



THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN LITERATURE: SYMBOLISM, SOCIAL ROLES AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT: The study aimed to identify the peculiarities of female characters in the works of Aitmatov and to reveal their artistic and philosophical significance in the context of symbolism, social roles, and cultural aspects. The methodological framework integrated typological, hermeneutic, historical-literary, and structural-semiotic methods, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the evolution and meaning of women's images. The results demonstrated that female characters in Aitmatov's works were characterised by versatility, psychological depth, and rich symbolic resonance. A typology was established, including hearth keepers, rebels, victims, wise old women, mothers, and women of nature – each performing distinct artistic and ideological functions. These images reflected both traditional gender roles and the growing aspiration for freedom, individuality, and equality. The study revealed that Aitmatov's heroines not only structure the artistic world of his prose but also embody the cultural-philosophical dimension of his thought, expressing universal values of motherhood, love, moral resilience, and the eternal human quest for justice.

KEYWORDS: Symbolism, gender dynamics, cultural identity, literary functions, typology of heroines.

LA IMAGEN DE LA MUJER EN LA LITERATURA: SIMBOLISMO, FUNCIONES SOCIALES Y ASPECTOS CULTURALES

RESUMEN: El estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar las peculiaridades de los personajes femeninos en la obra de Aitmatov y revelar su significado artístico y filosófico en el contexto del simbolismo, los roles sociales y los aspectos culturales. El marco metodológico integró métodos tipológicos, hermenéuticos, histórico-literarios y semiótico-estructurales, garantizando un análisis exhaustivo de la evolución y el significado de las imágenes femeninas. Los resultados demostraron que los personajes femeninos en la obra de Aitmatov se caracterizaban por su versatilidad, profundidad psicológica y una rica resonancia simbólica. Se estableció una tipología que incluía a las guardianas del hogar, las rebeldes, las víctimas, las ancianas sabias, las madres y las mujeres de la naturaleza, cada una con funciones artísticas e ideológicas distintas. Estas imágenes reflejaban tanto los roles de género tradicionales como la creciente aspiración a la libertad, la individualidad y la igualdad. El estudio reveló que las heroínas de Aitmatov no solo estructuran el mundo artístico de su prosa, sino que también encarnan la dimensión filosófica-cultural de su pensamiento, expresando los valores universales de la maternidad, el amor, la resiliencia moral y la eterna búsqueda humana de la justicia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Simbolismo, dinámica de género, identidad cultural, funciones literarias, tipología de heroínas.

L'IMAGE DES FEMMES DANS LA LITTÉRATURE : SYMBOLISME, RÔLES SOCIAUX ET ASPECTS CULTURELS

RESUMÉ : L'étude visait à identifier les particularités des personnages féminins dans l'œuvre d'Aïtmatov et à révéler leur signification artistique et philosophique dans le contexte du symbolisme, des rôles sociaux et des aspects culturels. Le cadre méthodologique intégrait des méthodes typologiques, herméneutiques, historico-littéraires et structuralo-sémiotiques, garantissant une analyse complète de l'évolution et du sens des images féminines. Les résultats ont démontré que les personnages féminins de l'œuvre d'Aïtmatov se caractérisaient par leur polyvalence, leur profondeur psychologique et leur riche résonance symbolique. Une typologie a été établie, incluant les gardiennes du foyer, les rebelles, les victimes, les vieilles femmes sages, les mères et les femmes de la nature – chacune exerçant des fonctions artistiques et idéologiques distinctes. Ces images reflétaient à la fois les rôles traditionnels de genre et l'aspiration croissante à la liberté, à l'individualité et à l'égalité. L'étude a révélé que les héroïnes d'Aïtmatov structurent non seulement l'univers artistique de sa prose, mais incarnent également la dimension culturelle et philosophique de sa pensée, exprimant des valeurs universelles de maternité, d'amour, de résilience morale et de quête éternelle de justice.

MOTS-CLÉS : interprétation artistique, dynamique des genres, identité culturelle, fonctions littéraires, typologie des héroïnes.

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1. Introduction

The image of women in literature has always been relevant for researchers, as it reflects not only the aesthetic and artistic goals of the author but also the social, cultural and philosophical ideas of the era, embodying the complex processes taking place in society as well as the eternal questions of human existence (Marchesi, 2024). Female images in literature were diverse and symbolic, mirroring social norms, gender roles and cultural values (Hadyk, 2025). In this context, Kyrgyz literature, which had long existed in the oral tradition, expresses folk values. Songs and poems composed by akyns became public property, passed down from generation to generation and developing into new versions created by successive generations. These traditions reflected the basic principles of folklore, where the word played a key role and was valued above all else in Kyrgyz culture, and the akyn-improviser was considered the highest master. However, in the eyes of society, this art was more inherent to men, which is associated with traditional views on the role of women in society. Despite social inequality and restrictions imposed by patriarchal norms, some women became prominent figures, breaking established norms and risking their lives, as was the case with the legendary Burulchi. Metaphorical thinking and figurative expression of their perception of the world and attitude towards life were no less characteristic of Kyrgyz women than of men.

In the modern world, where gender roles and social norms have undergone significant changes, reinterpretation of female characters in literature has become particularly important (Kieliszek, 2024; Navas and Vianna, 2024). It is necessary to determine how the perception of women has changed in different eras, what social and cultural factors influenced the formation of their image, and what universal human values they embodied.

Numerous studies confirmed the interest in the topic of the female image in the literature. For instance, Stadnichenko et al. (2021) examined the philosophy of the female character in the context of social circumstances, analysing in detail how social factors such as class, education, and marital status influenced the formation of the character and worldview of female characters. The authors concluded that women in

literature are often presented as bearers of moral and ethical values, capable of resisting social injustices and fighting for their rights. Pataridze (2017) studied from a constructivist perspective how women created their world in literature, analysing how women authors used language and literary devices to construct their reality and express their subjective experience. The study demonstrated that women in literature were actively involved in creating meanings and interpreting reality, forming a unique vision of the world.

Khandan (2022), analysing the image of women in Turkish poetry, traced the evolution of this image from traditional ideas about women as keepers of the home to more modern interpretations related to their active social role. The author noted the influence of cultural traditions and religious norms on the formation of the female image in Turkish poetry, emphasising its versatility and contradictions. Rahmonova (2023) studied the image of a woman and social position in the poetry of Alisher Navoi, emphasising the connection of literary images with the historical context and social norms of the era. The author argued that despite the restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society, women in Navoi's poetry are presented as strong and independent individuals capable of love, self-sacrifice, and struggle for their ideals. Kim (2022) studied the female image in love novels, analysing how male stereotypes about women influenced their portrayal in literature. The study concluded that many romance novels reproduced traditional gender roles and stereotypes, limiting female characters to passivity and dependence on men.

Other studies analysed female characters in specific national literatures and cultural contexts. Bokoeva and Nogoibaeva (2023) analysed the image of women in the stories of the Kyrgyz writer Topchugul Shaidullaeva, identifying the peculiarities of creative methods related to the depiction of the lives of Kyrgyz women in a period of social change. The study emphasised the role of women in preserving national culture and traditions. Aslan and Küçükturan (2024) studied the reflection of gender norms in Kyrgyz and Turkish fairy tales, analysing the influence of patriarchal traditions on the formation of women's roles. The authors noted that fairy tales reproduced traditional gender stereotypes, presenting women as passive and obedient beings dependent on men. Usupova and Koshbakova (2022) addressed the role of women in Kyrgyzstan in the process of transition from a traditional society to a modern one, noting positive changes in women's status related to access to education and participation in public life. The study emphasised the importance of education and economic independence for achieving gender equality. Hassan (2022) analysed the image of Kyrgyz women who were victims of human trafficking, drawing attention to the social and economic factors that contribute to this problem. The study accentuated the fight against human trafficking and the protection of women's rights.

De Beauvoir (1949) provides a foundational theoretical framework for understanding the socio-cultural construction of womanhood and remains essential for analysing female identity in literature. Through her existentialist assertion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” Beauvoir distinguishes biological sex from gender, arguing that patriarchal structures and cultural narratives have historically defined women as the “Other” in relation to man. This conceptualisation illuminates how women’s roles have been shaped by social norms that confine them to domesticity and dependence while denying their capacity for transcendence and self-determination. Beauvoir’s emphasis on the interplay between freedom, immanence, and transcendence allows for a deeper exploration of literary female characters as agents negotiating societal constraints and asserting individuality. Her analysis of myth, motherhood, and love as ideological mechanisms of control also resonates with studies of women in national literatures, including Aitmatov’s heroines, who embody both resistance to and continuity with traditional values. By situating female experience within existential freedom, Beauvoir’s philosophy enriches the interpretation of women’s images as complex, evolving figures within the broader historical and cultural context.

Although previous studies have explored the social and cultural aspects of female characters in Aitmatov’s works, they have largely overlooked their deeper symbolic and philosophical significance. This study addresses that gap by analysing how Aitmatov’s heroines function as carriers of universal values and as expressions of his broader moral and existential vision.

The study aimed to identify the peculiarities of the image of women in literature, incorporating symbolism, social roles and cultural aspects. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set:

- to identify the typology of female characters in the works of Aitmatov;
- to analyse the image of a woman on the example of specific works by the writer;
- to trace the evolution of the image of a woman in the work of Aitmatov;
- to identify the functions of the image of a woman in the writer's works.

2. Materials and Methods

The material basis of the study consisted of Aitmatov, in which female characters play a key role in the development of the plot. In particular, the following works were analysed: “Face to Face” (1991), “Jamila” (2002), “My Poplar in a Red

Scarf” (2005), “Duishen” (2016b), “Mother Earth” (2016a), “Farewell, Gyulsary!” (1973), “White Ship” (1972), and “The White Cloud of Genghis Khan” (2023). The choice of these works is determined by their significance in the writer’s work, as well as the fact that they reflect different stages of career and the variety of created female characters.

To systematically examine the typology of female characters in Aitmatov’s works, the typological method was employed as the primary analytical tool. This approach began with a meticulous reading of the selected texts, aimed at identifying and cataloguing all female characters and their defining attributes. The characters were then classified into distinct groups based on shared characteristics. Particular attention was paid to their social status, psychological depth, worldview, and narrative function. By comparing these characters across different works, the study uncovered recurring patterns and thematic similarities, shedding light on the archetypes and individualities that populate Aitmatov’s literary universe.

The hermeneutic method was instrumental in dissecting the nuanced portrayal of women in Aitmatov’s writing. This method involved a layered analysis of the texts, focusing on the symbolism, subtext, and contextual underpinnings of each character. The interpretation of their speech, actions, and interpersonal relationships – coupled with an exploration of their inner conflicts and motivations – revealed the complexity and richness of Aitmatov’s female protagonists. The hermeneutic approach also considered the broader historical, social, and cultural contexts in which these characters were conceived, allowing for a more profound understanding of their roles as both products and reflectors of their time.

To trace the evolution of the female image across Aitmatov’s career, the historical-literary method was applied. This method situated the characters within the trajectory of the writer’s literary development, examining how societal changes and cultural shifts influenced their depiction. By analysing the progression of female characters from early to later works, the study highlighted the dynamic interplay between Aitmatov’s artistic vision and the external forces shaping his narrative choices. This temporal perspective illuminated the ways in which the writer’s perception of women evolved, introducing new dimensions and complexities to their portrayal over time.

Finally, the structural-semiotic method was used to explore the functional significance of female characters within Aitmatov’s artistic system. This involved assessing their roles in the compositional structure of the texts, their symbolic resonance, and their impact on the ideological undercurrents of the narratives. The analysis revealed that female characters in Aitmatov’s works often serve as embodiments of key ideas, catalysts for plot development, or symbolic representations

of broader philosophical and cultural themes. Through this lens, the study underscored the integral role of women in shaping the thematic and ideological fabric of Aitmatov's literary world. The combination of these approaches ensured both micro-level textual analysis and macro-level contextual interpretation, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the typology, evolution, and symbolic significance of female characters in Aitmatov's oeuvre.

3. Results

3.1. *Typology of female characters in the works of Aitmatov*

The work of Aitmatov not only reflects social reality but also a deep comprehension of the eternal questions of human existence. Female images, striking in their versatility and psychological depth, play a central role in the works. The author analysed various aspects of women's nature, including their inner strength and vulnerability, their capacity for deep feelings, self-sacrifice and resilience in the face of life's trials.

The term "female archetype" refers to a recurrent symbolic model of womanhood that reflects collective cultural ideals, moral values, and psychological patterns. In this study, it denotes the recurring images of women – such as the mother, the rebel, or the wise elder – that convey both individual and universal dimensions of female experience within Aitmatov's prose. To systematise the female images found in the works of Aitmatov, it is worth highlighting several main types, each of which has unique specificity and semantics (Figure 1).

The keeper of the hearth is an archetypal image rooted in the depths of centuries, embodying traditional values of family and motherhood (Bazaluk and Nezhyva, 2016; Jumaev, 2022). Women of this type are firstly mothers and wives devoted to their homes and loved ones. They are the emotional centre of the family, a source of warmth, care and comfort. They are the source of the life force that nourishes and unites all members of the household. However, Aitmatov avoided the idealisation of this image. The guardians of the hearth were not portrayed as abstract ideals but as realistic characters with unique experiences, joys, doubts and hopes. This archetypal image, reflecting traditional values of family and motherhood, is present in the novella *Mother Earth* (Aitmatov, 2016a) in the character of Tolgonai. The character is devoted to the family and embodies warmth, care and resilience despite the loss of the husband and sons. A similar archetype is also present in the novel "Farewell, Gyulsary!" (Aitmatov, 1973) in the character of Tanabay's wife, who remains a faithful spouse despite difficult family circumstances.

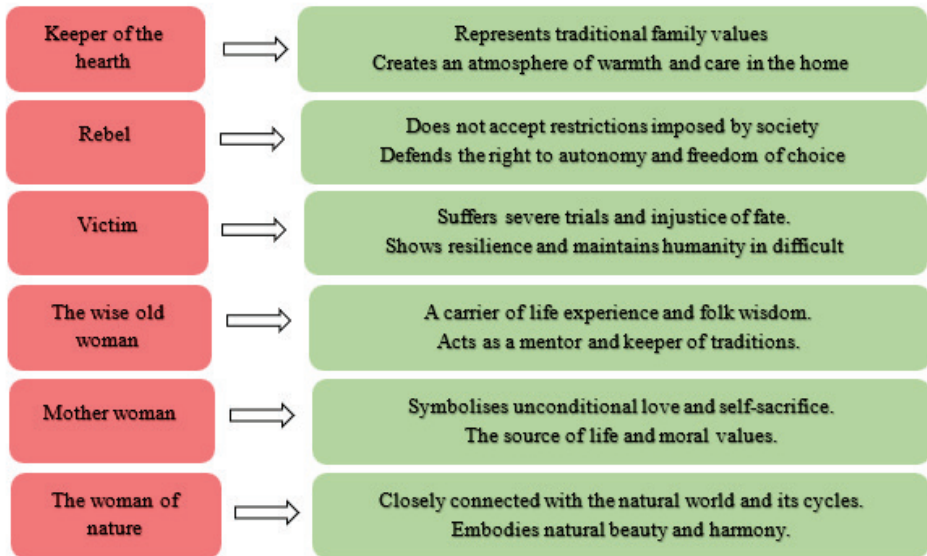


Figure 1. Female archetypes in the world of Aitmatov. Source: compiled by the authors based on Shirinova et al. (2021), Aslan and Küçükturan (2024), Khamrayev (2023).

They face difficulties and experience loss, but they do not lose faith in goodness and justice. Their strength lies in love, patience and innate wisdom. They are a support for their husbands and children, their reliable rearguard in a world full of trials. This image is shaped by deep cultural layers and patriarchal traditions that have shaped the perception of women as guardians of the hearth and symbols of stability and continuity between generations for centuries. However, Aitmatov does not simply reproduce established stereotypes but endows his heroines with depth and individuality. They do not just fulfil their traditional roles but also demonstrate strength of spirit, wisdom, and empathy, revealing the complexity and richness of the inner world of women.

Rebel – this type of female image is opposed to the traditional one and is a kind of response to changes in social consciousness. Rebel women do not want to accept the restrictions imposed by society. They strive for freedom, self-realisation and independence. They are not afraid to refuse tradition or to defend their rights and beliefs. They have an indomitable spirit, a thirst for life, and a desire for happiness. They don't want to be just a wife or mother; they want to be individuals, to have a personal voice and destiny. They are ready to fight for their love, for their place in life, for the right to be happy. This image emerges on the verge of two epochs, in a

period of social transformation and rethinking of traditional values. The emancipation of women and their desire for equality are reflected in literature. Aitmatov sensitively captured these trends and embodied them in his works, creating vivid and memorable images of women who are not afraid to challenge fate and social mores. The archetype of the female rebel is vividly represented in the story “Jamila” (Aitmatov, 2002). Jamila defies traditional norms by choosing love for Daniyar over following patriarchal expectations. This image is also present in “My Poplar in a Red Scarf” (Aitmatov, 2005) in the person of Asel, who strives for personal happiness and inner freedom, even when faced with the condemnation of society.

The victim – this type evokes special sympathy and compassion. Female victims suffer from injustice, violence, and betrayal. The characters are in difficult life situations that test their strength. These are images of women broken by life, who have lost faith in happiness. They experience heavy losses, betrayal of loved ones, and cruelty in the world around them. But even in the most difficult trials, they retain their human dignity, their capacity for compassion, and their love of life. The origins of this image can be found both in the social problems of the era, such as war, famine, and repression, and in the eternal questions of human existence related to suffering, injustice, and evil. Aitmatov is not afraid to show the dark side of life, revealing the tragedy of women's fate and their vulnerability in the face of cruel reality. The image of a female victim is traced in the story “White Ship” (Aitmatov, 1972) in the form of Becky. The suffering, caused by infertility and unfair treatment by the husband, symbolises the influence of patriarchal norms. The tragic fate of Tanabay's wife from “Farewell, Gyulsary!” (Aitmatov, 1973) also demonstrates this archetype through humility and internal struggle against social expectations.

The wise old woman embodies life experience, wisdom and knowledge. Women of this type are guardians of traditions, advisors and mentors. They possess a deep understanding of life and can offer wise advice and support in difficult times. They are the connection between the past and the present, the bearers of folk wisdom and spiritual values. Their lives are full of events and trials. They have substantial experience, and their knowledge is invaluable. They teach young people patience, wisdom, and love for life. The cultural and historical roots of this image go back centuries and are linked to the traditional respect for elders and the cult of ancestors that is characteristic of many cultures. Aitmatov emphasises the importance of the connection between generations, the continuity of traditions, and the wisdom that is passed on from elders to younger people. The archetype of the wise old woman is embodied in “Duishen” (Aitmatov, 2016b) through the image of Altynai, who in mature age acts as a bearer of folk wisdom, continuity of generations and inspiration for young people. The story of the wise old woman embodies the importance of

intergenerational ties and the power of experience passed down from older to younger generations.

The mother figure is a key theme in Aitmatov's work. The mother figure is central to the novella "Mother Earth" (Aitmatov, 2016a) in the character of Tolgonai. This character symbolises maternal love, self-sacrifice and fortitude. The maternal theme is also present in "White Ship" (Aitmatov, 1972), where the heroine Bekey embodies the tragic side of maternal hopes and their collapse under the influence of social circumstances. For Aitmatov, the mother is a symbol of life, love and self-sacrifice. The mother gives life, protects, nurtures and is a source of moral strength. In Aitmatov's work, maternal love is an all-encompassing feeling that knows no bounds. The mother is ready to do anything for children – protect, guide and inspire. The image of the mother embodies the purest and most noble feelings and the highest moral qualities. This image is universal in nature and is associated with the archetype of the mother, which is present in many cultures. Aitmatov elevates motherhood to an absolute, seeing in it the highest manifestation of humanity.

The image of a woman-nature reflects the deep connection between man and nature, which is characteristic of Women and nature are inextricably linked; they interact and influence each other. A woman in Aitmatov often appears as a part of nature, as its embodiment. Women are just as beautiful, harmonious, and life-loving. The same strength, energy and wisdom are concentrated in the character. The Aitmatov's philosophical views, in which nature is perceived as a source of life, beauty and harmony, created this image. A woman in the works is often associated with nature, embodying its strength, beauty and vital energy. The archetype of a woman-nature is presented in "The White Cloud of Genghis Khan" (Aitmatov, 2023), where the image of a woman giving birth to a child in a military campaign symbolises vitality and connection with natural cycles. This image emphasises the harmony between humans and nature, depicting it as a source of life, beauty and sustainability.

Notably, the typology of female characters in Aitmatov is not rigid and unambiguous. Many characters combine features of different types, therefore even more interesting and complex. However, the identified types can systematise the diversity of female characters and expand the definition of their role in the writer's artistic world. The "artistic system" refers to the coherent structure of interconnected elements – characters, symbols, motifs, and narrative techniques – through which the author realises his aesthetic and ideological vision. Within this system, female characters are not isolated figures but integral components that shape and communicate the moral and philosophical essence of Aitmatov's literary world.

Aitmatov's typology of female archetypes reveals not only a spectrum of feminine identities but also the deep social and moral tensions that shaped Central

Asian society in the twentieth century. The contrast between the keeper of the hearth and the rebel serves as a key axis of this system, symbolising the conflict between tradition and transformation. The keeper of the hearth embodies continuity, duty, and the moral centre of family life – her strength lies in endurance, compassion, and loyalty to inherited values. In contrast, the rebel challenges patriarchal constraints and asserts her right to self-determination, representing the awakening of individuality within a collective world. These opposing archetypes expose the inner struggle between obedience and freedom, communal responsibility and personal happiness, that defines the evolution of gender consciousness in Aitmatov’s prose.

Similarly, the opposition between the victim and the wise woman reflects the passage from suffering to awareness: while the victim embodies the consequences of social injustice and moral rigidity, the wise woman transforms pain into spiritual knowledge, preserving cultural memory and guiding others toward renewal. The tension between the mother figure and the woman-nature archetype further illustrates the coexistence of human and cosmic dimensions—the mother represents moral and familial continuity, while the woman-nature expresses harmony with the universal cycles of life. Through these contrasts, Aitmatov constructs a dynamic artistic system in which female characters personify the dialogue between past and future, tradition and progress, and human fragility and moral resilience. Each opposition not only reflects individual psychological complexity but also mirrors broader societal debates over gender, morality, and cultural identity in a world undergoing profound transformation.

3.2. Complexity of female characters in the works of Aitmatov

Aitmatov was distinguished by a deep development of the psychological characteristics of the characters. Female characters are striking in their versatility and depth. They not only reflect the social reality of the time but also embody complex philosophical and moral ideas and eternal questions of human existence. In them, the writer reveals various facets of the female soul, its strength and fragility, its capacity for love and self-sacrifice, and its resilience in the face of trials. The analysis of specific works contributes to the research of the versatility of female nature in the writer’s interpretation, revealing the peculiarities of interaction with the surrounding world and social mores.

“Face to Face” (Aitmatov, 1991) presents the drama of Seyde, a young woman forced to hide her husband, who has deserted the front. This act forces a difficult moral choice between the duty to society and loyalty to the family. Aitmatov depicts the inner struggle in detail. Doubts, fears, and conflicting feelings are revealed through

internal monologues and emotionally intense dialogues with other characters. Seide does not idealise the husband; the character is aware that the husband has broken the law. However, love and compassion are stronger than fear of punishment. Seydée's courage and determination are on full display in the scene of meeting with the chairman of the village council. Seyde not only asks for leniency but also denounces the authorities for their indifference to ordinary people and their inability to protect them from war and famine. In this scene, Seyde is not just a frightened woman but the voice of a people tired of deprivation and injustice. Seyde's character organically combines the traits of a hearth keeper and a rebel. Seyde strives to preserve family while being unafraid to confront public opinion and defend values (Ünal et al., 2024).

The novella “Jamila” (Aitmatov, 2002) is a lyrical story about the awakening of love and the desire for freedom. The main character, Jamila, is a young married woman who falls in love with another man. Feelings for Daniyar are not just infatuation but the discovery of a new world full of colours, sounds and emotions. Love transforms Jamila, making the character stronger and braver. Aitmatov does not condemn Jamilya for the choice. On the contrary, the author shows that these actions are a protest against outdated traditions that limit women's freedom and right to happiness. Jamilya is not a victim of circumstances; the character consciously chooses her own path. Jamilya is not afraid of condemnation and is ready to fight for the right to love. The story also shows the contrast between Jamila and her mother-in-law, who embodies traditional values. The mother-in-law's rejection of Jamila's choice highlights the complexity of social transformations taking place in Kyrgyz society and the clash of different worldviews.

In “My Poplar in a Red Scarf” (Aitmatov, 2005), the reader follows the fate of Asel, a young woman who has faced challenging life experiences. The first marriage falls apart, forcing them to build a new family. However, the past remains, and Asel repeatedly returns to memories of the first love. Asel is not a typical rebel. The character attempts to find happiness within traditional values while being unable to completely suppress feelings and desires. The character is portrayed as a woman torn between duty and emotion, between the past and the present. Aitmatov shows the drama of a woman's fate and the complexity of the search for love and happiness in a world full of contradictions. Asel is not perfect, with mistakes, but at the same time retains human dignity and faith in love (Shirinova et al., 2021).

The “Duishen” (Aitmatov, 2016b) describes the story of Duishen, a young teacher who arrives in a remote Kyrgyz village to open a school and teach children. However, the character faces misunderstanding and resistance from the locals, who are used to their traditional way of life. In these circumstances, the character of Altynai, a teenage girl who craves knowledge and strives to change destiny, becomes

particularly important. Altynai is the embodiment of strength of spirit and independence. Altynai is not afraid to challenge established traditions and fight for the right to education. The image symbolises the awakening of a new consciousness, the desire for freedom and self-realisation. Altynai is not just a student; the character is Düşen's comrade in the struggle for education. Altynai's image reflects the conflict between the old and the new, between the traditional way of life and the desire for change. Altynai is a symbol of hope for a better future in which women will be able to realise their potential and take their rightful place in society (Agabekova et al., 2021).

The story "Mother Earth" (Aitmatov, 2016a) is a heartfelt tale of maternal love and self-sacrifice. The main character, Tolgonai, loses their husband and sons in the war but does not break under the weight of grief. Tolgonai finds the strength to live on, caring for her daughter-in-law and the child. Tolgonai is the embodiment of motherhood, a symbol of life that continues even in the most difficult circumstances. The image of Tolgonai evokes deep respect and compassion. The character is not just a mother but a keeper of memories, a link between the past and the future. The story uses the technique of addressing an unborn child. Tolgonai recounts the story of life to her grandson, describing the war, love, and the suffering and hopes of people. The story is a kind of confession, an attempt to make sense of what is happening and find meaning in life.

The novel "Farewell, Gyulsary!" (Aitmatov, 1973) revolves around the character of Tanabay's wife. The wife forgives her husband's betrayal, guided not only by personal feelings but also by traditional ideas about the role of women in the family. The wife considers it a duty to support the husband, even in wrongdoing. This image reflects the complexity of a woman's fate in a patriarchal society. A woman must be submissive and patient, forgiving a man for weaknesses. However, this does not mean the absence of pain and resentment. The image of Tanabay's wife shows the inner struggle of a woman torn between duty and feelings. The wife loves the husband but cannot justify the actions.

In the novel "White Ship" (Aitmatov, 1972), the character of Bekey is a woman suffering from infertility. The husband reproaches the wife for this, which leads to tragic consequences. This image shows the cruelty of traditional ideas about the role of women in the family. Women are valued primarily as mothers, and if they cannot have children, they are considered inferior. Bekey is a victim of social stereotypes and male egoism. Bekey loves the husband but cannot provide the desirable: a child. The tragedy is shared by many women who become victims of social expectations and perceptions. Aitmatov raises the issue of female infertility and its impact on women's

lives in a patriarchal society, showing how social norms and stereotypes can destroy human lives.

“The White Cloud of Genghis Khan” (Aitmatov, 2023) describes a woman who was punished for giving birth during a military campaign. This image symbolises the cruelty of war and its devastating impact on human life. This woman is a victim of war, which has taken away her home, family and future. But even in the most difficult circumstances, the character retains the will to live and hope for a better future. The image is a symbol of the vitality and indomitability of the human spirit. The birth of a child in such circumstances is an act of resistance to death and destruction, an affirmation of life in the face of chaos and violence (Ünal et al., 2024).

In general, female characters in Aitmatov’s works are distinguished by their depth, multifaceted nature and psychological realism. The writer does not simply portray women in various social roles but also reveals their inner world, their thoughts, feelings and aspirations. The author shows the complexity and contradictions of the female nature, its strength and fragility, and its capacity for love and self-sacrifice. The female characters in Aitmatov's works are not just literary characters but living people with their destinies, personalities and dreams. Aitmatov's work mirrors the era in which it was written, reflecting the complex social and cultural processes that took place in Soviet society over several decades. Female characters occupy a special place in his work, evolving alongside changes in public consciousness and moral values.

The evolution of female characters in Aitmatov’s works reflects the complex path of social development and changes in social consciousness. From traditional guardians of the hearth to rebels striving for freedom, from the embodiment of eternal values of motherhood to victims of social problems, such is the path of development of female characters in the writer's works. In Aitmatov’s works, female characters perform several important functions, enriching the ideological content and artistic fabric of his prose. They not only reflect the diversity of female characters and destinies but are also used as symbols through which the writer conveys philosophical and moral views (Table 1).

The female characters in Aitmatov's works are not just artistic elements but complex symbols that perform a range of important functions and enrich the ideological content of prose. They not only reflect the diversity of female characters and destinies but also convey the philosophical and moral views, vision of the world and humanity of the author.

Table 1. Functions of female characters in prose by Aitmatov.

Function	Description	Examples of works
Carriers of moral values	Embody kindness, compassion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and preserve humanity in difficult situations.	“Face to Face” (Seide), “Mother Earth” (Tolgonai), “Duishen” (Altynai)
A symbol of life and procreation	Associated with maternity, fertility, continuity of life, and intergenerational communication.	“Mother Earth” (Tolgonay), “White Ship” (Bekei)
Keepers of traditions and culture	Pass on folk wisdom and customs and ensure the continuity of culture.	“Jamila” (Jamila's mother-in-law), “Mother Earth” (Tolgonay)
A symbol of social change	Challenge outdated norms and fight for freedom and equality.	“Jamila” (Jamila), “Duishen” (Altynai), “My Poplar in a Red Scarf” (Asel)
Victims of social problems	Depict the tragic consequences of social problems (war, violence, injustice).	“White Ship” (Bekei), “The White Cloud of Genghis Khan” (a woman punished for giving birth)
Expressing the author's position	Convey the author's thoughts ideas, and vision of the world.	“Jamila” (assertion of the right to freedom), “Mother Earth” (celebration of maternal love)

Source: compiled by the authors based on Karaeva and Edilova (2022), Ünal et al. (2024), and Agabekova et al. (2021).

One of the key functions of female characters is to embody moral ideals (Efremov, 2025; Kieliszek, 2022). They embody qualities such as kindness, compassion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and humanity. They are capable of resisting cruelty and injustice, maintaining spiritual purity and moral fortitude even in the most difficult trials of life, and affirming humanistic values and faith in goodness. They serve as moral guides for other characters and readers, inspiring them to preserve their humanity in all circumstances. Another important function is the symbolisation of the vitality and continuity of existence. Women in Aitmatov's works are closely connected with nature, with its cycles of birth and death, and with eternal renewal. They embody the idea of the continuation of the family line, the connection between generations, and the infinity of life. Motherly love appears as the highest manifestation of this life force, capable of overcoming any obstacles, healing emotional wounds and giving strength to continue living. Female characters also serve as guardians of cultural traditions and historical memory (Le, 2024; Jiao, 2024). They are the bearers

of folk wisdom, customs, and moral values, and they preserve the spiritual heritage of their people. They pass on their experience to the younger generation, ensuring the continuity of culture and the connection between times, highlighting the importance of preserving our roots and historical memory. At the same time, female images can symbolise social change and the desire for freedom. They challenge outdated norms and traditions, defend their rights, and fight for equality and self-fulfilment. They embody the spirit of freedom and independence and the desire for personal growth and social justice.

Some women's images perform the function of social criticism (Oliveira, 2024; Papa et al., 2025). They become victims of cruel traditions, social injustice, military conflicts, and gender inequality. Through their fates, the writer shows the tragic consequences of social problems and calls for their solution, for the humanisation of society and the protection of human rights. Finally, female characters serve to express the author's position. Through them, the writer conveys thoughts and ideas, the vision of the world, and the attitude to what is happening. They reveal the philosophical, moral, and social problems that concern contemporaries and express a civil position.

The proposed typology of female archetypes in Aitmatov's works contributes significantly to both gender literary theory and Central Asian literary studies by offering a culturally grounded yet theoretically integrative framework for interpreting women's images. It expands gender literary theory by demonstrating how archetypal categories – such as the mother, the rebel, the victim, and the wise woman – can be reinterpreted through the lens of nomadic philosophy, moral collectivism, and existential reflection, thereby linking local cultural codes with universal feminist concepts of agency and self-definition. Within the context of Central Asian literary scholarship, this typology provides a systematic model for analysing female representation beyond sociological or folkloric perspectives, revealing how Aitmatov's heroines articulate ethical, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of identity. By bridging symbolic analysis with gender theory, the study situates Aitmatov's female characters as central to understanding the transformation of gender consciousness in the region's literature and as a vital contribution to global discussions on the intersection of culture, philosophy, and women's self-realisation.

4. Discussion

The analysis of female characters in the works of Aitmatov revealed both universal and unique aspects of characteristics. Comparison of the results with the data of other studies established similarities and differences and contributed to the issue.

The role of family values in the formation of women's images was analysed by Sataeva (2017) in a study on the novel “Jamila”. The author emphasised that the conflict between the protagonist's personal aspirations and patriarchal norms demonstrated the gap between traditional and new values in Kyrgyz society. The comparison demonstrated that the results of both studies overlapped in revealing the duality of Jamila's image, representing both traditional and innovative beginnings. However, this study extends the analysis beyond the confines of a single story, tracing the evolution of female characters in the broader context of Aitmatov, including their symbolic and philosophical significance. The term “symbolic image” is used to describe a literary representation that transcends its immediate narrative function to express broader philosophical or cultural meanings. A symbolic image in Aitmatov’s works thus embodies moral, existential, or mythological significance, serving as a vehicle for the writer’s reflection on humanity, nature, and social transformation.

In terms of the universality of female characters, Pardaeva (2021) analysed Aitmatov’s work within the context of world literature. The author emphasised that the female characters created by the writer combined national identity and universal archetypes, which made them meaningful to readers from different cultures. The results of this study confirmed these conclusions, especially regarding the archetypal nature of the heroines. The difference lay in the emphasis on their evolution and functionality in the artistic system, which contributed to the role of female characters in the context of Aitmatov's ideological concept.

Another aspect was the study of stereotyping of female images, which was examined by Yelubay and Biray (2023) through an analysis of Turkic proverbs. The authors concluded that traditional perceptions often limited the role of women to the home and family responsibilities. A comparison demonstrated that in the works of Aitmatov, female characters exceeded such stereotypes, combining traditional and progressive traits, which made them more complex and dynamic.

The symbolic and mythopoetic depth of female images studied by Kabdiyeva (2024) was related to their stage interpretations, which emphasised the sacredness of female characters in the works of Aitmatov. The author noted that female characters embodied the spiritual principle, being symbols of the connection between the earthly and the divine, and also acted as conductors of universal ideas about life, love and death. Kabdiyeva demonstrated how the sacred features of the heroines enhanced their significance in literary and stage contexts. This study confirmed these conclusions but expanded them by analysing the functions of female characters in the structure of the works, where they not only embodied philosophical ideas but were also key in the development of the plot and the resolution of the conflict. The difference was that this

study emphasised the interaction of the heroines with other characters and their influence on the social context, which contributed to their versatility.

The role of language in creating new meanings through women's images was addressed by Sha (2022). The author emphasised that women described outside the traditional framework of femininity became active participants in cultural change, and their images demonstrated the use of language for the expression of subjective experience and redefining social roles. The study analysed the linguistic strategies used to create new cultural meanings that could transform the perception of gender stereotypes. This study confirmed the idea of women as agents of change but emphasised their role in socio-historical contexts and symbolic content. The difference was that Sha addressed primarily linguistic aspects, while the present study examined female characters in terms of their multifunctionality and influence on the development of the plot and ideological structure of the works.

The influence of female characters on the education of moral values was analysed by Mamatova et al. (2020). The authors emphasised that female characters in the works of Aitmatov were central in the formation of such qualities as humanity, empathy and compassion in the younger generation. Maternal images, which, according to the researchers, were used as moral guidelines and symbols of vitality, were emphasised. The analysis highlighted the importance of female characters as carriers of cultural and spiritual values, capable of influencing the education of young people through artistic images. The results of the study resonate with the present study, which also emphasises the important role of women as carriers of moral ideals. However, this study expands on this aspect, highlighting not only the educational function but also the interaction of female characters with other images and their role in revealing philosophical ideas and building the symbolic system of works. This approach demonstrated the versatility of Aitmatov and their influence not only on the formation of moral qualities but also on the cultural and social transformations.

The folklore heritage and its influence on women's images, studied by Chingiz (2024), demonstrated that in the folk tradition, women were presented as carriers of collective identity, embodying cultural and spiritual values passed down from generation to generation. The author emphasised that folklore images often emphasised collective traits such as loyalty to traditions, family care and moral fortitude, which contributed to the creation of stereotypical but stable archetypes. This study also confirmed the idea of women's role as symbols of collective consciousness but with an emphasis on their active role in transmitting moral values and influencing social processes. The difference between the results was that the present study emphasised the multifunctionality of female images, while the study by Chingiz focused on folklore typology.

One aspect explored in this study concerned the symbolism of female images that represented key human and cultural values. Simanjuntak and Lumingkewas (2022) also emphasised the symbolic significance of women in literature. Female images were analysed from a hermeneutic perspective, where they represented universal concepts such as love, devotion and strength of spirit. These findings echo those of the present study; however, while the present study found that the symbolism of female images was closely linked to their functions in the plot structure, Simanjuntak and Lumingkewas addressed religious and mythological interpretations.

The aspect of the historical evolution of women's images studied in this paper was addressed by Lucas and Ordeniza (2023). The authors studied the changes in the perception of women in the literature of different eras, highlighting the transition from patriarchal stereotypes to more complex and independent heroines. The study emphasised that the literature of modern times reflected the desire for equality and freedom of choice. This aspect intersected with the results of the analysis of the works of Aitmatov, whose female characters demonstrated an evolution from traditional roles to more progressive models. The difference was that Lucas and Ordeniza emphasised temporal and cultural shifts, while the present study focused on the evolution within the work of one author.

Jackson (2022) studied the role of women in Renaissance literature, highlighting their role in creating new cultural meanings. The author argued that the heroines of this period became active participants in cultural change, rethinking traditional gender roles. Comparison with the results of this study revealed similarities in the presentation of women as agents of change, but in the analysis of Aitmatov's works, this was closely related to the socio-historical context of Kyrgyzstan, which provided a unique national specificity to the characters.

Garbacik-Balakowicz (2022) studied female characters in the works of contemporary Hungarian women writers, emphasising their psychological complexity and diversity. The author noted that women in these works were often at the intersection of tradition and modern challenges, making them characters of conflict and transformation. These results were consistent with the present study, especially in terms of the complexity of the inner world of female characters. However, the difference was that the analysis of Aitmatov in this study also included their symbolic and philosophical functions, which went beyond the social and psychological approach used in the study by Garbacik-Balakowicz.

An analysis of female characters in contemporary Chinese literature by Wang and Galai (2024) found that heroines often reflected social and cultural changes associated with modernisation and the impact of globalisation. The authors emphasised that contemporary Chinese literature demonstrated more progressive

images of women that went beyond traditional gender roles. In this study, similar trends were observed in the analysis of the late works of Aitmatov, where women's images were also transformed towards greater freedom and independence. The difference was that in Aitmatov's transformations, female characters were closely intertwined with national specificity and philosophical ideas.

Guo (2022) studied female characters in the literature of ancient China, highlighting their symbolic meaning as carriers of moral and cultural values. The author concluded that these images represented stereotyped archetypes, such as the virtuous wife or the wise mother, reflecting the dominant patriarchal norms. The comparison demonstrated that Aitmatov's works retained elements of archetypalism, but the characters were more individualised, therefore multidimensional characters capable of social and personal transformation.

A comparative synthesis of Aitmatov's female archetypes demonstrates that while they share common features with those found in Turkic and world literature, they possess distinct characteristics shaped by the author's cultural and philosophical worldview. The figures of mothers, rebels, victims, and wise women reflect universal archetypes of femininity, yet in Aitmatov's interpretation they transcend traditional boundaries and acquire a deeper symbolic meaning. His heroines combine personal emotion with social responsibility, embodying both the continuity of national traditions and the quest for moral renewal. They are not passive reflections of their environment but active participants in the transformation of society, whose inner strength and moral integrity become sources of humanistic and ethical values. Unlike many literary traditions where female characters remain confined to domestic or subordinate roles, Aitmatov endows them with agency, moral authority, and a philosophical dimension that unites individual experience with collective destiny. Thus, his female images simultaneously align with global archetypes and express a unique synthesis of national identity, cultural symbolism, and existential reflection.

5. Conclusions

The study revealed the specificity of female characters in the works of Aitmatov, which determined their artistic and philosophical significance more deeply. The analysis of the works demonstrated that the female characters of Aitmatov were complex and multifaceted images that, on the one hand, reflected traditional social roles, and on the other hand, demonstrated changes in the perception of women in different cultural and historical contexts.

The typology of female characters identified covered several key archetypes, including the keeper of the hearth, the rebel, the victim, the wise old woman, the

mother figure, and the woman as nature. Each type fulfilled specific artistic and ideological functions, enabling Aitmatov to convey with great accuracy both the individual traits of the heroines and their symbolic meaning. Such images not only embodied the personal qualities of the characters but also reflected broader social, cultural, and philosophical concepts characteristic of the era and society in which the works were created.

The analysis of such works as “Face to Face”, “Jamila”, “My Poplar in a Red Scarf”, “Duishen”, “Mother Earth” and others demonstrated that the female characters of Aitmatov were distinguished by a deep psychological development. Their inner world, thoughts, feelings and actions often contradicted or, on the contrary, supported social norms and expectations. For instance, Jamilya embodied the desire for freedom and self-realisation, challenging traditions, while Tolgonay from Mother Earth symbolised the unchanging power of maternal love and resilience in the face of severe trials.

The evolution of female characters in the works of Aitmatov demonstrated that in the early period of his work, women were predominantly depicted within the framework of traditional roles associated with family and home. Over time, images of heroines striving for independence, freedom and equality emerged, reflecting changes in social consciousness. In later works, female characters acquired philosophical depth and symbolism, expressing universal ideas about life, love, nature and human resilience, as well as reflecting existential issues related to fate and moral choice.

The revealed functions of female images demonstrated their importance in the artistic structure of the works. Women in Aitmatov acted as bearers of moral values, symbols of life and motherhood, keepers of cultural traditions and a reflection of social change. These images served as conductors of the author's philosophical ideas and became key elements for revealing the ideological content of his works. Thus, female images in the works of Aitmatov combined cultural specificity and universal archetypes, becoming an important part of the writer's artistic and philosophical heritage.

Future research could extend this study by conducting a comparative analysis of gender archetypes across Turkic authors to trace shared cultural codes and region-specific reinterpretations of femininity. Another promising direction involves applying digital humanities methods, such as computational text analysis or visual mapping of archetypal motifs, to identify recurrent symbolic structures and thematic networks across Central Asian literary corpora. Such approaches would not only deepen understanding of gender representation in regional literature but also situate Aitmatov's female imagery within a broader transnational and interdisciplinary framework, linking narrative symbolism with evolving models of identity, ethics, and cultural memory.

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