



## THE ROLE OF NATURE IN LITERARY WORKS ACROSS CULTURES: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS SYMBOLISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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*ABSTRACT:* The aim of this study was to examine the role of nature as a cultural and philosophical phenomenon in the literature of various cultural traditions. The research employed methods of comparative literary analysis, including textual interpretation and the identification of key functions of nature in works from diverse traditions, such as Kyrgyz, Japanese, American, Germanic, and French literature. Particular attention was paid to analysing the symbolic and philosophical significance of natural imagery, its functions within literary works, and the contexts in which it acquires unique meaning depending on cultural and historical conditions. The findings revealed that nature fulfilled multiple functions in literature: from serving as a backdrop shaping the emotional tone of a work to functioning as a complex philosophical symbol embodying ideas of harmony, freedom, and conflict. In Kyrgyz literature, nature was interpreted as a symbol of resilience and national identity. Japanese literature emphasised the ephemerality and harmony of nature, underscoring its philosophical

significance. In American literature, natural imagery was depicted as a space for struggle and spiritual growth, while in Germanic literature, it symbolised the unity of humanity and the cosmos, as well as the pursuit of freedom. French literature used nature to contrast with urban environments, highlighting the internal and spiritual conflicts of characters. The analysis demonstrated the importance of further research into the symbolism of nature in understudied literary traditions, which would deepen our understanding of its cultural and philosophical dimensions. The study confirmed the universality of natural imagery in literature while revealing its cultural specificity. Nature emerged as a multifaceted element of literary creativity, reflecting both shared philosophical ideas and the distinct worldviews of different cultures.

**KEYWORDS:** Interpretation, socio-historical context, artistic movements, aesthetics, imagery of the natural world.

## **EL PAPEL DE LA NATURALEZA EN LAS OBRAS LITERARIAS DE TODAS LAS CULTURAS UN ANÁLISIS DE SU SIMBOLISMO Y SIGNIFICADO FILOSÓFICO**

**RESUMEN:** El objetivo de este estudio era examinar el papel de la naturaleza como fenómeno cultural y filosófico en la literatura de diversas tradiciones culturales. La investigación empleó métodos de análisis literario comparativo, incluyendo la interpretación textual y la identificación de las funciones clave de la naturaleza en obras de diversas tradiciones, como la literatura kirguisa, japonesa, estadounidense, germánica y francesa. Se prestó especial atención al análisis del significado simbólico y filosófico de la imagería natural, sus funciones dentro de las obras literarias y los contextos en los que adquiere un significado único dependiendo de las condiciones culturales e históricas. Los resultados revelaron que la naturaleza cumple múltiples funciones en la literatura: desde servir de telón de fondo que da forma al tono emocional de una obra hasta funcionar como un complejo símbolo filosófico que encarna ideas de armonía, libertad y conflicto. En la literatura kirguisa, la naturaleza se interpretaba como símbolo de resistencia e identidad nacional. La literatura japonesa hace hincapié en lo efímero y la armonía de la naturaleza, subrayando su significado filosófico. En la literatura norteamericana, las imágenes naturales se representaban como un espacio de lucha y crecimiento espiritual, mientras que en la germánica simbolizaban la unidad de la humanidad y el cosmos, así como la búsqueda de la libertad. La literatura francesa utilizó la naturaleza para contrastar con los entornos urbanos, resaltando los conflictos internos y espirituales de los personajes. El análisis demostró la importancia de seguir investigando el simbolismo de la naturaleza en tradiciones literarias poco estudiadas, lo que profundizaría nuestra comprensión de sus dimensiones culturales y filosóficas. El estudio confirmó la universalidad de la imagería natural en la literatura, al tiempo que reveló su especificidad cultural. La naturaleza se reveló como un elemento polifacético de la creatividad literaria, reflejo tanto de ideas filosóficas compartidas como de las distintas cosmovisiones de las diferentes culturas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Interpretación, contexto socio-histórico, movimientos artísticos, estética, imagería del mundo natural.

## LE RÔLE DE LA NATURE DANS LES ŒUVRES LITTÉRAIRES À TRAVERS LES CULTURES : UNE ANALYSE DE SON SYMBOLISME ET DE SA SIGNIFICATION PHILOSOPHIQUE

*RESUMÉ* : L'objectif de cette étude était d'examiner le rôle de la nature en tant que phénomène culturel et philosophique dans la littérature de diverses traditions culturelles. La recherche a utilisé des méthodes d'analyse littéraire comparative, y compris l'interprétation textuelle et l'identification des fonctions clés de la nature dans des œuvres de diverses traditions, telles que la littérature kirghize, japonaise, américaine, germanique et française. Une attention particulière a été accordée à l'analyse de la signification symbolique et philosophique de l'imagerie naturelle, à ses fonctions dans les œuvres littéraires et aux contextes dans lesquels elle acquiert une signification unique en fonction des conditions culturelles et historiques. Les résultats ont révélé que la nature remplissait de multiples fonctions dans la littérature : elle servait de toile de fond pour définir le ton émotionnel d'une œuvre et fonctionnait comme un symbole philosophique complexe incarnant les idées d'harmonie, de liberté et de conflit. Dans la littérature kirghize, la nature est interprétée comme un symbole de résilience et d'identité nationale. La littérature japonaise met l'accent sur le caractère éphémère et l'harmonie de la nature, soulignant sa signification philosophique. Dans la littérature américaine, l'imagerie naturelle est dépeinte comme un espace de lutte et de croissance spirituelle, tandis que dans la littérature germanique, elle symbolise l'unité de l'humanité et du cosmos, ainsi que la poursuite de la liberté. La littérature française a utilisé la nature pour contraster avec les environnements urbains, soulignant les conflits internes et spirituels des personnages. L'analyse a démontré l'importance de poursuivre les recherches sur le symbolisme de la nature dans des traditions littéraires peu étudiées, ce qui permettrait d'approfondir notre compréhension de ses dimensions culturelles et philosophiques. L'étude a confirmé l'universalité de l'imagerie naturelle dans la littérature tout en révélant sa spécificité culturelle. La nature est apparue comme un élément multiforme de la créativité littéraire, reflétant à la fois des idées philosophiques communes et les visions du monde distinctes des différentes cultures.

*MOTS-CLÉS* : Interprétation, contexte socio-historique, mouvements artistiques, esthétique, imagerie du monde naturel.

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### 1. Introduction

Nature has always been an important element of literary works, performing not only an aesthetic but also a profound semantic function. Its depiction in texts from different cultures does not simply create a plot background but reflects philosophical

concepts, worldview orientations, and symbolic interpretations of human existence. The diversity of nature's depiction in literature reveals characteristic ideas about the natural world in different traditions, making its study necessary for understanding the evolution of ideas, values, and cultural codes. However, although numerous studies have been devoted to the depiction of nature in individual literary traditions, only a few of them consider its philosophical and symbolic aspects through a broad intercultural prism. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a systematic comparative analysis of how nature functions as a universal and culturally specific symbol in different literatures.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated comparative-philosophical structure: unlike previous works, which focus on ecological or aesthetic interpretations of nature, this study synthesises philosophical, cultural and symbolic perspectives. By comparing the literary traditions of Kyrgyzstan, Japan, America, Germany, and France, the article demonstrates how nature simultaneously expresses common existential problems and different cultural worldviews. This comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which natural images reflect and shape human thought, revealing their role as a cross-cultural means of philosophical expression.

However, there is still a need for a comprehensive comparative analysis, since, despite extensive research, the mechanisms of formation and transformation of natural images in cultural, philosophical and historical contexts are not yet fully understood. The lack of a systematic approach complicates the identification of universal patterns and specific features of nature symbolism, which, in turn, limits our understanding of its role in literary discourse. In addition, many literary traditions remain insufficiently studied in terms of natural symbolism, which hinders the formation of a holistic understanding of the interaction between nature, worldview and artistic creativity.

In literary studies, nature is often regarded as a key element of symbolism and philosophy. For instance, Tajane et al. (2024) examined the influence of nature and the environment in literature from an ecocritical perspective, exploring how natural imagery reflected ecological consciousness and the relationship between humanity and nature. The authors analysed how literary works employed descriptions of natural phenomena to shape ecological discourse, emphasising issues of sustainable development. They argued that literature played a significant role in conceptualising environmental challenges, fostering a deeper appreciation of nature among readers. The study by Sabohat (2024) demonstrated that natural elements in English literature perform an important symbolic function, constructing metaphors that reflect cultural and moral ideals. The author highlighted their role in establishing narrative atmosphere and expressing core values.

García (2024) explored the universal symbolism of rivers in contemporary literature, focusing on their role as representations of life's journey and metaphors of transformation. The author concluded that rivers serve not only as narrative elements but also as crucial philosophical symbols, conveying ideas of time, change, and continuity. This approach elucidates how literature employs nature to create profound semantic structures. The study by Kulish et al. (2022) examined the phenomenon of "nature's silence" in poetic discourse. The authors found that the metaphor of silence enhances the meditative effect of texts and facilitates the articulation of philosophical ideas related to introspection and inner contemplation. Such use of nature generates a unique emotional impact on the reader.

The dichotomy between nature and reality in fantasy literature was thoroughly analysed by Bal (2021). The study revealed that nature functions as an idealised space, juxtaposed against urbanisation and technological progress. Particular attention was paid to its significance as a means of preserving cultural identity and a tool for escapism. The analysis demonstrated that through natural imagery, fantasy literature reinterprets the relationship between humanity and the environment, constructing alternative realities where harmony with nature holds exceptional value. The research of Lin (2022) investigated the interaction between nature and urban spaces in aesthetic narratives. The author showed that nature in literature serves as a counterpoint to urban chaos, symbolising harmony and natural order. In the works analysed, nature reflects both aesthetic and philosophical ideas, forming a crucial contrasting element.

Research on the influence of fiction on readers' worldview formation has demonstrated that depictions of the natural world play a significant role in developing cognitive flexibility. Buttrick et al. (2022) found that natural motifs in texts facilitate the perception of diverse perspectives, expanding interpretative possibilities for audiences. The analysis showed that natural elements function as tools for creating multi-layered imagery, strengthening the connection between the reader and the author's intent while deepening the understanding of philosophical and symbolic dimensions. Baig (2024) focused on analysing nature in Romantic poetry, highlighting its role in expressing emotions and spiritual quests. The author demonstrated that natural imagery in Romanticism becomes a universal symbol of beauty, reflecting the harmony between humanity and the natural world. The use of nature in poetry lends texts profound emotional resonance and philosophical depth (Efremov, 2025b; Allaithy, 2025).

Jasny (2024) examined the role of nature in Japanese modernist literature, with particular attention to the works of Kojima Usui. The author noted that natural imagery is employed to establish aesthetic hierarchies and express cultural specificity. In Japanese literature, nature serves not only as an aesthetic component but also as a

medium for philosophical reflections on humanity's place in the world. The work of Adabpal (2019) offered a critical analysis of nature in literature, focusing on its aesthetic, symbolic, and philosophical aspects across various literary traditions. The author explored how natural elements in literary works functioned as metaphors for harmony, inspiration, chaos, or destruction. The study emphasised that perceptions of nature in literature varied depending on historical context, genre conventions, and authors' worldviews.

Although these studies demonstrate the richness of natural imagery and its diverse interpretations, the novelty of this study lies in its comparative synthesis of these aspects. By tracing common philosophical ideas such as harmony, freedom, and transcendence alongside culturally specific meanings, this study provides a unified framework for understanding how nature functions as a literary and philosophical construct across different traditions.

The aim of this study was to examine the role of nature as a universal and culturally specific symbol in literary works across different cultures. The study also pursued the following objectives:

- to analyse general information on the function of nature in the literature of various cultures;
- to examine specific examples of literary works illustrating the use of nature as a symbol;
- to systematise the findings of the analysis, identifying key similarities and differences in the symbolism of nature across distinct cultural contexts.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The study involved an analysis of literary texts associated with the symbolism and philosophical significance of nature. Emphasis was placed on identifying cultural and historical particularities in the perception of natural imagery in literature. To explore the broader context of nature's role, data were collected on how natural elements reflect cultural traditions, worldview concepts, and philosophical ideas. This included an examination of texts where nature serves as a symbolic or metaphorical device, as well as an assessment of its significance within aesthetic and cultural categories. Methodologically, the research was grounded in a comparative-analytical approach, incorporating structural and semantic text analysis. Cross-cultural analysis was also employed to identify parallels and divergences in the symbolism of nature. As an additional method, contextual analysis was applied to uncover philosophical and historical interpretations of natural imagery.

The research corpus included literary works in which nature plays a central symbolic and philosophical role. Among these were Aitmatov's "The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years" (2010a) and "The White Steamship" (2010b), representative of Kyrgyz literature and its connection between natural imagery and human destiny. The Japanese literary tradition was exemplified by Kawabata's "Snow Country" (2013) and Mishima's the Temple of the "Golden Pavilion" (2010), which express the aesthetics of harmony and transience. American literature was represented by Thoreau's "Walden, or Life in the Woods" (2024) and London's "White Fang" (1906), reflecting the transcendental and existential dimensions of human interaction with nature. In the German literary tradition, Goethe's "Faust" (2019) and Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell" (1972) were analysed as examples of nature functioning as a symbol of freedom, harmony, and philosophical contemplation. French literature was represented by Hugo's "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" (1993) and "Rousseau's Confessions" (1903), where nature serves as a counterpoint to urban life and as a moral and spiritual ideal.

The analysis focused on identifying literary techniques, such as metaphor, symbolism, and descriptive imagery, that contribute to the construction of natural motifs. An interpretative-hermeneutic method was applied to reveal semantic layers and symbolic meanings of natural imagery within each work. Additionally, cultural codes embedded in depictions of natural phenomena were examined to understand how representations of nature reflect national worldviews and aesthetic paradigms.

The collected data were systematised through comparative and typological analysis, which facilitated the identification of both shared and distinctive features in the use of natural imagery across literary traditions. Nature was regarded as a universal phenomenon playing a vital role in literature while retaining cultural specificity.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. The role of nature as a cultural and philosophical phenomenon in literature*

Natural imagery constitutes a significant element of literary creativity, forming the basis of numerous works ranging from epic narratives to contemporary prose and poetry. Its components – mountains, forests, rivers, the sky – assume symbolic roles, representing fundamental aspects of human existence, such as life, death, rebirth, harmony, and conflict (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of the role of nature in different cultures.

<b>Culture</b>	<b>Primary functions of nature</b>	<b>Symbolic meaning</b>	<b>Philosophical perception</b>	<b>Representational features</b>
Eastern (Japan)	Harmony, reflection of the inner world	Symbol of tranquillity, ephemerality, oneness with humanity	Nature as an embodiment of Daoism and Zen Buddhism; contemplation as a path to truth	Subtle descriptions, attention to detail, connection with the philosophy of mono no aware
Western (Europe, USA)	Realm of struggle, transformation, search for meaning	Freedom, wilderness, conquest, source of spiritual insight	Nature as an object of study, a medium for spiritual quests	Dynamism, contrasts, Romantic perspective (awe and trepidation)
Central Asian (Kyrgyzstan)	Unity with humanity, bearer of cultural memory	Symbol of resilience, tradition, eternity	Nature as a living force intertwined with the fate of the people	Imagery of the steppe, nomadic world, interplay between humans and nature
Germanic	Domain of philosophical contemplation	Symbol of harmony, divine order, freedom	Nature as a source of knowledge, a path to self-discovery	Romanticised perception, philosophical allusions (J.W. Goethe, F. Schiller)
French	Contrast to urbanisation, reflection of emotions	Symbol of lost harmony, ideal of liberty	Nature as an aesthetic benchmark, a means of spiritual liberation	Detailed descriptions, juxtaposition of city and nature

Source: compiled by the authors based on Zakir et al. (2024), Petterson (2022).

Literary texts inspired by nature assign it diverse meanings depending on cultural and historical contexts. The symbolism of nature reflects not only an aesthetic perception of the surrounding world but also writers' pursuit of comprehending the profound aspects of existence (Jiao, 2024; Doszhan, 2023b). Natural phenomena are

frequently employed to express abstract ideas and emotions. For instance, dawn may symbolise hope and renewal, while a storm conveys conflict or inner turmoil. Thus, nature becomes a metaphorical language capable of expressing that which transcends direct description. Furthermore, literature often turns to nature as a means of establishing mood and emotional undertones. Readers perceive natural imagery as a tool for immersion into the narrative space, where the environment serves not merely as a setting but as an active participant in the storytelling. This renders nature a universal yet multifaceted instrument of literary expression, adaptable to various genres, styles, and traditions (Zakir et al., 2024).

The approach to depicting nature in literature varies significantly across cultural traditions. In Eastern literature, nature is often portrayed as an integral part of human life, symbolising harmony, the indivisibility of the world, and the intrinsic connection between humans and their surroundings. Here, nature is not juxtaposed against humanity but rather emphasises its unity with human essence. This is reflected in the profound symbolism of natural imagery, which frequently embodies philosophical concepts such as Zen or Taoism, where key notions include tranquillity, naturalness, and balance. Conversely, Western literature often depicts nature as a potent and autonomous force, which may be either benevolent or hostile (Alieva et al., 2022). It functions as an object of conquest or study, a perspective linked to the long history of technological progress and human dominion over the environment. At the same time, Western authors frequently present nature as a space for philosophical contemplation or the pursuit of transcendent experience. Natural landscapes serve as backdrops for individual introspection and spiritual quests, a characteristic particularly prominent in Romanticism and Modernism (Efremov, 2025a; Brait et al., 2024). The East tends to perceive nature through the lens of contemplation and philosophical reflection, whereas the West often accentuates it as a dynamic force evoking both awe and trepidation. This dichotomy in perception reflects divergent worldviews shaped by historical and cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, both traditions regard nature as a universal theme connecting literary texts to fundamental aspects of human existence (Pettersson, 2022).

In literature, nature functions not merely as a physical element or aesthetic object but also as a philosophical category expressing fundamental ideas about the world and humanity's place within it. Literature frequently employs natural imagery to explore philosophical concepts such as time, eternity, freedom, and harmony. It becomes a medium through which authors examine questions of human existence, moral values, and relationships with the surrounding world (Table 2).

Table 2. Symbolism and philosophical significance of nature in literature.

Aspect	Description	Examples of context
Nature as a philosophical category	Embodies ideas of the world, time, eternity, freedom, and harmony	Exploration of values and relationships with the world
Embodiment of eternal order	Symbolises order, wherein every element occupies its designated place	Cosmic laws, the divine principle
Symbol of chaos and loss of stability	Reflects chaos, instability, and utopianism	Fluctuations in world perception
Reflection of philosophical schools	Associated with transcendentalism, romanticism, and realism	Cultural and ideological specificities
Role in transcendentalism	A mirror of the soul, reflecting inner states and facilitating self-awareness	Analysis of the inner self
Role in romanticism	A symbol of freedom, beauty, and opposition to urbanisation	Pursuit of natural harmony
Role in realist literature	Serves as a backdrop or setting, reflecting social processes	Social context in literary works

Source: compiled by the authors based on Zakir et al. (2024), Pettersson (2022), Burke (2023).

In the philosophical context, nature can be conceptualised as the embodiment of an eternal order, wherein each element possesses its own place and significance. In certain literary traditions, it symbolises a divine principle, reflecting the laws of the cosmos. In others, particularly during modernism, nature becomes a symbol of chaos, the loss of stability, and utopian ideals. These approaches enable writers to articulate the fluidity of human perception, emphasising its multi-layered and complex nature. The interpretation of nature in literature is often linked to specific philosophical schools. For instance, transcendentalism regards nature as a mirror of the soul, capable of reflecting an individual's inner state and aiding in the realisation of their place in the world. In Romanticism, nature emerges as a symbol of freedom and beauty, juxtaposed against urbanisation and technocratic civilisation. In realist literature, it assumes a more functional role, serving as a setting or a reflection of social processes (Davies, 2023). A philosophical analysis of natural imagery in literature facilitates an expansion of our understanding of the structure of the universe and humanity's place

within it. This allows authors and readers to transcend quotidian experience and contemplate fundamental existential questions. Thus, nature in literature becomes not merely a narrative element but a crucial instrument for expressing profound philosophical ideas.

An analysis of the general functions of nature shows that its literary role goes beyond description and extends to philosophy and culture. In different traditions, nature appears as (1) a universal language of symbolic communication, (2) a reflection of different worldviews, contemplative in the East and dynamic in the West, and (3) a philosophical category that combines the concepts of order, chaos, and transcendence. This synthesis corresponds to the first research objective, establishing the theoretical and intercultural foundations for further textual analysis.

### *3.2. Nature as an artistic element in literary works*

The study of specific literary works enables a deeper comprehension of nature's role as both a symbol and a philosophical category across diverse cultural and historical contexts. Textual analysis reveals how authors employ natural imagery to articulate key ideas, shape emotional undertones, and generate aesthetic impact. This subsection examines works in which nature functions not only as a narrative backdrop but also as a meaningful component of artistic conception, reflecting the unique features of each literary context. In Kyrgyz literature, nature plays a pivotal role, serving not merely as a setting but as a profound symbol embodying philosophical and moral dimensions of life. Natural elements in the works of Kyrgyz authors are intrinsically linked to the fates of their characters, shaping their inner worlds and illuminating aspects of cultural identity.

For instance, in Aitmatov's novel "The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years" (2010), the steppe is depicted as an infinite expanse, representing eternity, freedom, and simultaneously, solitude. In one passage describing saxaul trees, the author writes: "The saxaul... a symbol of the steppe, enduring against all odds, rooted in sand beneath the scorching sun." Here, the saxaul becomes a metaphor for human resilience and the capacity to survive under the harshest conditions. Through this image, Aitmatov underscores the indissoluble bond between humanity and nature, which, despite its severity, remains a source of life and strength. The symbolism of the saxaul reflects a philosophy of survival, unity with the land, and the preservation of tradition.

In another of the author's works, "The white steamship" (2010) nature assumes an even more symbolic dimension. The river, described as "a steel ribbon connecting worlds," serves as a boundary between the protagonist's reality and imagination. It symbolises dreams, purification, and the connection between generations. Aitmatov

employs the river's imagery to convey the philosophical notion that nature is an eternal witness to human existence, bridging past, present, and future. Through natural motifs, the author articulates the emotional states of his characters – hope, despair, and the yearning for freedom. Thus, in Kyrgyz literature, particularly in Aitmatov's oeuvre, nature functions as a philosophical category, embodying resilience, harmony, and spiritual renewal. Its imagery elucidates profound facets of cultural heritage, rendering nature a vital link between humanity and its roots. Japanese literature traditionally ascribes profound symbolic and philosophical significance to nature, frequently associating it with characters' emotional states, cultural values, and the transience of existence. Natural elements in Japanese literary works become integral to the narrative, influencing plot development and the articulation of philosophical concepts (Zhetessova et al., 2025; Mambetkunov, 2022).

In Kawabata's novel "Snow country" Kawabata (2013), nature plays a crucial role in evoking an atmosphere of isolation and inner alienation. The opening passage depicts a snowscape: "The snow-clad mountains faded into endless whiteness, as though severing this land from the rest of the world." Here, nature reflects not only the physical remoteness of the characters from conventional life but also their emotional detachment. Snow symbolises purity and, simultaneously, emptiness, accentuating the ephemerality of human desires and the unattainability of absolute harmony. Thus, through imagery of snow and mountains, Kawabata conveys the philosophical idea of life's transience, central to the Japanese aesthetic of *mono no aware* (the pathos of impermanence). In Mishima's "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" (2010), nature contrasts with the artificial beauty of the Golden Pavilion, highlighting the protagonist's conflicted perception of harmony and destruction. A pivotal scene describes a sunset: "The sun sank into the sea, its final rays staining the hills blood-red, as though foretelling tragedy." This natural image mirrors the protagonist's inner turmoil – his oscillation between reverence and hatred for idealised beauty. The sunset symbolises an ending, destruction, yet also the inevitability of change, aligning with the Buddhist concept of impermanence.

Both works demonstrate how nature in Japanese literature mediates between characters' inner worlds and external circumstances, underscoring spiritual and philosophical dimensions of Japanese culture. Through natural imagery, the authors articulate themes of mutability, beauty, and the tragedy of human existence. In American literature, nature is often perceived as a space for spiritual introspection, a source of vitality, and a battleground for survival. Literary works vividly illustrate these approaches, revealing nature's symbolic and philosophical significance in relation to human existence.

In Thoreau “Walden, or Life in the Woods” (2024) nature becomes a medium for spiritual renewal and self-discovery. The author recounts his sojourn at Walden Pond: “I went to the woods to live deliberately, to confront life’s essential facts and discern what it had to teach”. This passage underscores Thoreau’s desire to retreat from urban chaos into simplicity and harmony with nature. Here, nature symbolises not only physical space but also the transcendentalist philosophy, wherein the natural world reflects the soul. Walden Pond serves as an allegory for inner tranquillity and purity, offering opportunities for contemplation and the pursuit of truth. Thus, Thoreau’s depictions of nature emphasise its role as a wellspring of wisdom and harmony, capable of revealing existential truths. In London’s “White Fang” London (1906) nature is portrayed as a merciless, unforgiving force that shapes the protagonist’s character and destiny. A pivotal scene describes the Arctic winter: “All was white and lifeless. The wind howled, and the frost bit like the very spirit of death hovering over the land”. Here, nature personifies an adversarial power demanding adaptation for survival. The white wilderness symbolises not only physical trials but also the necessity of inner fortitude and struggle. Through overcoming hardships, the protagonist discovers a connection with nature, which moulds his instincts and identity. For London, the natural world is not a realm of serenity but an arena for survival and self-affirmation. In these works, nature is presented as an integral part of human existence, possessing a dual character: it serves simultaneously as a source of inspiration and harmony, as well as an arena for struggle and transformation.

In Germanic literature, nature plays a pivotal role, functioning as a symbol of struggle, harmony, and philosophical contemplation. In Faust by “Goethe” (2019), nature embodies the endless pursuit of knowledge and unity with the world. In one scene, Goethe depicts the sunrise: “Behold, as the sun rises, it caresses the earth and sea, and all things come to life beneath its rays.” This imagery symbolises rebirth, harmony, and the grandeur of the universe, which transcends human comprehension. For Goethe, nature is not merely a backdrop for the narrative but a reflection of the divine order that the protagonist strives to comprehend. Through interactions with natural elements – such as light, the sky, and the river – the author conveys the philosophical idea of the unity between humanity and the cosmos, wherein nature serves as a mediator in the pursuit of higher truths. In “Wilhelm Tell” by Schiller (1972) nature functions as a symbol of freedom and resistance. The Alpine landscapes are described with meticulous detail: “The mighty mountains that shield our people – they are our walls and our protection”. Here, nature embodies not only physical inaccessibility but also the moral fortitude of a people fighting for independence. The mountains become a metaphor for human strength and liberty, underscoring the connection between nature and national identity. Schiller employs natural elements to

create an atmosphere of tension and drama, illustrating how nature inspires the characters to fight for their ideals.

For Goethe, nature symbolises the harmony of the universe and the pursuit of higher truths, emphasising humanity's connection to the cosmos. It reflects the human quest for meaning through engagement with the divine order. For Schiller, nature embodies freedom, resilience, and the strength of the human spirit, highlighting its role in shaping national identity and the struggle for independence. These approaches demonstrate the diversity of philosophical interpretations of nature in Germanic literature, where it becomes a conduit for both spiritual and political ideals.

In French literature, nature occupies a distinct place, serving as a reflection of spiritual quests, emotional turmoil, and moral ideals. In "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" by Hugo (1993), nature contrasts with the urban environment, accentuating the emotional and spiritual conflicts of the characters. In one scene, the author describes Quasimodo observing the sunset from the cathedral's heights: "The crimson rays of the sun-bathed Paris, while the sky appeared as an infinite canvas uniting earth and eternity". This depiction of the sunset mirrors the protagonist's inner turmoil – his solitude and yearning for freedom. Here, nature symbolises something beyond human control, evoking both awe and a sense of helplessness in the characters. Through such imagery, Hugo explores the theme of spiritual freedom, juxtaposing it with the constraints of urban existence. In "Confessions" by Rousseau (2015), nature becomes a central motif, representing the ideal of a natural life and moral purity. Rousseau writes: "In nature, I felt free, full of life and harmony. The forests and rivers spoke to me in the language of sincerity". These lines underscore the author's philosophical aspiration to return to nature as a means of attaining authenticity and moral equilibrium. In Rousseau's work, natural landscapes are not merely a backdrop for reflection but an active participant in the author's philosophical dialogue with the world. They symbolise purity and incorruptibility, contrasting the natural order with the artificiality of societal life. In French literature, Hugo employs nature as a counterpoint to the urban milieu, reflecting the characters' inner conflicts and their longing for freedom. Sunsets and landscapes serve as metaphors for spiritual seeking and emotional depth. For Rousseau, nature represents an ideal of moral purity and harmony, offering a path to reclaiming a natural existence and attaining genuine freedom. These interpretations highlight nature as a philosophical category tied to the pursuit of spiritual balance and inner truth. In both Germanic and French literature, nature is revealed through its capacity to function as both an emotional catalyst and a philosophical concept, embodying ideas of freedom, harmony, and spiritual renewal. Each work explores unique aspects of humanity's interaction with nature, emphasising its universal significance in literature.

The study of nature's role in the literatures of various cultures demonstrates that, despite national distinctions, there exists a set of shared motifs unifying literary works. Nature in literature fulfils several functions: it serves as a narrative backdrop, shapes the atmosphere, becomes a symbol of philosophical ideas, and even plays a pivotal role in the plot (Issakova et al., 2023; Kemiatic, 2024). However, the perception and interpretation of nature depend on the ideological traditions and historical conditions shaping each literary tradition. One key commonality is the portrayal of nature as a space that influences the human psyche. In American, French, Japanese, and German literature, the environment is not merely a setting but also acts upon the characters' consciousness, altering their destinies. In Japanese tradition, nature reflects the emotional states of characters: snow or rain may symbolise loneliness, inner tranquillity, or the inevitability of change. In American literature, nature similarly conveys a protagonist's inner struggles but often serves as a trial through which they must pass. In German Romanticism, nature aids the protagonist in comprehending their place in the universe and attaining inner harmony, while in French literature, it frequently contrasts with urbanity, intensifying the work's emotional impact. In Kyrgyz literature, nature is deeply intertwined with lifestyle and cultural traditions, where steppes, mountains, and rivers are not only narrative backdrops but also symbols of historical memory, resilience, and spiritual ties to ancestors.

Across all examined literary traditions, nature serves as a medium for philosophical contemplation. In Japanese, Kyrgyz, and German literature, it is an element that reveals humanity's relationship with eternity, time, and the transience of existence. In German literature, nature represents a source of higher truth; in Japanese literature, a symbol of ephemerality and meditative melancholy; and in Kyrgyz literature, an embodiment of the nomadic life cycle. Nature also becomes a space for spiritual seeking. In American literature, characters venture into the wilderness to find themselves, resolve inner conflicts, and attain harmony. A similar motif appears in German Romanticism, where nature acts as a guide to higher truths. In Japanese literature, it is an object of contemplation and meditation, enabling characters to achieve enlightenment and inner peace, while in French literature, it serves as a contrast between civilisation and the natural order, helping protagonists articulate their philosophical ideals.

Despite these similarities, nature is depicted differently across cultures. In American literature, it is portrayed as a hostile force that must be conquered – a theme particularly evident in the works of Jack London, where nature becomes an arena for the struggle for survival. In contrast, Japanese literature presents nature as harmonious, rooted in a tradition of reverence for the natural world, and framed as an

intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. In Kyrgyz literature, nature is perceived as an inseparable extension of the human experience, where the steppes and mountains symbolise destiny (Doszhan, 2023a; Khalilov and Matmusaeva, 2024). In French literature, nature is juxtaposed against urban environments, reflecting the conflict between the natural and artificial worlds. Meanwhile, in the German tradition, nature symbolises the pursuit of knowledge, self-discovery, and connection with higher forces. The symbolic significance of nature also varies across these literary traditions. In Japanese culture, natural phenomena – such as snow, rain, or cherry blossoms – are associated with the concept of *mono no aware*, expressing a melancholic awareness of the transience of things. In Kyrgyz literature, nature embodies resilience and eternity, with the saxaul tree, for instance, symbolising survival under harsh conditions. American literature portrays nature in an ambivalent light: on one hand, it can be a source of freedom and harmony, as in Thoreau's works; on the other, it appears as a threat demanding strength and endurance to overcome, as seen in London's narratives. In the German tradition, nature serves as a conduit for philosophical reflection, particularly evident in the works of J.W. Goethe. In French literature, it often symbolises a lost paradise or a space where protagonists seek harmony but encounter insurmountable obstacles.

The role of nature in shaping characters also diverges across cultures. In American literature, it fosters fortitude, with heroes enduring gruelling trials, overcoming adversity, and undergoing transformation. In Japanese tradition, nature influences characters' inner worlds, conveying emotions through atmosphere and mood. In Kyrgyz literature, characters do not so much change under nature's influence as affirm their bond with it, reinforcing the strength of national traditions. In German literature, nature aids protagonists in understanding their place in the world, guiding them toward self-discovery and spiritual growth. Conversely, in French literature, nature becomes a space for moral inquiry, though its harmony often remains unattainable. The functional significance of nature within plots also differs. In American literature, it acts as a catalyst for events, subjecting characters to severe trials. In Japanese tradition, it serves as a metaphor for change, mirroring characters' internal states. In Kyrgyz literature, nature is organically woven into the narrative, functioning as part of the national epic tradition and cultural code. In German literature, it enables characters to reinterpret themselves, uncover truth, and embark on spiritual quests. In French literature, nature primarily serves as a medium for philosophical contemplation of human existence and social critique.

Thus, across various literary traditions, nature plays a pivotal role as an aesthetic, philosophical, and narrative element. While it is commonly depicted as a symbol of spiritual quest, self-discovery, and emotional reflection, its functions and

interpretations vary. In American literature, nature is a formidable environment demanding human conquest. In Japanese literature, it is a harmonious backdrop conveying the philosophy of transience and contemplative sorrow. In Kyrgyz literature, nature is tied to cultural identity, tradition, and resilience. In German literature, it embodies the pursuit of truth, higher knowledge, and philosophical understanding. In French literature, nature contrasts with urban civilisation and articulates moral and social ideas. These distinctions underscore national specificities in worldview and demonstrate that nature remains one of literature's most potent means of expressing cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic concepts.

An analysis of specific texts confirms that authors from different cultures attribute multifaceted functions to natural images. Kyrgyz literature associates them with heritage and survival; Japanese literature with changeability and beauty; American literature with moral testing and self-realisation; German literature with cosmic order and freedom; French literature with emotions and ethics. These comparative findings directly address the second goal, providing concrete literary evidence of the symbolic and philosophical diversity of nature.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study revealed the universality of nature symbolism in literature, showing that natural images reflect the core cultural values of different traditions, embodying both harmony and conflict. In Kyrgyz literature, nature symbolises endurance and unity with the earth, resolving tension through spiritual continuity; in Japanese literature, harmony is achieved through acceptance of transience and changeability, where conflict dissolves into contemplation. In contrast, American writers interpret nature as a testing ground for moral and existential conflicts, where harmony is achieved through self-conquest and reconciliation with the environment. German authors such as Goethe and Schiller transform this tension into a philosophical dialogue between freedom and cosmic order, offering harmony through intellectual and moral aspirations. French writers, on the contrary, place nature in conflict between civilisation and inner authenticity, where reconciliation occurs through aesthetic or moral awakening.

In these traditions, the tension between harmony and conflict reflects different philosophical orientations: Eastern literature resolves it through balance and acceptance, Western literature through struggle and transcendence, and Central Asian literature through unity and endurance. The environment itself is an active factor in shaping human perception, and landscapes function as mirrors of inner states and metaphors for broader philosophical truths. This synthesis demonstrates that nature,

although culturally specific in its images, is a universal philosophical category that connects people with the cosmos. Thus, the discussion integrates cross-cultural findings into a coherent interpretation: different traditions converge in the view that nature is a mediator between humanity and the world, where harmony and conflict coexist as complementary forces. By combining these perspectives, the study shows that literature transforms the environment into a place of philosophical inquiry, moral reflection, and aesthetic experience – a shared human attempt to express meaning in the natural order.

In Kyrgyz literature, for instance, nature symbolises national identity and cultural endurance, as corroborated by Yakubov and Yarmukhammat (2023). Their work examined steppes and rivers as philosophical images emphasising the unity of humans and the natural world. Unlike their study, however, this research broadens the context by comparing Kyrgyz literature with other traditions, deepening the understanding of nature's universal role in literary works. In American literature, the analysis suggests that nature functions as both a space of struggle and spiritual renewal, playing a transformative role in character development. This aligns with Smith's (2022) findings on the influence of natural forces on protagonists' inner development. However, while Smith's work focused primarily on ecological dimensions, the present study expands the analysis by framing nature not only as a factor of ecological consciousness but also as a symbol of philosophical inquiry and spiritual metamorphosis, thereby enriching the comprehension of its literary functions.

In the case of Japanese literature, evidence shows that natural imagery conveys harmony, transience, and balance, reflecting the principles of Zen philosophy and the aesthetic of *mono no aware*. These observations support Pirretti's (2023) assertion that Japanese nature writing embodies profound philosophical ideas. However, unlike Pirretti's nationally focused study, this work adopts a comparative approach, analysing how Japan's conceptualisation of nature relates to other literary traditions. This methodology not only highlights the uniqueness of Japanese aesthetics but also underscores the universality of natural motifs in literature. In this study, nature in German literature is examined as a key philosophical category, reflecting the quest for higher truths and cosmic harmony. This echoes Emerson's (2023) analysis of nature's symbolism in Goethe, where he emphasises its role in spiritual exploration. Yet, unlike Emerson, the present research extends the scope by incorporating Schiller's works, allowing nature to be considered not only philosophically but also within a political framework tied to national identity formation.

A new finding is that in German-language literature, natural landscapes are not passive backdrops but active agents shaping worldviews and prompting existential

reflection. This corresponds with Duerbeck and Lu's (2024) observation that contemporary German writing uses nature as a medium for philosophical introspection. However, whereas their analysis is temporally limited, this study encompasses a broader historical span, including classics by Goethe and Schiller. This reveals a continuity in nature's philosophical interpretation within German literature, tracing its evolution from Romantic ideals of cosmic harmony to modern notions of inner resonance and spiritual seeking.

The results also demonstrate that Romantic philosophy perceived nature as both inspiration and mediator between humans and higher truths. It was not merely an object of aesthetic contemplation but a domain enabling spiritual liberation and transcendence. This aligns with the findings of Valpione (2022), who similarly noted that nature in Romantic literature symbolised the transcendence of the material world's boundaries. However, unlike Valpione's study, this research has expanded the context by comparing the symbolism of nature across different literary traditions. This approach has demonstrated how the perception of nature varied depending on cultural and philosophical frameworks, rendering its interpretation more multifaceted and universal.

One of the key conclusions of this study is that nature in literature functioned as a spiritual guide, fostering inner transformation and harmony between humans and the surrounding world. It served not only as an aesthetic element but also as a medium for profound philosophical reflection. These findings are consistent with the work of Soni (2024), who analysed the poetry of W. Wordsworth and argued that natural imagery – such as rivers, hills, and forests – symbolised purity and the unity of humans with their natural environment. However, unlike Soni's study, this research has extended the analysis by examining the spiritual role of nature across diverse cultural traditions. This approach has revealed that, despite the universality of this aspect, the perception of nature was significantly influenced by cultural specificity.

The comparison further shows that in Romantic literature, nature was conceived as an embodiment of harmony, counterbalancing industrial and social upheaval. Its imagery symbolised a return to origins, the restoration of equilibrium, and the search for moral direction. Similar conclusions can be observed in the work of Sharma (2022), who noted that Romantic authors depicted nature as a refuge from industrialisation and a site for reclaiming lost wholeness. However, unlike Sharma, the present study has broadened this context by examining nature not merely as a contrast to urban environments but also as a philosophical category that facilitates the contemplation of human existence and its interaction with the cosmos.

This study has demonstrated that in British and American Romantic literature, nature was perceived not only as an aesthetic element but also as a means of engaging

with fundamental philosophical questions concerning human existence and harmony with the world. This perspective resonates with the conclusions of Jin (2022), who viewed natural imagery as a symbol of human responsibility towards the environment and a tool for maintaining ecological balance. However, unlike Jin, this study has not confined itself to the analysis of ecological consciousness but has additionally explored the symbolic and spiritual significance of nature. This has expanded conventional understandings of its role, revealing its influence on moral frameworks and philosophical inquiries.

This study has found that in American literature, nature serves not only as a trial but also as a profound symbol of the protagonists' transformation. It becomes a space where human character is tested, and inner change acquires particular significance. Parallels can be drawn with the work of Ananiya and Dhanabal (2024), who analysed the writings of London, emphasising that nature is portrayed as a harsh yet just force shaping the hero's identity. However, unlike their approach, the present study moves beyond the individual's confrontation with nature, instead considering it as a vessel of universal philosophical values. Furthermore, the focus on cross-cultural comparison has enabled the identification of recurring motifs in the literature of different peoples. This study has corroborated many conclusions from prior research while also offering new perspectives. The comparison of literary traditions has revealed both universal and culturally specific functions of nature, underscoring its significance as a key element of literary analysis.

## 5. Conclusions

This study introduced a new analytical perspective by combining Kyrgyz, Japanese, American, German, and French literary traditions into a single comparative system. Unlike previous studies that examined the symbolism of nature in isolated national contexts, this study combines philosophical, cultural, and literary approaches to reveal how nature functions as a universal yet culturally specific category of meaning. This synthesis is a new methodological contribution that creates a unified system for interpreting natural images in different traditions.

The results confirm that nature plays interrelated aesthetic, symbolic, and philosophical roles in literature. It shapes narrative structures, evokes emotional depth, and serves as a means for exploring fundamental existential questions – life, death, freedom, harmony, and renewal. A comparative analysis revealed characteristic cultural patterns: in Kyrgyz literature, nature embodies national identity and resilience; in Japanese literature, it reflects the harmony and transience of existence through Zen aesthetics; in American literature, it signifies struggle and spiritual

rebirth; in German literature, it represents philosophical inquiry and cosmic unity; and in French literature, it acts as a counterpoint to urban modernity, exposing internal moral and emotional conflicts.

The main contribution of this study is that it demonstrates that natural images serve as a philosophical means of intercultural dialogue, through which different civilisations express their understanding of humanity's place in the cosmos. By combining philosophical hermeneutics, cultural semiotics, and literary typology, the study goes beyond descriptive comparison and moves toward a deeper understanding of the symbolic mechanisms through which literature conveys both common human concerns and different cultural perspectives. This interdisciplinary and comparative orientation distinguishes this work from previous ecocritical studies or studies devoted to a single tradition. The study also showed that, although the symbolism of nature demonstrates universal patterns, its meanings are conditioned by historical and ideological contexts. Eastern literature depicts nature as harmonious and inseparable from humanity, while Western traditions emphasise its autonomy, grandeur and power, reflecting divergent cultural conceptions of the relationship between humans and the environment. The synthesis of these contrasting traditions shows that literature functions as a transnational medium where diverse philosophical and aesthetic conceptions of nature intersect. Thus, this study contributes to the field of comparative literary studies by offering a comprehensive model of analysis that considers nature as both an aesthetic construct and a philosophical category. It highlights how literary representations of the natural world serve as a bridge between the universal and the culturally specific, combining spiritual reflection with artistic expression.

A limitation of this study is its focus on selected canonical works, which may not represent the full spectrum of world literary traditions. Therefore, future research should expand this framework to include literature from the Middle East, India, and Native Americans, allowing for a broader and more comprehensive understanding of how the symbolism of nature embodies the pluralism of human relationships with the natural world.

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