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## A LITERARY TEXT AS A PORTAL TO ETHNO CULTURE (BASED ON THE MATERIAL FROM A NOVEL BY A. ZHAKSYLYKOV 'SINGING STONES')

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the literary text in terms of the ethno cultural meanings hidden in it. A literary text is understood by us as a piece of the national linguistic world. In this aspect, we consider it always contains a lacuna of different levels - from the lexical-semantic one and onto the national and psychological ones. Thus, the work of fiction provides us with rich materials that enable us to become familiar with another culture and its value paradigm. As an object of the analysis, we selected a novel by one of the greatest writers of modern Kazakhstan, Aslan Zhaksylykov - "Singing Stones".

**Key words:** culture, concept, myth, lacuna, national language view of the world, outlook, ethnos

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Before analyzing the novel at all levels of its poetic style, we will consider as far as possible in the context of postmodern works, such as this, its key plot slots and try to guess the ethno cultural riddle inherent in the text.

So, the main hero of the novel is Jan, a brilliant and intelligent man who is a respected professor at the university and an aspiring poet; he is married to the beautiful Ainur and is a friend of Arman, who is a successful businessman. He is respected in the inner scientific circles; however the life of the city, with its troubling competitiveness and hypocrisy, oppressed him. After his wife's betrayal with his best friend, Jan reaches the lowest bottom of social hierarchy; he becomes a hobo serving an old Chinese man, for bread and cheap wine. At the end of the novel (which at the same time is its beginning, too) Jan very haggard finds himself in a hospital. To his wife, Ainur, the situation is a sign of irreversible social collapse; to Jan, it is a stage of happy relief and the beginning of a new life. Why this one event, the formula of which can be expressed as a dictum "Agent 'A' is in the locus 'B'", is assessed so differently by Ainur and Jan, presented in the novel as coming from the same culture and the same social stratum?

In the text of the work is implemented the opposition of two principles, two axiological systems and ideologies - urban and ethno genetic... Subject embodiments of the first are Ainur and Arman; the second one is realized in a complex of characters including Jan, Duysen-baksy, the shepherd, Koke (father), the mother of the main hero and a little boy.

Since the artistic text is a "model of reality with culture position" (1) (Y.M. Lothman), it has to be considered in a point of view of national and specific features through verbal and non-verbal behaviors, consisting in it. Only in this negative aspect "social scenario" of Jan, having been "happy lash" (definition from the text), can be interpreted as a logical one. Before us, first of all, the national-psychological lacuna (typology by I.Y. Markovina and Y.A. Sorokin) (2), the elimination of which may only take place by taking into account the appeal for a language culture, which generated this text. In our situation this is the language culture of Kazakhstan.

The linguistic space of Kazakhstan is rich and non-homogeneous - this is determined both by particularities of historical development and a unique language view of the world, imaging values and the ways of perception of different cultures.

As far back as in the Great Silk Way period, the territory of Kazakhstan was a global transposition, synergetic meeting space for a wide majority of languages, mentalities, cultures, and that further on determined the poly cultural face of the country.

A language picture of Kazakhstan is 'sophisticated' as there are present two dominant languages, forming a conditional coordinate system: the Kazakh language, a genetic ground of the ethnos, being a diachronic (and, more strictly it is regarded as pan-chronic) axis; and the Russian language, having become a pivot of synchronic (and retrospective-synchronic). Thus, every individual (conditionally pointed in the coordinate level) belongs to two pivots at the same time – Y & X, embodying an integrated language perception. At the same time the language culture of Kazakhstan is presented also by the whole mosaic of other languages and their bearers – big and small ethnic groups.

This situation was an incentive for expanding the character effect in a cultural aspect, i.e. creative work of bilingual writers, to which relates Aslan Zhaksylykov, too. Having been bearers of a native language they write in the language "mastered" (Russian). Write in the words of Mukhtar Auezov, "in Russian language, but not as Russians do".

If the native language is a "norm" for its bearer, as a rule, it's not realized in the variety of all its meanings and cultural codes, then in interconnection with the other language it will raise a required distance in order to "look at the culture from the outside". So, the Russian language, in which the novel "The Singing stones" was written, allowed Aslan Zhaksylykov to look carefully at the native culture, and enabled him to mark precisely "my own" and "the others".

A specific example from the text: the protagonist (a chief hero) names his mother "mom", and his father by addressing him as "Koke" that is not an equivalent manner for the Russian language. According to "the Grammar vocabulary of the Russian language" by A.A. Zaliznyak, 'mom' is a respectful form of the noun "mother" (3).

Such treatment shows a certain distance between the hero and his mother, the absence of a close, trusting relationship. This is confirmed at the level of the plot structure: the mother is cold to her son, often beats him and does not respond to his timid expressions of love.

*It was pity bitterly to me, because I couldn't see my own faults. It was horrible for me to recall my mother's eyes similar to sharp dark ices. Those were thorny ices from which my heart became sick. Those eyes were different, not loving me and of an unexpected cruelty. I cried more from other complicated and deep, unexpressed feelings, which with their claws scratched my soul. That was the feeling of a final and irreversible loss of something important and basic in my life. The cold unbuttoned inside was unbearable for a child's heart (4).* Finally, she abandoned him, paralyzed in hospital and went away forever. One of the maxims of the Kazakh people is a rigorous respect of the elders – it requires showing esteem to the mothers not depending on their behavioral natures. In this occasion the Russian noun "mom" is at the same time both respect and a translative mechanism (as ethno cultural prescribes) and a litmus test of "otherness".

## 2. MYTH AS A TRANSLATIVE MECHANISM OF THE LINGUISTIC CULTURAL ETHNOS

From the aspect of the myth-poetic interpretation the abandonment by his mother is not casual. In it is considered the realization of a scenario connected to a female symbol, both temporary and chaotic. (That's why a girl in the family is referred to as a *guest*). In a similar way Jan's wife is shown too, leaving him for his best friend. According to the ancient Turki faith, a wife is a personification of Chaos, the underground world (hell). Often the character of a married woman is interpreted as an image of Erlig-khan, one of the two demurgues of the universe along with Tengri. This guileful, changeable and inconstant Splrit is represented in the image of ugly old men or women. "Er-lig" means "married woman". So, the motive of betray as a realization of behavioral code of this myth appears in the novel thrice: 1) the mom betrayed his father (Koke) with a foreman; 2) the mother betrayed her son; 3) the wife of the hero betrayed her husband with his friend.

Erlig-Khan, the terrible Splrit of the Underneath world, exists as an opposite of the Summit, the Heaven (sky). Er-lig appeared in the mortal life and paid off for it with poor health, constant irritability, mischief and finally, by death.

It has been otherwise expressed in Jan's treatment of his father, whom he names exceptionally *Koke* (and never – in the Russian noun "father"). To Alimzhanova G.M., it is an ethno cultural vocative case; *Koke* connects the semantic blocks 'respect' and 'affectionate attitude' (5). Moreover, in the semantic structure of this vocative case a connection with the inner shape hasn't been lost (A.Potebnya) - the adjective *kok*, which translates as blue. In aspect of color symbolic, the color blue is connected with the sky (heaven) and in the ethno cultural view of the world it embodies the God Tengri – the demurge of all things. It requires a comment. Despite that the historical sources don't

give descriptions regarding Tengri but the "Creator of cosmogonies" ('demiurge'), the Turki (also the Altai Tatars and Yakuts,) name Tengri - the Creator.

According to M. Eliade, the word *tengri*, is a semantic complex which includes the structures "god" and "heaven", is a Turki-Mongolian vocabulary word, spread all over the Asian continent and serves for designating the supreme God and secondary deities (6). In ancient texts this God is named "supreme", "heaven", "eternal"; he has been gifted with "power". One of the Turkic Orkhon inscriptions is the evidence: "When had been created blue heaven at the upper, and at the under the soft earth, between them two were created human sons".

As an invariant of deity, Tengri has no concrete image; he is "omnipresent" and "unrevealed". However in the refraction of the Kazakh world this hyper concept "falls into" the system of representative figures: Tengri-batyr (Tengri-the warrior), Tengri-anshy (Tengri-the hunter) /shepherd, Tengri-baksy (healer, shaman, poet). By ethnic imagination he is gifted with gigantic sizes, horrendous power -connotation with the image of batyr (warrior)-but at the same time bears an harmonizing origin (i.e., the shepherd who doesn't allow his herd to wander and established "geography" for their settlement according to the cycle of the nature, defending them from predators). In the Kazakh cultural view of the world the imaging of Tengri became Baksy, or Shaman, being not only guides between the three levels of cosmogonical verticality (divine heaven, middle world, hell), and demiurges, "creating the world by Harmony". This confirms the set of myths of Korkut, who created the qobyz (a violin like instrument), a musical instrument, symbolizing the act of first creation.

The character of *Koke* in the text of the novel is a hint of the God Tengri: tremendous height, thunderous voice (Tengri-thunder – one of 99 "representations of Tengri"), jerking movements. He always bears with him a *kamschy* (whip-lash) (the origin of "*Kam*" means creation) – an attribute of Tengri and the majority of his time he spends in the mountains. In the mind of little Jan his father and the Blue Mountains flow into a single whole:

*Sometimes I'd have liked being with my koke. Then I climbed up onto the roof's shed, from where one can see the mountains clearly, and look long at them (4).*

And besides, Jan's father is a *shepherd*, spending most of his time in herding, and a *hunter*, setting traps. He can play the qobyz. As we see, the system of attributes, allows to construct an original imagine of the hero's father and determine its implications.

The boy's father, a taciturn shepherd, loves his son a lot and dies of grief when the boy was hospitalized with a broken head.

The important stage in understanding this character has been an interpretation of his *Koke's* (father) death. "The meaning of the word "father" is connected tightly with a totem - death: in the ancestor community the totem is the dead father of all, forefather, and in the antenatal community the father is a priest, a totem-leader, killing and parting the totem-beast, divine of death. The dead totem is God" (7). Thus, Zhaksylykov "translated" a concrete realistic character of the father (*Koke*) and put it in a metaphysical space, restoring the groundwork of the ethno genetic myth of creation, death (initiation) and new life.

Unlike the chaotic mother in the beginning, the father embodied for Jan harmony, connection with the cosmos.

Hence, having lost both his father and mother, the little Jan became an orphan, i.e. a man who lost his roots in the mythological sense. Jan collided with the "emptiness" of a non-created world. And here, it is essential for us to emphasize what Jan means by "Soul", when translating it from Kazakh it allows us to distinguish two levels of the plot – the life of the human community and the of the "inner" human (E. Etkind).

The soul in the world view of the Kazakh people, is multivariate, they have been penetrated by all the strata of human reality. And, like the very universe, the Soul has got three levels in its embodying: material, represented as *body* in the human being (meat-soul); spiritual, connected with the cosmic world, the memory of the nation, the ancestors (spiritual soul); which is intermediary, connecting between the material and spirit.

### 3. THE COMPOSITION OF THE TEXT AS A REFLECTION OF A NATIONAL WORLD OUTLOOK

The text of the novel has got a unique polycentric architectonics. It is as though it 'radiates' circles, every next circle is an inductive 'fruit' of the previous one. A similar circle organization is specific to the national musical genre – *kuy* (melody). *Kuy* is differed by mixed metrics, being in different shapes – from playing up to multi frequency constructions, organized by the rondo principle. In its complicated shapes the *kuy* is repeated (not less than 3 times) in a 'circular' manner from the main theme, alternating different episodes from each other. On this principle the novel "Singing



stones" was built. Already in the very shape of its embodiment this work accumulates a type of national thought – totally circular, presumptive, and contemplative.

Time in the national world outlook, has been dependent on changing rhythms, life-death-life, transformative: Chaos becomes Harmony, Harmony, being frustrated returns to Chaos in order to be embodied in a new quality. As explained by Karakozova Zh. K. and Hasanov M.S., this is determined by the historical area in which the nomadic nation dwelt – the steppe.

"In the steppe there was an obvious nature of Divinity, having circles everywhere, and the boundless space became a quality of this Divinity". All the land was for the nomad a circling sphere, because he migrated seven hundred kilometers circling from zhallau (summer living place) to kuzdeu (autumn place), and from kuzdeu to kystau (the winter place), from kystau to kokteu (the spring place), and again to zhailau. The laws of the circling movement gave the nomad Kazakhs the first imagines about the world" (8).

The compositional "solution" of the novel is a meaningful embodiment of *kuy*. This unique genre in the world culture differs with a peculiar division in three parts. Beginning his song from low, from mourning (memorial cry), the *akyn* (a poet improvisator) develops the theme, "by taking away" the sound high and enclosing the circle in the end.

"For the Kazakh people each musical theme was to be finished by a circle formula: such a composition brings, to the Kazakhs imagination, feelings of harmony and peace, and a balanced soul" (8).

The "Singing stones" begins as a "mourning of Doomsday": it expands gradually to the loss which is realized in the chain of tragic events in the hero's life: childhood in the aul (village), plagued by trials at the Semipalatinsk polygon; the death of the little sister; his mother's abandoning; his father's death; the need to adapt to the strange life in town; his wife's betrayal and the betrayal of his friend; slavery; hospital.

Finding himself in hospital, little Jan for the first time encounters an opportunity of full spiritual transformation, but its initiation is not done. As an adult, the young man came to the city, went to the university, became a scientist and even tried to write poems.

All his actions – marriage to Ainur who is beyond reach, the "hard" friendship with Arman, well-to-do and cynical, have been dictated by his previous fear of his shadow (M.-L. Fon France), i.e. by the unrealized or un-shown potential of the Ego-complex (9), a representation which comes forward as a mythical power – Erlig-Khan. In the novel there are present, not by case, "speaking names". So, Ainur ('lunar light' / 'a light of the moon') correlates with the plan of darkness, a motive of return to Chaos; Arman ('dream', 'illusion') also becomes a hermeneutic stimulus, by pointing to the illusion of Jan's current existence, the need to search for a certain truth.

When interpreting it in the novel this scene is remarkable. Jan, with foreboding, scrambles out on the second floor of the house where Arman lives. He is sure that he will find his wife and his friend in infidelity, and he was right in it. He stood stunned, so, by what he saw, Jan "fell down as a stone". In the language culture of the Kazakh ethnos "falling down" means the loss of living orientations, sinking into the unconscious, since the universe is vertical, penetrating three worlds. Dwelling in the middle world, a man has to strive for the high world; otherwise he/she is "summoned by hell". After long wandering Jan found himself in a desert (which is compared to the mouth of a dry river) and became a slave for the old man, Duysen-bakysy. Slavery in the nomad's life is equal to death. But, in Jan's case his death is the initiation, a required condition for the continuation of a *mindfully* life.

#### 4. THE INITIATION OF THE HERO AS A CULTURAL CODE

As before mentioned, the first initiation of Jan was not carried out *completely*. All his previous life had been a development of a scenario connected to the motive of *choice (selectivity)*. The early loss of his parents, the feelings of *world emptiness*, survival after his close to death condition, show as by the Turki faith, that the spirits choose him especially to serve people – the way of a shaman, or *bakysy*. According to research of Z. Nauryzbaeva, "a child – a potential shaman from the beginning doesn't belong to the human community, he is the chosen one by the spirits. They steal his bird-soul still before he is born (or in the childhood) and bring him up in their way, in the nest of the World Tree; during all the life they build the man to be a shaman, i.e. to approach them" (7). Sooner or later the chosen one makes his way to an initiation journey to the other world, known by his/her soul. In an unconscious state, the visionary, for a certain period wanders in wild terrains, standing aloof of people, or lies, fixed to a bed, not knowing the surroundings, in short - delirium.

Zhaksylykov realizes this mythic scenario step-by-step: Jan indeed found himself in a wild, unknown terrain (a desert), avoids meeting people, lies in an unconscious condition, delirium, dreams – gains experience of his own transpersonal emotional experiences. We don't mean that the hero

must become a real *baksy*, healer, hermit, because he himself is not in his imagination with a shape of a real man, but a *symbol of the human soul*. Since the narration touches, before all, on the metaphysics of reality, the mental and spiritual existence, *baksy* becomes a structure of psyche, a personification of Animus's, a stimulus of personal transformation. Hence, via the peripety of the cultural myth, he must be restored to a personal complete hero and the original completeness of the *symbol*.

To M. Eliade, mystic abilities of a human are evidence of the change of his social and personal appearances: a future shaman differs from the surroundings with his unusual manners, becomes pensive and dreamy, searches for solitude, wanders in forests and deserted terrains, has got visions, sings in his dreams and etc.

Before finding himself in the deserted terrain, Jan experienced everything described before:

*In the basis of any movement lies a world of emptiness.*

*I often like to be alone. I lock the door with two locks, pulling down the curtains in all the windows besides those of my study, tightly turn off the taps so the dripping sounds from the sink wouldn't bother my hear. When haunted and harassed and after long enough thoughts forgotten, around you begins a faraway movement. All your being is penetrated by feelings of a deepest unexpressed secret of the existence (4).*

The mystic mission is often accompanied by the deep crisis of identity of the neophyte, which becomes a fact of its particular initiation. In other words, all of the ways dictated to the shaman supposes a compulsory period of isolation from people so the candidate can experience physical and mental agony (6).

Finding himself in the desert, in the *boundary area*, Jan met his preceptor (tutor), Dyisenbaisbaksy, who assisted him in the initiation. The Shaman made Jan work hard, collect nephrites from the mouth of a dry river, and Jan was scourged without mercy in case of disobedience or blunder. As a reward for his hard labor Jan gets some *bread and wine*.

Nature parameters made the desert a place, physically and physiologically hard for a man; thus, the geographical condition has been fulfilled (finalized) by the means of potential connotation – “a trial site”, “a site of complicity with the God”, “a solitude site”. The desert tested the man, returning him to the condition of an “original virgin” by conscious asceticism. The concept of “desert” covers the following variants: 1) geographical object; 2) a site where a man is tested bodily; 3) a sacred solitude site, close to the God; 4) a site of spiritual ablation; 5) a site of temptation; 6) a site of initiation in the hero's life and his next transformation; 7) Purgatory.

Thus, this is the token of “beginning of the beginnings”. This semantics enable us to fathom the unconscious hero in the “Singing stones”:

*The steep and abrupt bank of the River Tyshkan. For a few days I've been wandering along the dry river-bed, gathering patterned occasionally beautiful pellets and putting them into a canvas bag hopping to find the desired nephrite (4).*

Noteworthy, that the hero's actions can be shown as “gathering stones”, that at under-text level correlates with Solomon's “The time of collecting stones” (verse, semantically connected with the previous “The time of casting stones”). In the adopted interpretation “collecting stones” represents the process of creation, restoration, and building from the beginning. In this way, we can decipher a symbol of the desert by A.Zhaksylykov as a “site of return to the origins and re-generation”. This is confirmed by the following episode. Once Jan found a strange and wonderful perfect round stone with the image of In-Yang, on the one side and a wonderful female profile on the other side. In-Yang in the Buddhist outlook means an indissoluble cosmic (space) dichotomy of light and dark, male and female, eternal and transient; this is a cosmogony sign.

The process of Jan had been assisted by Duysenbaksy. Still in the ancient Turki culture the *baksy* comes out as a creative and demiurgic hypostasis of the Sole (God). The main duty of a *baksy* in the archaic community was to cure, mentally (spiritually) and bodily. The *baksy* was esteemed as a defender of the human generation, leading him to struggle with the evil powers (a *baksy*'s attributes include various types of arms (weapons): a spear, a sword, a bow and arrows, lash and etc.)

In the general Turki mythology the shaman (*baksy*) was created by the Heaven as a mediator between the worlds. In the Kazakh folklore the patron of all the *baksy* was Qorqyt. For years Qorqyt wandered over the world searching for a place where there is no death, but he couldn't find such a place nowhere. Then he slaughtered his life companion, the magical camel and from his skin he made a musical tool, the *qobyz*. According to the legend, the *qobyz* can utter all the sounds of all alive and

non-alive nature. Thus, Qorqyt was able to overcome the death by his music. Music is harmonizing for the Kazakh nation, with the music they connect to the process of the first creation.

Duysen-baksy lives in the boundary area, at the river Khorgos, the real boundary between Kazakhstan and China. He dwells afar from people, as the rules require it; all his appearance is rich in theatrical elements: the narrator names him "a skilled actor", "a buffoon", 'gesticulating enthusiastically and violently' before the stunned crowd. Staging is a particular communicative strategy, a translative bridge between a sender (baksy) and his audience. According to the legend, a baksy goes to the afterlife in order to ask Erlig-khan welfare for his folk (nation). He is not allowed to tell what he had seen, but can describe this by pantomime, dance, circling, games, playing on a musical tool. From here the origin of the carnival actions, of the total magic in the discourses in which the baksy acts.

Duysen-baksy tests Jan not only by hard work and whaling at him, but he gives him stimulus to travel to his own unconscious condition, to meet with his Fear. Baksy shows the hero that his soul was arrested in Hell:

*In your breast sleeps a Dragon, and you live as a blind mole, and you are in filth (4).*

The mole, dwelling under the ground, is one of the representations of Erlig-Khan; this animal was created by the divinity of the underground world. The cosmogony Turki world connects with Erlig and filth: for the first time, when only exists the World Ocean, Erlig-Khan in the image of a duck dives in the deeps and bring out in his beak, filth (clay), from which the Universe was created. Thus, Erlig-Khan is considered one of the demiurges together with Tengri.

When a man's soul is under the lower world, a baksy makes his afterlife travel. It's considered that he brings rich gifts to the Lord of Hell, among them special wines, in order to smooth the God's soul so it won't harm the whole generation. From the aspect of this shaman myth the wine which Jan gets as fee for his labor, is a gift – given to Erlig-Khan. That has been summoned to liberate the consciousness and to give freedom.

By every day hard tests Jan becomes close to his clearing and blooming. He begins *dreaming*, goes into multilevel ecstatic Trans, returns to his childhood and sees, that the Fear which pursued him for years, was nothing but the summons (call) of the single Life.

The final stage of the initiation, as to M.Eliade, is the death in the afterlife. The visionary can be killed and divided by the spirits, which then eat him and collect him from his bones giving him a new flesh, or by the divinity.

In one of the last of his after lives, Jan receives an image of a malicious demon-asur and fights a dreaded goddess, Sarasvati, who overtakes him with a flaming vajra. In this part in the Turki myth this concept was taken from a fragment of the Buddhist religious view of the world, however the "scenario", the development of the events remains unchanged. Having been killed in the world of spirits, Jan returns to the earth in a new quality.

*The universe has been reformed for me. Unseen walls have been ruined. The world has been full with other light, and I have to know this novelty. Koke (father), the mountains are crying, can you hear? (4).*

Jan's heart has been full with gratitude for the old man, baksy; he doesn't need any wine and is able to consciously penetrate the Eternity. Into his ecstasy, flows of conscious are merging together, koke, the dear dead father and Koke, the creator, the Heaven and merciful, returning to the World Mountain (the symbol of Cosmos, the center of the world that means harmony and order).

In the boundary, at the river Khorgos, Jan is found by the frontier guards; he is taken to the hospital. He is visited by his wife, but then, in this synchronic section, she is not a part of his Ego-complex, his shadow, summoning to his renewal. She becomes a representative of the other, *already experienced* world. And now, we can reply to the question given before in the beginning. Sinking into the language culture space of the text has allowed us to come out beyond the plot and decipher the complicated system of internal motives of the hero, which in accordance with them; he embodied his life trajectory and gained the freedom.

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