *zakat* (obligatory charity) to the poor, built a house of charity in Mecca" [Ayan 2021: 46] The *madrasah*⁹ education he received enhanced his knowledge and understanding of the world, including religious and cultural aspects. His teacher Kamaletdin at the Akhmet Riza madrasah followed the Jadid direction in Islam, which emphasized not only the traditional teaching of the Quran but also the teaching of sciences. This approach aimed to explore the vast scientific knowledge hidden within the Quran and encouraged the development of critical thinking. Abai received an education encompassing Arab-Muslim culture, the teachings of Eastern scholars, the foundational principles of Islam, and the literary works of the Middle East. Abai also studied the works of prominent figures such as Shakhabutdin Marjani and Ismail Gaspirinski (Jurtbai 2020).

9 *Madrasah* (Kaz. *medrese*): a specific type of a religious school for the study of the religion of Islam.

Returning to the poem under consideration, we see that the religious views of Abai are based on love. This poem deals with three types of love, which the poet calls “*Imani gul*” (the flower of faith). These three loves make the most precious “flower of faith.” It is worth even sacrificing one's life for it.

Osi ũsh süyü bolady imani gül,
 İmannañ asyly ũsh dep sen tãhqıq bil.
 Oylan dađı, ũşewin taratıp baq,
 Bastı bayla jolına, malyñ tügil.

[These three loves make the flower of faith,
 Three treasures of faith, be sure.
 Think of it and try to penetrate,
 Give your life for it, not only riches.]

Abai regarded love and justice as intertwined. In his philosophy, they were seen as two essential aspects of the Creator, inseparable from each other. Love illuminates the world and empowers it, while justice governs all things. When combined, they create a harmonious cosmic balance. A similar perspective we find in Abai's poem “*Äsempaz bolma ärnege*” (Do not get carried away by everything):

Qairat pen aqyl zhol tabar
 Qashqanğa da, quğanğa.
 Ädilet, shapqat kimde bar,
 Sol zharasar tuğanğa.
 Bastapqy ekeu soñğysyz
 Bite qalsa qazaqqa,
 Aldyñ – zhalyñ, artyñ – muz,
 Barar edin qai zhaqqa?

[Power and reason find the way
 To both fleeing and running down.
 Justice and mercy within oneself
 It is better to possess from birth.
 The first two without two last
 If a Kazakh has
 Fire in front and ice behind,
 Where could you pass?] (Qunanbayev 1957: 163)

According to Abai, one who leads a purposeless life, neglecting justice and mercy, is destined for the infernal fire, leaving behind only frozen ground where nothing grows.

The understanding of the origins of love motives in Abai's poetry is greatly enhanced by Mukhtar Aueyev, who played a significant role in preserving and

disseminating the poet's heritage. In his novel *Abai Joli* (The way of Abai) M. Auezov writes: "The fire of love continues to lead ... Reading Babyr, Navoyi, Allayar he also takes a list of paper and a pencil and starts writing something like them" (Myrzakhmet 1994: 23, our translation).¹⁰ The concept of 'Love fire' was widely prevalent in Eastern poetry and Sufism,¹¹ where symbolic love verses viewed love as a divine phenomenon, elucidated Sufi love philosophy as the "pure soul's quest to attain the Master" (Myrzakhmet 1994: 23, our translation).¹² In Sufi poetry, happiness is perceived as the union with Allah, representing the highest form of self-realization.

Through the path of love, one can come to know Allah, and this journey leads us to the renowned figure of Rabia al Adaviya (713–801). Despite facing numerous hardships in her life, she devoted herself entirely to Allah, laying the foundation for this profound spiritual science. Her teachings and philosophy of love inspired followers such as Al-Bistami, Al-Khallaj, and Ibn Arabi, who further glorified the concept of love in their works. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the philosophy of love transcended into various art forms, poetry, and literature, giving life to masterpieces such as *1001 Nights* and the works of Ferdowsi, Nizami, Rumi, and Hafiz, who are recognized as the poets of love. A prime example of this trend is the epic of *Leyli and Majnun*, where the love for Leyli represents love for the entire universe. In this narrative, Leyli serves as a metaphorical image, embodying the essence of divine love (Esim 2019: 43).

In addition, there is a Sufi myth that tells of a time when Allah was the sole being on Earth, and the world was enveloped in darkness. Allah then created birds and provided them with seeds as their sustenance. However, one day, when the seeds ran out, all the birds perished. Allah became saddened by this. The birds, content with what they had, did not take any action to ensure their survival. They lacked the feeling of love for life.

To remedy this, Allah formed a creature out of clay and bestowed upon it a soul and intellect. This creature was named "Adam." At the creation of Adam, Allah infused him with a longing for life, which is synonymous with love. Hence, it is believed that humans are inherently created with the essence of love (Esim 2013). This myth serves to emphasize the significance of love as an essential aspect of human existence and our connection to the divine.

The expression of Sufi ideas and the concept of the "science of the heart" in the Turkic world can be traced back to early literary works such as Jusip Balasaguni's

¹⁰ "Gashyq oty magshuqqa" degen saryndar jetektei beredi...Babyr, Nauai, Allayar, siyaqtilardy oqyp-oqyp kep, ozi de qagaz, qaryndash alyp, solarsha birdemeler jazyp ketedi.

¹¹ Sufism: a mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God.

¹² "tazargan janmen iendi tanisyn."

Qutty Bilik (Blessed knowledge) (Balasagun 2015). Considered a book of wisdom, *Qutty Bilik* showcases the Sufi worldview prevalent among the Turkic people of the ninth and tenth centuries. The main character, Ogdurmysh, known as “contentment,” embodies the ideals and values associated with Sufism. This literary masterpiece provides profound insights into the qualities and virtues that define a good person, emphasizing traits such as politeness, generosity, knowledge, and kindness. Through the portrayal of Ogdurmysh and exploration of moral virtues, *Qutty Bilik* stands as a testament to the enduring impact of Sufi thought in the Turkic world. It contributes to the region's rich literary and cultural heritage, providing valuable insights into the spiritual and ethical values cherished by the Turkic people of that era.

In the twelfth century, Koja Ahmet Yassau¹³ played a significant role in introducing Sufi ideas to Turkestan, specifically Southern Kazakhstan, through his renowned work *Diuni Hikmet* (The book of knowledge) (Yassau 2007).

This influential text not only conveys the fundamental principles of Islam but also provides profound insights into the Kazakh perspective, which was deeply influenced by Sufism. *Diuni Hikmet* exemplifies the integration of spiritual teachings, cultural heritage, and intellectual pursuits, enriching the understanding of Islam and its profound significance within Kazakh society.

The reverence for Yassau among the Kazakh people was so strong that they held him in equal regard to Prophet Muhammad. They expressed this sentiment through the saying: “Medinede-Mukhammet, Turkistanda-Koja Ahmet” (In Medina, Muhammad; in Turkestan, Koja Ahmet), highlighting the deep respect and recognition of his spiritual stature. In the Mangystau region of Western Kazakhstan, on the walls of the Shaqpaq Ata underground palace, were discovered inscriptions containing magical symbols and Sufi ideas attributed to Yassau. This underground palace, with a history dating back around a thousand years, signifies the widespread presence and influence of Sufi ideas across the vast territories of the Kazakh steppes (Myrzakhmet 2012).

The findings at the Shaqpaq Ata underground palace serve as a testament to the enduring legacy and diffusion of Sufi ideas throughout the region, further affirming the profound impact of Yassau's teachings on the spiritual and cultural landscape of Kazakhstan.

The verses of Yunus Emre, the renowned Turkish poet and Sufi mystic who lived during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, beautifully express his deep devotion to love and his spiritual journey. He declares:

¹³ Koja Ahmet Yassau was an outstanding Sufi leader and poet of the twelfth century. His mausoleum is considered “The Little Mecca” and attracts many pilgrims.

I wasn't sober until
 I drank the wine of Love.
 I didn't know myself
 Until I met a master. (Emre 1989: 45)

Yunus Emre emphasizes the profound significance of love in his life. Indicating his transcendence of ordinary worldly concerns and his immersion in the realm of spiritual enlightenment, he further proclaims:

We will master this science and read this book of love.
 God instructs. Love is His school. (Emre 1989: 34)

The poet continues, "Love is my sect and religion" (Emre 1989: 40). Thus, for Yunus Emre, love serves as his guiding light, leading him on his spiritual path until the very end. His verses reflect his profound connection with the concept of love, which holds great spiritual and transformative power in Sufi philosophy. Through his poetry, Yunus Emre invites readers to explore the depths of love and to embark on their own spiritual journey guided by its transformative force.

According to Bertels (1965: 54), understanding the works of Eastern poets requires knowledge of Sufism, as many of these poets were connected to the tradition. Sufism's influence on their poetry is evident in its symbolic language and mystical themes. Familiarity with Sufi sources and concepts provides deeper insights into the spiritual dimensions of their verses.

The works of Abai, written around the end of the nineteenth century, were met with enthusiasm in Kazakh society. Alash¹⁴ leaders tried to realize Abai's ideas in their fight for justice. They tried to fight with their own limitations and become "Integrated Men." The enlightening ideas of the poet were used in their philosophy, literature, and pedagogics. Abai's poetry was highly valued, as it was still the epoch when the Kazakh nomadic life and habits, national culture, traditions, and worldview did not change so much.

Later they were forbidden and excluded from educational programs. The Sufi poetry and teachings of Yasau were declared false and forbidden. Most of the Alash party leaders underwent repressions. Scientists were imprisoned for doing research on Abai's legacy. Kayim Mukhamedkhanov was sentenced to twenty-five years in jail for his dissertation *Literary school of Abai* (Mukhametkhanov 2008: 144). This is

¹⁴ Alash is the first liberal democratic national movement in the history of the Kazakh people, which expressed not only the fundamental interests of the Kazakh people in the modern world, but also general democratic values.

the reason why all this cultural legacy of the past needs a new reading and interpretation.

Being a product of culture, every text points at other texts, which in their turn have also been affected by previous ones. Any message is linked to other messages, to which it responds and which respond to it in their turn (Bakhtin 2000: 260).

Every definition constitutes some other linguistic or visual message, which can be clarified by other signs, which in their turn comment on other cultural units carried by the preceding messages. These series of clarifications which circumscribe the cultural units of a society in an infinite progression make a chain, called by Peirce interpretants (Eco 2016 [1968]: 115).

Abai's poetry aligns with the tradition found in Eastern culture that emphasizes the concept of a "Perfect Muslim" and an "Integrated Man." This tradition recognizes the human heart as the root of all problems and emphasizes the need to balance reason, strength, and compassion in order to achieve integration. The poetry of influential figures such as Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, Omar Khayyam, Hafiz, Sagdi, Jami, Jusip Balassagun, and Koja Akhmed Yassauï reflects this cultural tradition and explores the depths of human spirituality and moral values. Abai writes in his poem "Segiz ayaq":¹⁵

Striving for the world,
Looking for knowledge,
I looked at two sides. (Qunanbayev 1957: 92)

Abai, a remarkable figure in the cultural landscape, possessed a deep understanding of both Eastern and Western cultures. Reflecting on the issue of reason in *Qara Söz* 27, he gives the conversation between Socrates and Aristodemos. His literary endeavors included translating the works of prominent Western writers such as Goethe, Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy. He had a fondness for Lermontov and translated over thirty of his poems, even translating Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied" through Lermontov (Belger 1989: 83). Abai and Goethe shared common ground, particularly in their emphasis on love and its connection to humanism. Both recognized the power of love in bringing forth positive qualities and criticized their compatriots for their lack of ambition, indifference, and inaction. Furthermore, both Abai and Goethe experienced personal struggles and solitude on their respective spiritual journeys. In recognition of Abai's contributions, a street in

15 "Gylymdy izdep,/Dunieni Kozdep,/Eki jaqqa unildim."

Berlin was named Abajstraße in his honor in the year 2000 (Mashakova 2017: 92), a testament to his enduring legacy.

The poetic words of Goethe and Abai capture the essence of love and its profound impact on human existence. In his book of lyrical poetry *The West-eastern Divan* (1914 [1819]), Goethe states in the “Book of the Singer”:

If love the verse should penetrate
The sweeter will its music ring. (Goethe 1914 [1819]: 8)

The poet conveys the idea that love enhances and enriches the experience of poetry. Love, in this context, acts as a lens through which poetry is perceived, making its music more melodious and its meaning more profound. Goethe continues:

Book of books most wonderful
Is sure the book of Love. (Goethe 1914 [1819]: 35)

The poet elevates the concept of love to a supreme level, comparing it to the most marvelous book one could ever read. The poet implies that love contains the most profound truths, insights, and mysteries, surpassing even the most esteemed literary works. Love, according to Goethe, is the ultimate source of wisdom and wonder. Further we find:

Love for love’s sake, with nought to win, –
Such love knew Ferhad and Schirin.
Each for the other, whole and sole, –
Medschnun and Leila touched that goal. (Goethe 1914 [1819]: 33)

Goethe celebrates the purity and selflessness of love. He refers to the legendary tales of Ferhad and Schirin, as well as Medschnun and Leila, who epitomize the ideal of love devoid of selfish motives or expectations of gain. These stories exemplify a love that is unconditional, sacrificial, and all-encompassing, where each partner’s devotion to the other is total and absolute. Through these examples, Goethe glorifies the highest form of love, characterized by its inherent nobility and profound spiritual connection.

Overall, the words of Goethe and Abai highlight the transformative nature of love, its essential role in human experiences, and its capacity to shape individual lives and foster a more compassionate and interconnected world.

In his spiritual quest Abai also turns to the Eastern poets:

Fizuli, Shamsi, Saihali,
Navoiy, Sagdi, Ferdowsi,
Kozha Hafiz-bu hammasi
Medet ber, ya shagiri fariyad!

[Fizuli, Shamsi, Saihali,
 Navoiy, Sagdi, Ferdowsi,
 Hoja Hafiz-incomparable poets!
 I ask for help from all of you!] (Qunanbayev 1957: 13)

In this early work of the poet, called “Fizuli, Shamsi, Saihali,” he pays homage to seven Eastern “stars” of poetry, drawing inspiration and seeking their support. The significance of the number seven in Kazakh culture adds a sacred and symbolic dimension to this reference. Among the seven mentioned, Hafiz stands out as a celebrated Persian poet renowned for his ghazals, a form of poetry that delves into themes of love and spirituality. Hafiz’s profound verses have resonated across cultures and time, capturing the hearts of readers and poets alike. Even Goethe, a prominent figure in Western literature, was deeply impressed by Hafiz’s poetry and even experimented with this form himself. The poet’s inclusion of Hafiz and the fact of Goethe’s admiration for his work suggests a recognition of the universal appeal and influence of Hafiz’s poetic expressions. It reflects an appreciation for the power of love and spirituality in poetry and highlights the connection between Eastern and Western literary traditions. By turning to these Eastern “stars” of poetry, the poet seeks inspiration and guidance from their profound insights and artistic achievements, adding depth and richness to his own poetic journey. As we will see further both poets- Hafez, and Omar Hayyam¹⁶ glorify man and portray love as a challenging yet rewarding journey, where individuals must be prepared to make sacrifices and endure hardships along the way: Love’s road is an endless road/Where there is no place to rest, Where souls must sacrifice themselves and not protest (Hafez 2013: 115).

If the Universe is some kind of a ring
 We are, no doubt, a precious stone on it. (Rosenfeld and Yushkevich 1965: 160)

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, a prominent Persian poet and Islamic scholar of the thirteenth century, expressed in his work *Diwan-e Kabir* (Great work): “These poems are spiritual secrets. They are like a ‘Noah’s ark’ for those who have devoted their hearts to Allah. They have the power to open hearts, just as eyes open to greet the dawn” (Djan 2008: 102).

Abai’s *Qara Söz* 38, originally titled “Gaqliyat-tasdiqat” (Explaining the truth), serves as a significant piece that encapsulates Abai’s philosophy. Although written around 1902 as a separate work, it was later included in the collection of forty-five “Words of Edification” to avoid Soviet repression, which claimed the lives of millions. In this work, Abai elucidates the concept of the “Integrated Person,” rooted in the Persian term *juvonmard*, where *juvon* refers to a young fellow and *mard* denotes

¹⁶ Persian philosopher and poet.

kindness and generosity. In Kazakh *zhomart*, carries the same meaning. Abai explains that *jauanmartlik* encompasses inherent qualities such as *siddyq* (truth), *karam* (generosity), and *gaqyl* (common sense), which are innate but also need to be nurtured and developed.

The concept of the “Integrated Person” has deep roots and can be traced back to various cultural and philosophical traditions:

- 1) Confucius, the influential Chinese philosopher (551–449 BCE), introduced the concept of *Jun-tzu*, which refers to a mature or superior individual. Confucius emphasized the cultivation of virtues, ethical conduct, and personal development as essential qualities of a mature person.
- 2) In Zoroastrianism, an ancient religion practiced in Turan and Iran, the book *Avesta* contains teachings about the God of charity and the first ideas of the doctrine of goodness. These concepts emphasize the importance of kindness, charity, and ethical behavior in leading a righteous and virtuous life.
- 3) The legends of Afrasiab, a mythical figure in Turanian folklore, also contribute to the roots of the “Integrated Person” concept. These legends, originating in Turan and dating back to the seventh century BC, reached the Kazakh steppes through Mahmud Kashgari’s dictionary, *Diwan Lughat al Turk*. This dictionary served as a compilation of Turkic words and cultural references, preserving and disseminating folklore and legends, including those related to Afrasiab (Myrzakhmet 2018).
- 4) It is logical to consider that Abai incorporated the Sufi notion of the “integrated person,” drawing inspiration from Ibn Arabi’s concept of *insan-ı kamil* (Aydın 2000). However, Abai might have attributed a distinct interpretation or added his own meaning to this concept (*Qara Söz* 19).

These diverse cultural and philosophical influences have shaped the understanding of the “Integrated Person” concept, highlighting the significance of moral virtues, ethical conduct, and personal growth across different traditions and civilizations. Abai’s exploration of the concept can be seen as a continuation of this broader philosophical and cultural heritage.

A few more lines from “Allah is truth. His word is truth”:

Amantu oqymağan kisi bar ma?
 Wäktubixi degenmen isi bar ma?
 [Have you ever read amantu?
 Any idea of uaktubihî?]

Zamana, sharua, minez künde özgerdi,
 Olarga kez-kezimen näbi keldi.
 Qagida sharighaty ö zgerse de,
 Taghrif Alla esh jerde özgermedi.

[Habits, epochs, things changed always,
 Prophets came to them thick and fast.
 Although truth changes everywhere,
 Never changes the science of Allah]

Ähli kitap bul sözdi beker demes.
 Adam näpsi, özimşil minezbenen
 Bos sözbenen qastaspay, tüzü kelmes.

[Holy books will never neglect this word.
 Until human fights selfhood and empty faith,
 He will never get on the trail of truth]

Abai demonstrates a deep understanding of the Arabic language and utilizes it to convey profound meanings. He incorporates Arabic words with significant connotations that enrich the overall message of his work. Some examples of these words include *amantu* (entrusted for keeping, safety), *nabi* (prophet), *uaktubihi* (religious books), and *sharigat* (right, proper way). Through these Arabic words, Abai emphasizes the idea that humanity has been entrusted with the responsibility of preserving eternal values, including language, culture, and nationality. This notion highlights the importance of recognizing and safeguarding these values for future generations. Furthermore, Abai employs contrasting terms such as *jarlyq* (order) and *söz* (word) to highlight the dichotomy between empty words and meaningful expressions. This juxtaposition draws attention to the significance of sincere and impactful communication. Abai suggests that mere empty words lack substance and should be challenged and replaced with meaningful and purposeful discourse.

Abai also contrasts religious books with empty words, underscoring the permanence and unchanging nature of religious teachings compared to the ever-changing world, habits, and the passage of time. This serves to emphasize the timeless wisdom and guidance found in religious texts. Abai's overall stance is clear: he believes that true change and progress can only occur when individuals confront their egoism and challenge the emptiness of hollow words. By employing these linguistic and conceptual oppositions, Abai emphasizes the importance of upholding and cherishing eternal values while acknowledging the need for self-reflection and transformation within individuals and society at large.

The process of interpretation, as described by Umberto Eco, relies on the logic of abduction, particularly influenced by the Peircean framework. Abduction involves formulating conjectures or hypotheses to explain the meaning of a text. One such conjecture is the "secret code," a law that explains the overall result of interpretation. To validate a conjecture about the intended meaning of a work (*intentio operis*), it must be consistent with the text as a coherent whole.

Augustine's perspective on interpretation, which Eco references, suggests that an interpretation can be accepted if it aligns with one portion of the text and should be rejected if contradicted by another portion. This principle of consistency and coherence serves as a guiding principle in validating interpretations (Eco 2011: 46).

In the context of the given text, if the interpretation of the first part does not contradict the subsequent part, it indicates its validity. According to Eco's framework, the conjecture made about the *intentio operis* can be considered correct since it remains consistent with the entirety of the text.

It's important to note that interpretations can vary, and different readers may arrive at different conclusions based on their own understanding and perspectives. Eco's framework provides a structured approach to interpretation, but it does not guarantee a single definitive interpretation for a given text. In the last lines that we propose from the poem under consideration, Abai emphasizes the importance of fulfilling Muslim duties, including *ruza* (*eid al-fitr*), *namaz* (five times prayer), *zeket* (*zakah* – obligatory alms), and *haj* (*hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca):

Ruza, namaz, zeket, haj – talassyz is,
Jaqsy bolsan, jaqsy tut berin tegis.
Bastapqy üshin bekitpey, sońgy törtti,
Qylghanmenen tatyndy bermes zhemis.

[Ruza, namaz, zeket, haj-questionless,
If you are good enough, exercise them all.
But without the first three, only the fourth
Even being exercised, will be fruitless]

The poet calls to observe all the obligations, rather than focusing solely on hajj, which has, in some cases, become more like a tourist trip than a deeply spiritual and meaningful journey. Further, Abai criticizes the state of the madrasahs (religious schools) of his time. He suggests that despite their outward appearance of cleanliness and purity, they lack true faith and righteousness. Abai emphasizes the importance of pursuing genuine knowledge and understanding, implying that the pursuit of true science and education is crucial to uncovering the reality of faith. He further condemns the presence of profit-seeking, boasting, and worldly passions within these institutions, suggesting that they corrupt the true purpose of seeking spiritual release and enlightenment. Abai's critique reflects his desire for a more sincere and authentic approach to religious education and practice.

Abai's approach to religion goes beyond blind trust and orthodox interpretations. He distinguishes between believing in Allah and truly understanding Him, considering the latter as a philosophical concept. He references the Hakims, who advocate for a conscious and knowledgeable approach to faith. Abai introduces the terms *Iman*

taqlidi (followers of faith) and *Iman yakini* (true faith) to highlight the distinction between superficial adherence and genuine spiritual understanding.

Through contrasting elements such as clean–dirty, outside–inside, and faith–devil, Abai depicts two opposing worlds: one of faith (*Iman*) and the other of devil (*Shaitan*). He associates the latter with negative traits like profit, boasting, and passion, calling for liberation from such influences. Abai's intention is to guide his people toward a more enlightened and spiritually fulfilling path.

The themes of societal change, loss of values, and criticism of local authorities can be found in the works of various authors both before and after Abai. These writers aimed to highlight the negative effects of colonization and the detrimental actions of those in power who were adapting to new conditions at the expense of their own people.

Yassau, for instance, denounced the individuals who prioritize personal gain over their own souls and the principles of Islam. In his poems, there was regret that earlier only the best ones had been Sufi, as currently their knowledge was poor and this could ruin the religion. All this reflected the betrayal of faith for material profit (Myrzakhmet 2012: 29–30).¹⁷ Dulat wrote: “Degraded local princes/Bite their own provinces. Together with wolves” (Babataiuly 2013: 13).¹⁸ In this way he drew attention to the degradation of local administrators who exploited their own people. These authors shared a common goal of shedding light on the moral and ethical decay within their societies, which they attributed to the influence of colonization and the actions of those in power. By highlighting these issues, they aimed to inspire reflection, self-improvement, and a return to core values and principles.

The repetition of the word “truth” throughout the poem carries significant meaning. While truth is considered to be eternal, the poet acknowledges that it can also be transient in certain situations. When we find ourselves unable to distinguish between what is true and what is not, the poet advises against engaging in a battle against truth. Instead, he urges individuals to preserve their human dignity and not tarnish their reputation.

This idea is well illustrated by Abai in the next lines of the poem called “Közinen basqa oiyi joq” (He has no other thoughts than his eyes):

if the eyes of the heart are opened,
it will see the light of truth (Qunanbayev 1957: 132)¹⁹

17 “Qor boldy ekinshiden sopy joly/Bul joldy ustaushi edi eldin zory./Aliptin atyn bilmes nadan sopy/Qoqamyn bola ma dep dinnin sorry.”

18 “Azgan eldin bekteri/Qan shyqsa elin julmalar./Qasqyrmenen aralas.”

19 “Jurektin kozi ashilsa,/Haqtyn tuser saulesi.”

These lines highlight the poet's belief in the value of personal engagement and active involvement in the search for truth. They suggest that truth is not something that can be easily obtained or comprehended without sincere effort and a genuine desire to uncover it.

We want to complete our research and respond to Batayeva, the author of the article *Zagadka Abaya: velichaishi neizvestni poet Kazakhstana*," mentioned above, with Abai's own verses from the poem "Ölsem, ornym qara jer syz bolmai ma?"²⁰ ("When I die, will not the damp earth become my resting place") (Qunanbayev 1957: 223):

Look deep into your soul and ponder my words:
To you I am a puzzle, my person and my verse.
My life has been a struggle, a thousand foes I braved,
Don't judge me too severely – for you, the path I paved.

Abai's upbringing in the remnants of nomadic civilization exposed him to the intricate tapestry of life, culture, social conflicts, and diverse perspectives prevalent in that way of life. The tragic fate of Kenesary Kasymuly, who led the Kazakh national liberation uprising, profoundly impacted Abai's artistic perception and thinking. Abai's heart was shattered by the horrifying tales shared by his father, Kunanbai, about the severed head of Kenesary Khan, which was carried in a coffin to Omsk and eventually transformed into a silver ashtray under General Gorchakov's orders. This experience, symbolized by Abai's own verses about becoming profound by drinking the poison of the past, marked the beginning of his artistic journey (Qunanbayev 1957: 219).

His poems served as enlightening pieces, encouraging reflection and delivering moral and social critiques. Abai emphasizes the ethical principle of "being a human" in his works, viewing a human as a combination of intelligence, hard work, justice, knowledge, love, and loyalty. He believed that a human's spiritual legacy, the good works he leaves behind, would live on even after death. Abai's understanding of faith differed from the traditional Islamic concept. He connected faith with ethical and moral aspects, elevating it to the level of honor.

According to Abduakap Kara, a professor at Mimar Sinan University in Turkey, Abai's criticism of the Kazakhs in his poems, which was the starting point of our research, can actually be extended to any Turkic nation, and they would not take offense because the limitations mentioned were common among all Turkic Muslims. Therefore, Abai can be considered the poet of the entire Turkic world (Kara 2020).

²⁰ "Juregimmin tubine teren boila,/Men bir jumbaq adammin,ony da oila./Soqtyqpaly, soqpaqsiz jerde ostim,/Mynmen jalgyz alystym kina qoima."

4 Conclusion

Our analysis of Abai's poetry, guided by the semiotic theories of Umberto Eco and Charles Peirce, has emphasized the importance of an encyclopedic reading and unlimited semiosis in the interpretation of his works. Abai's poetry is a rich tapestry of cultural, historical, and philosophical references, requiring readers to possess a broad knowledge base and engage in intertextual exploration. Through an encyclopedic reading, we have recognized the interconnectedness of Abai's ideas with various intellectual traditions, both Eastern and Western. This approach allows a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of meaning embedded within Abai's poetry. Moreover, the concept of unlimited semiosis highlights the continuous process of interpretation, where signs and symbols can evoke a multitude of meanings and associations. By embracing this perspective, we have uncovered new dimensions of Abai's poetry, transcending fixed interpretations and allowing an open-ended exploration of his poetic universe.

In our exploration of Abai's poetry, we have also delved into the notion of the absent structure, as advocated by Umberto Eco. The absent structure draws attention to what is not explicitly present in the text, such as gaps, silences, and omissions, which contribute to the richness of interpretation. By recognizing and exploring these absences, we have uncovered hidden meanings, symbolic implications, and underlying narratives that enhance our understanding of Abai's poetic vision. Furthermore, Charles Peirce's concept of triadic relationships between the sign, its object, and the interpretant has been instrumental in our analysis. It emphasizes the dynamic and interactive nature of interpretation, where the reader plays a vital role in constructing meaning. By examining the interplay between signs, their intended meanings, and the interpretations they evoke, we have gained insights into the complex web of connections within Abai's poetry, bridging the gap between the poet's intentions, the reader's understanding, and the broader cultural context.

"Umberto Eco's ideas on literature, role of the reader, encyclopedia of knowledge, cultural codes etc. are of 'universal' nature and applicable to any cultural context. This has always been the aspiration of the whole semiotic intellectual movement to provide methods and theories which were valid not only in the European based Western culture but also in other cultural orientations" This was the feedback of Eero Tarasti upon reading our research (Tarasti 2023).

The integration of encyclopedic reading, unlimited semiosis, the absent structure, triadic relationships, and the role of the reader provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Abai's poetry and its significance in a broader literary and cultural context. These theoretical notions highlight the active role of the reader in the interpretive process, inviting readers to engage deeply with the text, explore

intertextual references, and draw upon their own knowledge and experiences. This reader-centric approach aligns with the transformative nature of literature, where each reader brings their unique perspectives, biases, and cultural backgrounds to the interpretation.

Semiotics recognizes that signs and their meanings are dynamic and subject to change over time. However, this dynamic nature can make it challenging to capture and analyze signs accurately within a specific research period. The semiotic theory may require continuous updating and adaptation to account for evolving sign systems and cultural shifts.

Moving forward, there are several promising directions for future research on Abai's poetry. Comparative studies that analyze the triadic relationships in Abai's poetry alongside works from other poets or literary traditions can also provide valuable insights into the universality or cultural specificity of these dynamics. Scholars can further explore the specific intertextual connections and cultural references in Abai's works, analyze the impact of the absent structure on the overall meaning and interpretation, investigate the reader's role in constructing interpretations, and delve deeper into the triadic relationships between signs, objects, and interpretants. By embracing the multifaceted nature of Abai's poetry and the role of the reader, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Abai's literary contributions and their relevance in contemporary literary discourse.

Acknowledgments: Having completed our research, we would like to seize the opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to Professor Eero Tarasti (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Professor Bujar Hoxha (Skopje University, Macedonia) for all their support, advice, and scholarly collaboration. This study is a part of a broader research project in Cultural Studies titled "Semiotic Interpretation of Culture by Umberto Eco," completed as part of PhD studies at the department of Philosophy, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan.

References

- Abai [Abai Qunanbayev]. 2016. *Qara Soz* [The words of edification]. Almaty: Atamura.
- Aljanova, Nurlykhan. 2016. A semiotic analysis of the yurt, clothing, and food. Eating habits in Kazakh traditional cultures. *The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* 14(1). 27–36.
- Ayan, Ekrem. 2021. Abai and his family. In Suat Beylur & Omirbek Hanayi (eds.), *The wisdom of the great steppe. Abai Kunanbaiuly*, 39–57. Almaty: ERI.
- Aydın, Mehmet S. 2000. *İnsân-ı Kâmil*. [A perfect man]. TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi. İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları.
- Babataiuly, Dulat. 2013. *Baraqqqa* [To Barak]. *Works*. Almaty: Ana tili.

- Baitursinuly, Akhmet. 2013. *Alty tomdyk shygarmalar jinagy* [Six-volume compilation of works]. Almaty: Poligrafcombinat.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 2000. *Avtor i Geroi* [Author and protagonist]. Saint Petersburg: Azbuka.
- Balasagun, Jusip. 2015. *Aqyl kitabı*. Jidebai: Rollan Seisenbayev Khalyqaralyq Abai Kluby.
- Batayeva, Zaura. 2020. *Zagadka Abaya: velichaishi neizvestni poet Kazakhstana* [The puzzle of Abai: The greatest unknown poet of Kazakhstan]. Ufa: Istoki.
- Belger, Gerold. 1989. *Gete i Abai* [Goethe and Abai]. Almaty: Jalyn.
- Bertels, Evgenii. 1965. *Sufizm I sufistskaya literatura*. [Sufism and Sufi literature]. Moscow: Nauka.
- Bianchi, Cinzia & Michel Ghieri. 2009. Eco's semiotic theory. In Peter Bondanella (ed.), *New essays on Umberto Eco*, 17–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Bokeikhan, Alikhan. 1995. *Isbrannoye. Nauchniye issledovaniya, trudy na kazakhskom I russkom yazykah: monografii, statyi, rechi, doklady, stikhi, perevody, pisma* [Selected works. Scientific research, works in Kazakh and Russian languages: monographs, essays, speeches, reports, poems, translations, letters]. Almaty: Kazakh entsiclopediyasy.
- Brazgovskaya, Elena. 2019. *Semiotica. Yazyki I kody kultury*. [Semiotics. Languages and codes of culture]. Moscow: Urait.
- Caesar, Michael. 1999. *Umberto Eco: Philosophy, semiotics and the work of fiction*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.
- Campbell, Cary. 2018. Educating openness: Umberto Eco's poetics of openness as a pedagogical value. *Signs and Society* 6(2). 305–331.
- Corry, Leo & Renato Giovanolli. 1992. Jorge Borges, Author of the Name of the Rose. *Poetics Today* 13(3). 425–445.
- Danesi, Marcel. 2015. Preface: Umberto Eco and semiotics: An enduring legacy. *Semiotica* 2015(206). 1–3.
- Djan, Shefik. 2008. *Mevlyana Djaleddin Rumi*. Moscow: Dilya.
- Dulatov, Mirjaqyp. 2020. *Abay-175: Mirjaqyp Dulatovtyn "Abay" atty maqalasy* [Abai-175: The article Abai by Mirjakip Dulatov]. Almaty: Abai.kz.
- Eco, Umberto. 1976. *A theory of semiotics*. Edited by Thomas A. Sebeok. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, Umberto. 1981. *Il Nome della Rosa*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Lector in fabula: La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2000 [1962]. *Opera aperta: Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee*, 5th edn. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2002 [1995]. *Interpretazione e sovrainterpretazione*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2003. *Sulla Letteratura*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2007. *Dall'albero al labirinto. Studi storici sul segno e l'interpretazione*. Milan: RCS libri S.p.
- Eco, Umberto. 2011. *Confessions of a young novelist*. London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Eco, Umberto. 2014 [1984]. *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, 8th edn. Turin: Einaudi.
- Eco, Umberto. 2016 [1968]. *La struttura assente*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2016 [1990]. *I limiti dell'interpretazione*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, Umberto. 2018 [1994]. *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Emre, Yunus. 1989. The drop that became the sea. In *Lyric poems by Yunus Emre* (translated by Kabir helminski and Refic Algan). Putney, VT: Threshold Books.
- Esim, Garifolla. 2013. *Hakim Abai* [Hakim Abai]. Astana: Foliant.
- Esim, Garifolla. 2019. *Gulama-Name* [To a scholar]. Astana: Has-Sak.
- Farronato, Christina. 2003. *Eco's chaosmos: From the middle ages to postmodernity*. Toronto: University of Toronto press.

- Farronato, Christina. 2009. From the Rose to the Flame: Eco's theory and fiction between the Middle Ages and postmodernity. In Peter Bondanella (ed.), *New essays on Umberto Eco*. New York: Cambridge University press.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. 1914 [1819]. *The West-eastern Divan: In twelve books*. Translated by Edward Dowden. London & Toronto: J. M. Dent.
- Hafez. 2013. *Faces of love and the poets of Shiraz*. Translated by Dick Davis. London, England: Penguin books.
- Hale, Clinton. 2011. Umberto Eco Takes Semiotics to the Masses. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68(3). 255–263.
- Hoxha, Bujar. 2022. *Umberto Eco's semiotics: Theory, methodology and poetics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ibrayev, Bek. 1980. Kosmogonicheskiye predstavleniya nashih predkov [Cosmogonic ideas of our ancestors]. *Dekorativnoye Iskusstvo SSSR* 8. 41–44.
- Jumabayev, Magjan. 1995. *Shygarmalar* [Works]. Almaty: Bilim.
- Jurtbai, Tursyn. 2020. Abaidyn omirbayani [Biography of Abai]. *Juldyz Info*, 26 August. <https://juldyz.info/abajdyh-omirbayany/> (accessed 15 April 2024).
- Kara, Abduakap. 2020. Abai Jane Ruhani Mura [Abai and spiritual legacy]. *The Qazaq Times*, 10 April. <https://qazaqtimes.com/article/76818> (accessed 15 April 2024).
- Karakozova, Zhannat & Marat Hassanov. 2011 [1993]. *Kosmos kazakhskoi kulturi* [Cosmos of Kazakh culture]. Almaty: Evraziya.
- Leone, Massimo. 2020. *On insignificance: The loss of meaning in the post-material age*. New York: Routledge.
- Lorusso, Anna Maria. 2015. *Cultural semiotics: For a cultural perspective in semiotics*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mancino, Susan. 2017. Philosophy of Communication and Umberto Eco's Infinity of lists: The interplay of the poetic and pragmatic. *Atlantic Journal of communication* 25(3). 139–150.
- Mashakova, Ainur. 2017. Kazakh literary relations at the edge of the XX and XXI centuries. *Modern European Researches* 2017(2). 88–95.
- Mashakova, Ainur. 2023. Foreign translations of the classics of Kazakh literature: Prospects for research and study. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 11(2). 278–291.
- Mastrojani, Roberto. 2014. Signs and existence: The existential semiotics of Eero Tarasti between existentialism, semiotics and philosophical anthropology. In Kristian Bankov, Ivan Kasabov, Mony Almalech, Borislav Gueorguiev, George Tsonev, Reni Iankova, Dimitar Trendafilov, Ivo Iv. Velinov, Yagodina Manova & Boyka Batchvarova (eds.), *New semiotics: Between tradition and innovation – Proceedings of the 12th World Congress of IASS/AIS Sofia 2014 New Bulgarian University*, 465–470. Sofia: IASS Publications & NBU Publishing House.
- Mukhametkhanov, Kayim. 2008. *Tagdyr jane Karlag* [Fate and Karlag]. Almaty: Iskander.
- Myrzakhmet, Mekemtas. 1994. *Abai jane shygys*. [Abai and the East]. Almaty: Qazaqstan.
- Myrzakhmet, Mekemtas. 2012. *Qazaq Adebietindegi Sopylyq Tanim* [The concept of Sufism in Kazakh literature]. Almaty: Qazaqstan. <http://kazneb.kz/bookView/view?brId=1180573&lang=kk> (accessed 11 April 2024).
- Myrzakhmet, Mekemtas. 2018. “Tolyq Adam” Ilimi Jaily Tolganys [Reflections on the concept of the Integrated person]. *ULT*, 11 January. <https://ult.kz/post/mekemtas-myrzakhmetuly-tolyk-adam-ilimi-zhayly-tolganys> (accessed 13 January 2023).
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1931. *Collected papers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Qunanbayev, Abai [Abai]. 1957. *Shygarmalarynyn eki tomdik jinagy* [The complete two-volume collection of works]. Almaty: Korkem Adebiet baspasy.

- Raimkulova, Aktoty, Askhat Amen, Raikhan Doszhan, Manifa Sarkulova & Akmarzhan Auyelbekova. 2020. Sacral values as a phenomenon of Kazakhstan spiritual heritage. *XLinguae* 13(3). 185–193.
- Rosenfeld, Boris & Adolf Yushkevich. 1965. *Omar Khayyam. T-11085*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Sallis, Steven. 1986. Naming the Rose: Readers and codes in Umberto Eco's novel. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 19(2). 3–12.
- Schamiloglu, Uli. 2021. *Abai and intellectual movements of the 19th–20th centuries in the wisdom of the great steppe*. *Abai Kunanbaiuly*. Almaty: ERI Books.
- Schilling, Eric. 2015. Umberto Eco between postmodernism and narrative: Il nome della rosa, Il pendolo di Foucault, and La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana. *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 49(3). 800–811.
- Shakhanova, Nurilya. 1998. *Mir traditsionnoi kulturi kazakhov* [The world of traditional Kazakh culture]. Almaty: Kazakhstan.
- Tarasti, Eero. 2009. Greeting of the President of the IASS at the Nanjing International Symposium on cultural semiotics and the 8th annual conference of Chinese Association of Linguistic Semiotics. *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 1(1). 3–6.
- Tarasti, Eero. 2023. *E-mail communication to Roza Khassenova*.
- Telekanal 24kz. 2020. Byust Abaia ustanovlen v zdanii otdeleniya OON v Zheneve [A bust of Abai is installed in the UN office building], presented by European Correspondent Zhanat Ernst, 20 December. *Telekanal 24kz*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpAV2BAEqZs&t=40s> (accessed 16 April 2024).
- Usmanova, Almira. 2000. *Umberto Eco: Paradoxy interpretatsii*. [Paradoxes of interpretation]. Minsk: Propilei.
- Volli, Ugo. 2021. The origins of Umberto Eco's Semio-Philosophical project. *Rivista di estetica*. № 76. 81–95.
- Yassau, Koja Ahmet. 2007. *Diyani Hikmet* [The book of knowledge]. Astana: Foliant.

Bionotes

Roza Khassenova

Astana International University, Astana, Kazakhstan
roza.tolengut.kz@mail.ru

Roza Khassenova (b. 1969) is a senior teacher at Astana International University. Her present research interests include philosophy of language and culture, semiotics, interpretation techniques. Her publications include “Cosmodrome as a ‘gift of modernity’: representation of the theme of space in Kazakh and Kyrgyz literature” (with M. Sarkulova, 2022) and “Semiotic analysis of some aspects of national culture in Kazakhstan” (with M. Sarkulova 2023).

Manifa Sarkulova

L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan
manifa.s@mail.ru

Manifa Sarkulova (b. 1975) is Cand.Sc.Philosophy, an associate professor at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Her research interests include philosophy and poetics of myth and philosophy of culture. Her publications include “Semiotic analysis of petroglyph ‘Ancient Turks and the mother goddess umay/umai’” (co-author, 2021) and “Cultural features of orthodox female monasticism” (co-author, 2022).