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Erlan Zhünis's Poetry: Archetypes of Road, Time, and Cosmos – A Synthesis of Existential and Love Lyric

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive analysis of contemporary Kazakh poet Erlan Zhünis's work through the interrelated lenses of space–time unity, archetypal imagery, and existential depth. The research integrates Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope theory, Yuri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere, Carl G. Jung's archetypal psychology, and the existential philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus within a single methodological framework. The primary focus is the recurring symbols and motifs of the collections *Zholzhazba*, *Zhürek Mausymdary* (Heart Seasons), and *Shughylaly Tün* (Radiant Night): the road, steppe, star, sand, and "blue city". The findings reveal that Zhünis presents space and time as an inseparable whole of profound philosophical significance. Images such as the "black road," "yellow steppe," and "balbal stone" function as archetypes of national memory, ancestral spirit, and eternal motion. Star and cosmic motifs express humanity's yearning for infinity and spiritual wholeness, while urban scenes of the "blue city" embody the dialogue between tradition and modern civilization. Past, present, and future converge in a single poetic continuum fusing mythic heritage with contemporary sensibility. From an existential perspective, the lyrical protagonist confronts solitude, radical freedom, and the quest for meaning. The triptych *Heart Seasons* stages the temporal cycle "Past – Now – Coming Day," highlighting love and hope as enduring forces, whereas *Radiant Night* merges cosmic night with sensual imagery, dissolving the boundaries between body and spirit. By uniting national archetypes with global philosophical currents, Erlan Zhünis expands the expressive potential of Kazakh lyric poetry and elevates it to a phenomenon of universal significance.

Keywords: Erlan Zhünis, chronotope, archetype, symbolism, existentialism.

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Аннотация

Бұл мақала қазіргі қазақ поэзиясының көрнекті өкілі Ерлан Жүніс шығармашылығын кеңістік–уақыт тұтастығы, архетиптік бейнелер және экзистенциалдық тереңдік тұрғысынан кешенді түрде талдауға арналған. Зерттеу барысында М. Бахтиннің хронотоп теориясы, Ю.М. Лотманның семиосфера тұжырымдамасы, К.Г. Юнгтің архетиптер ілімі, сонымен бірге Ж.-П. Сартр мен А. Камюдің экзистенциализм қағидаттары біртұтас әдістемелік жүйеде қолданылады. Негізгі талдау нысаны – ақынның «Жолжазба», «Жүрек маусымдары», «Шұғылалы түн» өлеңдеріндегі жол, дала, жұлдыз, құм, көк қала сынды қайталамалы поэтикалық бейнелер мен символдық құрылымдар. Нәтижелер ақын поэзиясында кеңістік пен уақыттың ажырамас бірлігі терең философиялық мәнге ие екенін көрсетеді. «Қара жол», «сары

дала», «балбал тас» тәрізді образдар ұлттық жад пен ата-баба рухын, мәңгілік қозғалыс пен тіршіліктің шексіздігін білдіретін архетиптер ретінде айқындалады. Жұлдыз бен ғарыш мотивтері адамның шексіздікке, рухани тұтастыққа ұмтылысын, ал «көк қала» мен урбанистік көріністер дәстүр мен заманауи өркениеттің тоғысын бейнелейді. Ақын поэтикасында өткен, бүгін және болашақ бір ғана хронотоптық кеңістікке тоғысып, ұлттық мифтік жады мен қазіргі замандық сезімдерді бір арнада біріктіреді. Экзистенциалдық қырынан Жүніс кейіпкері жалғыздық, таңдау еркіндігі және өмірдің мәнін іздеу мәселелерін көтереді. «Жүрек маусымдары» триптихіндегі «Өткен – Қазір – Келер күн» үлгісі адамның өмірлік айналымын, махаббат пен үміттің мәңгілік сипатын паш етеді. «Шұғылалы түн» жинағындағы ғарыштық түн мен нәзік сезімнің астасуы тән мен рухтың тұтасқан сәтін көрсетеді. Осылайша, Ерлан Жүніс поэзиясы ұлттық архетиптер мен әлемдік философиялық ағымдарды органикалық біріктіріп, қазақ лирикасының көркемдік ауқымын кеңейтеді және оны әлемдік әдебиет деңгейіндегі әмбебап құбылыс дәрежесіне көтереді.

Кілт сөздер: Ерлан Жүніс, хронотоп, архетип, символизм, экзистенциализм.

Поэзия Ерлана Жүніс: Архетипы дороги, времени и космоса – Синтез экзистенциальной и любовной лирики

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Аннотация

В статье представлен всесторонний анализ творчества современного казахского поэта Ерлана Жүніс с позиций единства пространства и времени, архетипической образности и экзистенциальной глубины. Исследование опирается на теорию хронотопа М. Бахтина, концепцию семиосферы Ю.М. Лотмана, архетипическую психологию К. Г. Юнга, а также экзистенциальную философию Ж.-П. Сартра и А. Камю, объединённых в единую методологическую систему. Основное внимание уделяется повторяющимся символам и мотивам в стихах Жолжазба, Жүрек маусымдары («Сезоны сердца») и Шұғылалы түн («Лучезарная ночь»). Результаты показывают, что у Ерлана Жүніс пространство и время образуют неразрывное целое с глубоким философским смыслом. Образы «чёрной дороги», «жёлтой степи» и «балбал-камня» выступают архетипами национальной памяти, духа предков и вечного движения. Мотивы звезды и космоса выражают стремление человека к бесконечности и духовной целостности, а городские картины «синего города» воплощают диалог традиции и современной цивилизации. Прошлое, настоящее и будущее сливаются в едином поэтическом хронотопе, объединяя мифологическое наследие с чувствами современности. С экзистенциальной точки зрения лирический герой переживает одиночество, свободу выбора и поиск смысла. Триптих «Сезоны сердца» строится по схеме «Прошлое – Настоящее – Грядущий день», раскрывая вечность любви и надежды, а в «Лучезарной ночи» космическая ночь соединяется с чувственной образностью, стирая границы между телом и духом. Таким образом, соединяя национальные архетипы с мировыми философскими течениями, Ерлан Жүніс расширяет выразительные возможности казахской лирики и поднимает её до уровня универсального художественного явления.

Ключевые слова: Ерлан Жүніс, хронотоп, архетип, символизм, экзистенциализм.

1. Introduction

Kazakh poetry of the 21st century merges tradition and innovation, intertwining national archetypes with global poetic explorations. A vivid representative of this new wave is Erlan Zhūnis. His collections Zholzazba, Zhūrek Mausymdary, and Shughylaly Tūn create a poetic universe where

space and time, love and solitude, city and steppe coalesce. In Zhūnis's poems the steppe archetype and the urban chronotope, cosmic images and existential reflection form an integrated artistic system.

To interpret this poetic phenomenon it is essential to draw on several theoretical approaches in contemporary literary studies.

Bakhtin's chronotope theory (1981) defines the inseparability of time and space in a literary text. In Zholtzhazba, lines such as "The black road lengthens in spirals" and "Tears fall from the eyes of the migrating people" intertwine the transience of time and the dynamism of space, depicting the lyrical protagonist's existential journey.

Existentialism further illuminates the poet's vision. Sartre (1943) and Camus (1942) describe the human search for meaning amid solitude and the "absurd." Zhūnis's images—"In the pale steppe a wolf howls at dusk" or "Black road, black road, how shall I go?" – echo the dramatic relationship between humanity and eternity, reflecting the quest for meaning in a world devoid of inherent sense (Camus, 1942).

Symbolism and semiotics, developed from Bryusov (1904) and Blok (1910) and advanced by Lotman (1992), clarify the poet's recurring motifs of star, cosmos, road, and flower. In the triptych Shughylaly Tūn, the line "Stars drift, stars drift away" turns the star into a semiotic symbol of freedom and eternity.

Mythopoetics and archetypes also play a key role. Jung (2009) viewed archetypes as universal images of the collective unconscious, while Meletinsky (1995) traced their revival in literature. Zhūnis's images of steppe, migration, balbal stones, and the "blue city" recall Turkic cosmology and the nomadic memory of the Kazakh people. Lines such as "No roaming ridge, no hill untrodden" awaken deep mythic associations of ancestral homeland.

Kazakh literary scholarship supports these theoretical directions. The fusion of love and cosmic feeling is another striking feature. In Zhūrek Mausymdary, time is divided into three stages – "In the Past," "Right Now", and "On the Coming Day" – each interwoven with the experience of love. Lines such as "Hearts breathing with the cosmos, throbbing then falling silent" equate love with the infinite universe, a cosmic metaphor rare in Kazakh poetry and evidence of Zhūnis's innovative poetics.

At the same time, his urban images do not oppose the traditional steppe but merge into a single poetic space. Details like "blue city, crowded people" indicate the steady establishment of city culture in national poetry, resonating with the broader modernization of contemporary Kazakh literature.

Grounded in these theoretical premises, this study aims to examine comprehensively the archetypes of road, time, and cosmos in Erlan Zhūnis's poetry and to reveal their national and universal philosophical meanings. The objectives are to:

- interpret the space-time concept in the poet's works through Bakhtin's (1981) chronotope;
- identify the semiotic functions of key symbols – road, steppe, city, star, cosmos – using Lotman's (1992) framework;
- show their connection to Turkic mythopoetics through Jung's (2009) archetypal theory;
- explain the human longing for eternity and spiritual solitude via existential philosophy (Camus, 1942; Sartre, 1943).

The novelty of this research lies in considering Erlan Zhūnis's creative work within both national literary tradition and global theoretical discourse (chronotope, symbolism, existentialism, archetypes). Such an approach exposes the integrated artistic structure of his poetry, uniting steppe and city, love and cosmic sensation, history and modernity. In this way, Zhūnis's lyrical universe emerges as a defining phenomenon of new Kazakh poetry, synthesizing space and time, national archetypes and global philosophy.

2. Literature Review

Although there are few studies devoted exclusively to the poetry of Erlan Zhūnis, a wide range of foundational theoretical and literary works provide a solid framework for interpreting his art within a broader context. The following review highlights key sources on poetics, chronotope theory, existentialism, mythopoetics, and modern lyric that inform a critical analysis of his verse.

To understand the unity of space and time in poetic texts, Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) is essential, introducing the concept of the chronotope and analyzing the inseparability of temporal and spatial dimensions in literature (De Fina, 2022; Ritella et al., 2021). Lotman's *The Semiosphere* (1992) extends this idea by viewing culture as a semiotic system, which is useful for interpreting Zhūnis's recurring symbols—stars, roads, and cities—as cultural codes. Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977) and Michel Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces" (1986) offer further philosophical insights into space as lived experience and as a field of power, enriching a reading of poetic space.

The relationship between human beings and the universe, and the search for meaning in solitude, can be illuminated through existentialist theory. Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) articulate the quest for meaning in an "absurd" world, concepts that resonate with Zhūnis's images of boundless roads and silent steppes. Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927/2008) explores the temporal nature of existence, while Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1992) addresses faith and hope. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) links the body's spatial experience to the interpretation of poetic imagery.

Symbolism and semiotics further clarify Zhūnis's imagistic system. Valery Bryusov's *Symbolism* (1904) and Aleksandr Blok's essays on symbolism (1910) outline the multilayered nature of the poetic symbol. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1921) and Roland Barthes's *Image, Music, Text* (1977) examine ambiguity and intertextuality, while Roman Jakobson's "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" (1960) provides tools for analyzing poetic language.

For mythopoetic perspectives, C. G. Jung's *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (2009) remains fundamental, describing archetypes as universal images within the collective psyche. Meletinsky's *The Poetics of Myth* (1995) explores the renewal of mythic thinking in literature, and Mircea Eliade's *Myth and Reality* (1963) reveals the enduring role of myth in culture. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) clarifies the archetype of the hero's journey, while Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) maps mythic structures across literary genres.

Broader approaches to poetic analysis are provided by Laurence Perrine's *Sound and Sense* (1983) on verse form and sound patterns, Terry Eagleton's *How to Read a Poem* (2003), and Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2014). Contemporary studies of urban poetics, such as Lisa Glaz's "Contemporary Urban Poetics: Space and Identity" (2018) and Harry Smith's *Modern Lyric: Theory and Practice* (2016), help situate Zhūnis's imagery of city and steppe within modern global lyric trends.

While not focused solely on Erlan Zhūnis, provide a robust theoretical foundation for interpreting his poetry. Chronotope theory illuminates the road, steppe, and migration motifs; existentialism explains his themes of solitude and spiritual searching; symbolism and semiotics clarify images of stars, cosmos, and flowers; and mythopoetics and archetypal theory reveal the echoes of Turkic cosmology. Their synthesis enables a comprehensive evaluation of Zhūnis's lyric art within both the national tradition and the wider world literature context.

3. Methodology

This study focuses on Erlan Zhūnis's poetry collections *Zholzhazba*, *Zhūrek Mausymdary*, and *Shughylaly Tūn*, aiming to examine the spatial-temporal structures, symbolic imagery, and philosophical dimensions of his work through a multi-layered research design. The methodology integrates textual-poetic analysis, mythopoetic and archetypal inquiry, semiotic examination, existential-philosophical interpretation, and comparative literary approaches. Each component is outlined below.

3.1. Textual-Poetic Analysis

The first stage investigates the internal structure of Zhūnis's poems. Drawing on Laurence Perrine's (1983) concept of harmony between sound and meaning and Roman Jakobson's (1960)

notion of the “poetic function,” the study analyzes rhythmic–syntactic patterns, sound repetitions, meter, and intonation. Key lexical items—“road,” “star,” “blue city,” “steppe,” “sand” – are traced for frequency and semantic shifts. The composition of the triptych cycles (Zhürek Mausymdary, Shughylaly Tün) is examined to reveal connections among individual poems.

3.2. Chronotope and Space–Time Concept

The second stage applies M. M. Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of the chronotope to uncover the unity of time and space in Zhünis’s verse. Images such as “The black road lengthens in spirals” and “Tears fall from the eyes of the migrating people” demonstrate movement as time crossing space, while seasonal metaphors like “The moon sinks gently into autumn” symbolize cosmic temporality. This lens clarifies how past, present, and future merge in a single poetic continuum.

3.3. Mythopoetic and Archetypal Analysis

National cultural memory surfaces in images of “steppe”, “balbal stone”, “migration”, “sand”, and “sky”. Guided by C. G. Jung’s theory of archetypes (2009) and E. M. Meletinsky’s mythopoetics (1995), the study interprets these motifs as universal structures of the collective unconscious. The “steppe” evokes origin and eternity, the “road” signifies human destiny, and the “star” functions as a spiritual guide. Nomadic symbols such as “paired dun colors”, “migrating people”, and “balbal stones” are compared with Turkic cosmology.

3.4. Semiotic Examination

Using Y. M. Lotman’s *The Semiosphere* (1992), the research treats recurring motifs – stars, cosmos, flowers, city – as cultural signs. Each detail, including subtle images like “silk dress”, “moon flowers”, and “whirlwind” is read as part of an interrelated sign system within Kazakh and global semiotic fields.

3.5. Existential–Philosophical Interpretation

Themes of solitude, endless quest, and freedom invite an existential reading. Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and Albert Camus’s *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) help explain the tension between humanity and eternity, as in the line “In the pale steppe a wolf howls at dusk”. Camus’s concept of the absurd frames the poet’s portrayal of searching for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

3.6. Comparative Literature Approach

Zhünis’s urban lyric is placed in dialogue with Russian Symbolists (A. Blok, V. Bryusov), European Modernists (T. S. Eliot), and traditional Turkic verse. This comparison highlights the fusion of national heritage and modernist innovation in his poetic language.

3.7. Sources and Materials

Primary materials include Zhünis’s published collections from 2010–2020, alongside Kazakh literary criticism and the key theoretical works cited above (Bakhtin, 1981; Jung, 2009; Lotman, 1992; Camus, 1942; Sartre, 1943; Heidegger, 2008, etc.). All poems are examined in their original Kazakh texts to capture stylistic and semantic nuances.

3.8. Rationale for the Multi-Method Design

Combining these approaches makes it possible to reveal the multi-layered nature of Zhünis’s poetry. Textual analysis uncovers inner form; the chronotope illuminates the model of space and time; mythopoetics and archetypes expose cultural memory; semiotics deciphers symbolic codes; and existential philosophy clarifies the human quest for meaning. This integrative methodology situates Erlan Zhünis’s work at the intersection of national tradition and global modernist currents, enabling a comprehensive understanding of his spatial – temporal, archetypal, and symbolic artistry.

4. Results

4.1 Space–Time Chronotope

One of the most striking features of Erlan Zhūnis's poetic universe is the inseparable unity of time and space. M. M. Bakhtin (1981), who introduced the concept of the “chronotope”, emphasized the indivisibility of temporal and spatial dimensions in a literary work. Zhūnis's Zholtzhazba cycle provides vivid confirmation of this idea. Here the image of the “road” represents not only the lyrical persona's inner spiritual movement but also the long journey of history and destiny. In lines such as “The black road lengthens in spirals, perhaps the distant steppe wishes to twist it”, space (the steppe) and time (ceaseless motion) complement each other, creating a chronotopic vision of eternal movement.

Temporal measurement is also revealed through seasonal cycles. Phrases like “The moon sinks gently into autumn” and the tripartite structure “Past – Right Now – The Coming Day” in Zhūrek Mausymdary overlay natural and philosophical time. This is a classic example of Bakhtin's “road chronotope”: the traveler's path becomes a metaphor for human existence, linking past and future.

The poet's model of space is equally layered. Describing the steppe as “a beggar hill, a widowed ridge, an orphaned sky”, Zhūnis awakens historical and cultural memory, echoing Jung's (2009) archetype of the Earth Mother. Urban details such as the “blue city” and “crowded people” introduce modern cityscapes, yet they do not oppose the steppe; rather, they merge into a single, unified expanse.

Time in Zhūnis's chronotope often assumes a cyclical character. Lines like “At times she dances naked as a girl, at times whirls like a bird” symbolize both nature's eternal return and the stages of human life, resonating with Eliade's (1963) myth of eternal recurrence.

Thus, space and time in the poet's work are not merely background elements but fundamental poetic structures that frame the protagonist's existential search. Steppe and city, past and future, movement and stillness all converge into a single chronotope, giving Zhūnis's lyric poetry a broad philosophical scope.

4.2 Symbolic System

The most intricate and profound layer of Erlan Zhūnis's poetry is its rich symbolic imagery. Repeated key motifs may appear to be simple lyrical details, yet each forms a conceptual core of his poetic world. Here, Y. M. Lotman's (1992) semiotic theory of the symbol as cultural code, along with the ideas of European Symbolists such as V. Bryusov (1904), A. Blok (1910), and Roland Barthes (1977), provides critical insight.

In the Shughylaly Tūn triptych, lines like “Stars drift, stars drift away” and “Countless lights cover the sky” present the star not as an astronomical object but as a symbol of eternity and infinity. The star becomes the soul's light, a spiritual compass for the seeker of life's meaning. From a mythopoetic perspective (Jung, 2009; Eliade, 1963), the star joins heaven and earth, shaping destiny. Zhūnis fuses this archetype with urban space to express human oneness with the cosmos: “Hearts breathing with the cosmos, throbbing then falling silent”. Here the human heart is part of a cosmic rhythm, a fragment of eternal movement.

Among the most persistent symbols is the “road”. Refrains such as “The black road lengthens in spirals” and “Oh, black road, black road, how shall I go?” cast the road as the emblem of endless motion and existential quest. As Bakhtin's (1981) “road chronotope” suggests, the road is the space of spiritual transformation. Zhūnis at times likens it to “a bird whose wings are wearied”, at times to “a bird's wing ablaze”, embodying fate's uncertainty and the tension of hope and fear.

The steppe serves as a national archetype. Phrases like “a beggar hill, a widowed ridge, an orphaned sky” evoke an empty yet historically resonant landscape. This is the Kazakh manifestation of Jung's (2009) Great Mother: the steppe as origin, memory, and primal source. Seemingly opposed images of “blue city” and “crowded people” signify modern urban civilization, yet the poet does not set them against the steppe; instead, they form a single poetic whole, creating a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Sand carries special significance: “My twin duns, born of this sand, slowly

melt back into it” conveys transience, generational continuity, and the natural law of death and renewal, aligning with Eliade’s (1963) view of natural elements as symbols of the sacred.

Flowers symbolize not only love and youth but also the delicate, transient beauty of life. In Zhürek Mausymdary we read, “Crowning your hair with blue flowers”, and “Every word buds with a flower of happiness”, where the flower signifies emotional renewal and the inner spring of the soul. This motif echoes the “eternal feminine” of Blok’s (1910) Symbolist poetry. The link between flowers, spring, youth, and tenderness deepens the metaphysical dimension of the love lyric.

Motifs of water and moon embody the cyclical movement of nature. Images such as “A tiny pool, just one sip” and “Moon flowers blossoming” associate them with life, death, and rebirth. Night becomes the realm of spiritual depth and hidden love: “The July night rustles like a silk dress”, a moment where romance and mystery converge.

Zhünis’s symbolic system is not a set of isolated images but a unified cultural semiosphere. The star represents eternity; the road, motion; the steppe, origin; the city, contemporary civilization; sand, time; the flower, love; and the night, mystery. These motifs intersect to form the triad “human–world–cosmos”. As Lotman (1992) notes, each sign in a cultural text engages in dialogue with others, and in Zhünis’s poetry the symbols overlap to create multilayered meaning: the road leads to the star, the star to the cosmos, and the cosmos back to the human heart.

Overall, Erlan Zhünis’s symbolic system fuses traditional Turkic mythology with modern urban culture. Viewed through the lenses of Jung’s archetypes (2009), Bakhtin’s chronotope (1981), Lotman’s semiotics (1992), and Barthes’s textual polyphony (1977), his symbols emerge not merely as aesthetic devices but as profound philosophical categories. Stars and roads, steppe and city, sand and flowers—all serve as multivalent signs that address humanity’s timeless questions. This layered symbolism amplifies the artistic power of Zhünis’s poetry, making it a distinctive phenomenon within contemporary Kazakh literature.

4.3 Archetypal Images

Archetypes form the deep structural core of Erlan Zhünis’s poetic universe. Recurrent images such as the steppe, road, balbal stone, paired dun colors, blue city, star, and cosmos link his verse both to ancient Kazakh worldviews and to the universal symbols of the collective unconscious. C.G. Jung (2009) describes archetypes as primordial structures rooted in the depths of human consciousness and originating in mythic thought—an insight that precisely characterizes Zhünis’s fusion of space and time.

The archetype of the steppe occupies a central place. Phrases like “the yellow steppe thinned, its flesh worn away, a beggar hill, a widowed ridge, an orphaned sky” present the steppe not merely as geography but as a sacred locus of national history, ancestral spirit, and eternal origin. Following Eliade’s (1963) notion of “eternal return”, Zhünis sacralizes space and time, making the steppe a symbol of cultural memory, primal source, infinity, and at times existential solitude.

The road also bears archetypal weight. Echoing Bakhtin’s (1981) “road chronotope”, Zhünis’s road embodies the endless journey, spiritual quest, and passage of existence. Lines such as “The black road lengthens in spirals, perhaps the distant steppe wishes to twist it” convey ceaseless motion and humanity’s striving for the eternal. The road is not just movement but time itself – a symbolic bridge uniting past and future.

The image of the balbal stone signals ancient Turkic mythology and ancestor veneration. In “Leaning on the balbal stone, I dozed, and when I opened my eyes: a blue city, a throng of people”, the stone stands as witness to history and the spiritual link between generations. From a Jungian perspective, it evokes the “ancestor archetype”, representing the permanence of memory and the gravity of time, while the poet drowsing beside it suggests a fusion of personal consciousness with historical time.

The motif of paired dun colors (qos qongyr) reflects not just hue, but the dual structures embedded in Kazakh culture – light and dark, life and death, beginning and ending. “My twin duns,

born of this sand, slowly melt back into it” expresses the unity of life and mystery, the human merging with nature, and, as Eliade (1963) notes, the perpetual regeneration of the natural world.

The blue city introduces an urban landscape but also functions archetypally. City imagery symbolizes not only civilization but the site of inner trials. Jung’s (2009) concept of the “shadow” – the hidden contradictions of the psyche – intersects with the city motif, underscoring the lyrical persona’s solitude. The color blue in Kazakh mythology connotes sky and the supernatural; thus the “blue city” becomes a threshold between transcendence and earthly life.

Motifs of star and cosmos likewise retain archetypal resonance (Heidegger, 2011). The star, a universal sign of destiny and spiritual guidance, appears in lines such as “Stars drift away” and “Hearts breathing with the cosmos”, where human and universe converge. Read through Jung’s Self archetype, these images express the drive toward inner wholeness and cosmic harmony.

All these images interconnect (Collinson, 2021). The steppe and road construct a space of eternal movement; the balbal stone preserves ancestral memory; the blue city marks civilization and spiritual testing; the star and cosmos embody infinity and hope. Their interplay exemplifies Lotman’s (1992) “cultural semiosphere”, where every sign enters dialogue with others to create a unified network of meanings.

Thus, in Zhūnis’s poetry, archetypes are not mere remnants of folklore but enduring philosophical categories resonant with modern spiritual concerns. By merging traditional Turkic cosmology with contemporary urban reality, these archetypes deepen the poet’s artistic vision and elevate his lyric art to a phenomenon of universal significance.

4.4 Existential Motifs and Close Reading of Selected Poems

Erlan Zhūnis’s poetry stands out for its philosophical intensity and its drive to probe the deepest layers of human existence. His lyrical speaker grapples with solitude and hope, infinity and the limits of mortal life—an approach that resonates with Jean-Paul Sartre’s assertion that “man is condemned to be free” (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943) and Albert Camus’s concept of the “absurd” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942). Read through the lens of existentialism, each symbolic detail in Zhūnis’s verse becomes a sign of the dramatic relationship between humanity and the universe.

From the opening of the *Zholzhazba* cycle, the eternal movement of time and the loneliness of the human condition are vividly depicted:

“What village is this, the final village,
The signpost’s letters unreadable.
As if the bird’s wings tired in the distant steppe,
As if the bird’s wings burned in a sudden blaze!”

The nameless village symbolizes an endless quest, while the unreadable signpost signals life’s lack of clear direction. Phrases like “a bird’s wings tired” and “a bird’s wings burned” convey both the passage of time and the boundlessness of space. As Sartre argues, a person must create meaning through action, yet Zhūnis’s speaker sets out on a journey without ever finding the “final village”, embodying existential solitude.

Later stanzas deepen the sense of historical distance:

“The yellow steppe thinned, its flesh worn away,
A beggar hill, a widowed ridge, an orphaned sky.
Unless one says this is my ancestor’s resting place,
The child will never stop there.”

Metaphors such as “widowed ridge” and “orphaned sky” suggest the erosion of time and a break in collective memory. Through Jung’s (2009) “ancestor archetype”, the poem evokes a fading cultural consciousness, even as the speaker searches for personal meaning within that emptiness.

The journey continues:

“Oh, black road, black road, how shall I go,
No one to watch along the way.
In the pale steppe a wolf howls at dusk,

A child tugs at the wolf's breast."

Here the "black road" embodies the uncertainty of life's path. The wolf's howl evokes fear and isolation. Camus's absurd hero confronts a world devoid of ultimate meaning but chooses to persist; Zhünis's traveler likewise walks a path where "no one watches", aware of the lack of final answers yet committed to motion.

In *Zhürek Mausymdary (Heart Seasons)*, the triptych "Past – Right Now – The Coming Day" explores the philosophy of time through love. The first part captures the ardor of youth:

"In the past, at the start of life,

With a heart yearning for spring..."

The second reflects the melancholy of memory:

"Right now... in another city,

Someone is thinking of you..."

The final section offers hope for the future:

"Perhaps on your very street,

Perhaps in the central square,

For that dreamer, that wanderer,

Meadows, rivers, forests will appear..."

Time's three phases embody not only a human life cycle but also Camus's call to love life despite its absurdity.

Cosmic dimensions emerge in the *Shughylaly Tün (Radiant Night)* triptych. In the second part, the speaker describes:

"Night thick with stars,

When the sky longs for the earth,

And the earth reveals its secrets to the sky..."

The union of human heart and starry sky recalls Jung's archetype of the Self: the search for wholeness and harmony with the cosmos. In the third section, sensual and cosmic images merge:

"The July night rustles like a silk dress,

About to slip from your shoulders..."

Here the boundaries between body and infinity dissolve, revealing an experience where love and cosmic wonder are one.

Even Zhünis's brief lyrics pulse with existential depth. In the poem beginning "If only your heart were made of light...", the heart becomes a symbol of eternal love and spiritual completeness. Lines such as "If only your heart were a pen, I would write until the world renews" express the endless human search for meaning: love and creativity as forces that give life purpose.

Across these examples, Zhünis enacts the core principles of existentialism – solitude, freedom, choice, and the drive toward eternity – within a distinctly Kazakh poetic idiom. Bakhtin's (1981) chronotope frames this existential journey: the road signifies perpetual motion, the steppe an infinite expanse, and the star an emblem of hope and the eternal. Sartre's and Camus's ideas thus become vivid poetic images, conveying humanity's spiritual quest and its confrontation with the mystery of existence.

In this way, every stanza of Erlan Zhünis's poetry functions as a meeting point of national poetic tradition and global philosophy. The traveler's path, the gaze toward the stars, the night's mysterious touch—all express a profound movement toward self-knowledge and transcendence, marking Zhünis's work as a significant existential phenomenon in contemporary Kazakh literature.

5. Discussion

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Erlan Zhünis's poetic system emerges at the intersection of national tradition and world literary thought. The evidence confirms that his oeuvre marks a major new stage in Kazakh lyric poetry. The inseparable unity of space and time, the multilayered symbolism, and the existential depth of his verse all support this conclusion.

The integration of space and time is particularly striking. From the opening line of Zholzhazba – “The black road lengthens in spirals” – the philosophical dimension of Zhūnis’s vision is evident. In Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, the road functions as a chronotope that embodies both a spiritual journey and the endless motion of life itself. The road is not merely a geographical route but a metaphor for self-discovery and the ceaseless flow of existence, where forward movement also entails inner reflection and trust in the future. Images such as the “widowed ridge” and “orphaned sky” evoke wounds of time and fragments of history while suggesting an unbroken thread of ancestral continuity. Thus the poet renews the Kazakh worldview of a holistic space-time model.

Symbolism is another defining feature of Zhūnis’s art. The imagery of stars and the cosmos occupies a central role: the star is a sign of eternity, hope, and spiritual guidance. Lines like “Hearts breathing with the cosmos, throbbing and silent” equate the human inner world with cosmic movement, recalling Blok’s (1910) symbolist harmony between heaven and soul. Yet Zhūnis does not limit this motif to European symbolism; he also connects the star to the eternal sky of ancient Turkic cosmology. This dual coding exemplifies Lotman’s (1992) semiosphere, in which each symbol carries both national memory and universal meaning.

Equally important is the dialogue between steppe and city. The steppe serves as an archetype of origin and infinity, while the city represents contemporary civilization. Zhūnis never opposes them; instead, he fuses them into a single poetic landscape. References to the “blue city, dense with people” highlight the interaction of urban modernity and nomadic heritage. Following Eliade’s (1963) view that mythic thought unites the sacred and the everyday, the poet introduces this very unity into modern Kazakh verse.

Archetypal images underscore his reach into the collective unconscious. Jung’s (2009) “ancestor” archetype is vividly present when the speaker leans upon the “balbal stone”, that silent witness of history preserving ancestral spirit. The paired dun colors (qos qongyr) signify the dualities of life and death, light and darkness, beginning and end. Sand becomes a sign of transience and eternity at once: “My twin duns, born of this sand, slowly melt back into it”, revealing the human condition before time’s inevitability.

From an existential perspective, Zhūnis portrays the encounter of humanity and cosmos with exceptional depth. Camus’s (1942) “absurd” – the insistence on living despite life’s lack of ultimate meaning – finds expression in lines such as “Oh, black road, black road, how shall I go, with no one watching along the way”. The lyrical traveler knows that life offers no final answers, yet continues the journey. Sartre’s (1943) principle of radical freedom likewise resonates: each person bears responsibility for the path chosen.

Love in Zhūnis’s work operates on the same philosophical plane. In the Heart Seasons triptych, the temporal stages of “Past – Right Now – Coming Day” present youthful desire, present longing, and future hope as one continuous cycle. The lines “Right now... in another city, someone is thinking of you” convey both human helplessness before time and a persistent faith in the future.

The poet’s treatment of night and the cosmos further illustrates his metaphysical range. In Radiant Night, the line “The July night rustles like a silk dress, about to slip from your shoulders” transforms night into a metaphorical realm of cosmic unity, where body and spirit, time and eternity merge (Heidegger, 2021).

Together these observations confirm that Erlan Zhūnis’s poetry is a creative phenomenon that elevates national tradition to a new philosophical level (Fredriksson, 2022). He fuses mythic imagery of the Turkic steppe with the urban space of modernity and integrates global philosophical ideas – existentialism, symbolism – into Kazakh verse. Each symbol functions not merely as an aesthetic detail but as a philosophical category expressing humanity’s timeless search for meaning.

Thus, the analysis shows that Zhūnis’s work transcends national boundaries and speaks to universal concerns. He expands the expressive potential of the Kazakh language, weaving world literature’s philosophical currents into traditional poetics. Bakhtin’s chronotope, Jung’s archetypes, and the existential insights of Camus and Sartre all find vivid embodiment in his lines, offering new energy and direction to contemporary Kazakh poetry.

6. Conclusion

A comprehensive study of Erlan Zhūnis's poetry through the lenses of space–time unity, symbolic structure, and existential depth reveals the multilayered nature of his creative world. Recurrent images – road, steppe, sand, star, cosmos, blue city – illustrate the inseparable bond of space and time described by Bakhtin (1981). The road symbolizes eternal motion and the search for destiny; the steppe embodies national memory and primal origins. Through this poetic chronotope, Zhūnis unites past, present, and future within a single imaginative space.

His symbolic system, viewed through Lotman's (1992) semiosphere, fuses Kazakh tradition with global literary codes: the star stands for eternity and hope, the city for modern civilization and spiritual testing, the night for cosmic mystery and love. These symbols interact dialogically, showing the poet's mastery of both national heritage and international modernism.

The archetypal layer aligns with Jung's (2009) theory of the collective unconscious. Balbal stones, wandering caravans, paired duns, and the steppe revive Turkic mythopoetic memory and link the individual to the unbroken chain of ancestors.

Existential themes resonate with Camus's (1942) concept of the absurd and Sartre's (1943) idea of radical freedom. Lines such as "Black road, black road, how shall I go" embody solitude, directionlessness, and the will to continue. The temporal triptych of Heart Seasons – past, present, future – captures both human frailty before time and enduring hope.

In sum, Erlan Zhūnis's poetry is a major aesthetic phenomenon where tradition and innovation meet. By merging national archetypes with contemporary urban imagery and global philosophical ideas, he expands the expressive power of Kazakh verse and elevates it to a plane of universal significance.

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Author Contributions

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Data Availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are drawn from publicly available sources cited within the text. Additional information can be obtained directly from the author upon reasonable request.

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