INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE & LANGUAGE

Mother Earth as a Multilayered Concept in Chingiz Aitmatov's Prose: A Semantic, Cultural, and Ecological Analysis

Karlygash Sarekenova[1], Aishyrak Melis[1], Nurlykhan Aitova[1*], Nagbdu Kamarova[2]

[1]L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan, [2]Caspian University of Technologies and Engineering named after Sh. Yessenov, Kazakhstan

Abstract This study examines how the concept of Mother Earth is constructed in Chingiz Aitmatov's prose as a semantic, cultural, and ecological category. To address this gap, the study analyses four prose works: *Plakha* (The Scaffold), *Qosh Bol, Gülsary* (Farewell, Gulsary!), *Belyy Parokhod* (The White Ship), and *I Dol'she Veka Dlitsya Den'* (The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years). The study uses a qualitative conceptual-semantic analysis of 37 passages where natural elements acquire ethical, emotional, or symbolic meaning. The passages were selected through close reading and grouped by recurrent lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and culturally marked features. The analysis reveals four interconnected conceptual models: Mother Earth as a source of life, as a maternal protector, as a moral authority, and as a keeper of memory. These models show that nature in Aitmatov's prose functions not merely as a setting or poetic image, but as an ethical framework through which human responsibility, cultural continuity, ecological vulnerability, and moral judgment are articulated. The study contributes to cultural linguistics and literary ecocriticism by showing how Mother Earth operates as a structured conceptual model within Aitmatov's artistic worldview.

Keywords: *Conceptual-semantic analysis, Cultural linguistics, Ecocriticism, Turkic worldview, Conceptual metaphor*

[*]**Corresponding Author:**
Aitova Nurlykhan
nurlykhan.an@gmail.com

Received: April 8, 2026
Revised: June 9, 2026
Accepted: July 19, 2026
First Published: August 7, 2026

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1. Introduction

In Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and other Turkic cultural contexts, the relationship with nature has traditionally been grounded in closeness, respect, and moral responsibility. Although these traditions have their own historical and cultural specificities, they share a broader nomadic worldview in which nature is not perceived as an external environment but as a living presence that sustains human life and demands ethical balance. Within this worldview, the idea of Mother Earth holds a special status. It denotes not only the physical land, but also the source of life, continuity, and moral order. These meanings are deeply rooted in folklore, epic narratives, and

https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscl.2026.2087706.4523

Oral tradition, where the Earth is repeatedly personified as a nurturing and protective force, closely linked to ideas of care, gratitude, and responsibility (Eliade, 1959; Konyratbaev, 2001). Such representations reflect a worldview in which humans are inseparable from nature and accountable to it. As documented by Konyratbaev (2001) and Eliade (1959), this cultural framework provides the essential background against which the literary treatment of Mother Earth in Turkic prose must be understood.

Among the Turkic writers who engage most profoundly with this worldview, Chingiz Aitmatov stands out as a particularly significant figure, as his prose consistently transforms the cultural understanding of Mother Earth into a central literary and ethical concern. Despite its cultural centrality, the concept of Mother Earth has rarely been examined as a structured semantic phenomenon in relation to Chingiz Aitmatov's prose. In literary scholarship, including studies devoted to Chingiz Aitmatov, nature is most often approached as a symbolic image or thematic motif, while its internal conceptual organisation remains largely implicit (Isaev, 2010; Mukanov, 1998). Yet Aitmatov's prose consistently assigns nature an active ethical role. The Earth in his works reacts to human behaviour, preserves memory, and exposes moral rupture rather than merely framing events. Although recent international research has begun to link nature-related imagery with ethical values, cultural memory, and collective experience (Guo & Wu, 2025; Zhunussova et al., 2025), a systematic conceptual and semantic analysis of Mother Earth in Aitmatov's prose has not yet been fully developed. This gap is especially important because Aitmatov's works emerge from a Kyrgyz literary and cultural context while also resonating with broader Turkic, including Kazakh, cultural models of land, ancestry, and human responsibility.

Against this background, the objective of the present study is to examine how the concept of Mother Earth is constructed in Chingiz Aitmatov's prose from a conceptual-semantic perspective. The study treats Mother Earth not as an ornamental metaphor, but as a culturally embedded ethical framework that organises human–nature relations. The analysis is based on *The Scaffold, Farewell, Gulsary!, The White Ship,* and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) Which conceptual models shape the image of Mother Earth across the four prose works? (2) Through which lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and culturally marked mechanisms are these models realised? By answering these questions, the article aims to show how mythology, cultural memory, and ecological ethics converge in Aitmatov's representation of nature, contributing to discussions in cultural linguistics and environmental humanities.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in conceptual metaphor theory, cultural linguistics, mythological and archetypal interpretation, and ecocritical thought. These approaches provide a basis for examining Mother Earth not simply as a metaphorical or symbolic image, but as a complex conceptual structure in which ethical, ecological, and cultural meanings intersect within Aitmatov's prose.

While conceptual metaphor theory explains how abstract meanings such as care, protection, memory, and responsibility are understood through concrete images of motherhood and land, cultural linguistics shows how these metaphorical models are shaped by shared cultural experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sharifian, 2017). Together, these approaches explain why the Earth may be represented not only as a physical landscape, but also as a mother, guardian, witness, and moral authority. Bridging these theoretical lenses allows for a more nuanced reading of literary texts, where metaphorical language is not merely decorative but deeply embedded in culturally specific systems of thought. Cultural linguistics also offers an important theoretical basis for the analysis. Sharifian (2017) emphasises that language reflects shared cultural conceptualisations and collective ways of interpreting the world. In this respect, Mother Earth is closely associated with cultural models of land, ancestry, belonging, care, and moral responsibility. In Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and other Turkic cultural contexts, nature is often conceptualised as a living and value-bearing presence. At the same time, these traditions should not be treated as identical or interchangeable. Aitmatov's prose is rooted primarily in a Kyrgyz literary and cultural context, while also resonating with broader Turkic nomadic

worldviews, including Kazakh understandings of sacred land, ancestral memory, and human accountability before nature. To further illuminate how these shared cultural conceptualisations operate at the level of social values and ethical frameworks, it is useful to turn to cross-cultural dimensions of identity and obligation.

Hofstede's (2001) distinction between individualist and collectivist orientations helps contextualise the communal meanings attached to land. In Kazakh and broader Turkic traditions, land is often understood as an ancestral inheritance connecting individual identity with collective memory and responsibility (Abdigaziuly, 2012; Konyratbaev, 2001). This cultural predisposition manifests in Aitmatov's prose through the repeated invocation of "native land" (ata meken) and "ancestral soil," where individual identity remains inseparable from communal memory and ecological stewardship. Consequently, human actions are evaluated not by their individual utility, but by their alignment with collective well-being and the preservation of natural harmony, a moral calculus that positions Mother Earth as both the foundation of communal life and the ultimate arbiter of ethical conduct. While Hofstede's framework illuminates the social and communal dimensions of this relationship, the deeper spiritual and mythological underpinnings of Mother Earth require a complementary exploration through the lens of sacred tradition and ecological philosophy. The mythological meanings of Mother Earth are closely connected with its ecological and ethical functions. Images of sacred land, fertility, ancestry, and continuity establish the cultural value of nature, while ecocriticism explains how these meanings are used to evaluate environmental destruction and human responsibility (Eliade, 1959; Naess, 1973; Plumwood, 1993). The concept of Mother Earth occupies a significant place in mythological and literary traditions, where it is associated with life-giving power, protection, fertility, continuity, and moral order. In Turkic cultural contexts, this image is closely linked to nomadic worldviews that emphasise harmony between humans and nature, spiritual continuity, and respect for the land. Mother Earth is therefore understood not only as a symbol of native land, but also as an expression of ecological balance and ethical responsibility. Eliade's (1959) discussion of sacred space and mythological consciousness is useful in this regard, since it helps to interpret the land as a carrier of spiritual meaning and cultural continuity.

Having established the mythological and ecocritical dimensions of Mother Earth, it is now necessary to consider how these themes are specifically realized and given narrative form within Aitmatov's literary corpus itself. Within Kazakh and Kyrgyz literary studies, Chingiz Aitmatov's prose has been widely examined in connection with nature, mythology, symbolism, national worldview, and ecological thought. Scholars such as Abdigaziuly (2012), Mukanov (1998), Zhumabayev (2005), and Isaev (2010) underline the philosophical depth of nature imagery in Aitmatov's works and draw attention to its mythological roots and symbolic richness. These studies show that nature in Aitmatov's prose does not function merely as a background to human events. Rather, it appears as a spiritually charged presence connected with national worldview, moral values, and the ethical evaluation of human action. Ecologically oriented research further highlights environmental crisis and human responsibility as significant dimensions of Aitmatov's artistic world (Myrzakhmetov, 2018; Seitkazin, 2015). From a broader theoretical perspective, the image of Mother Earth is also consistent with ecocritical and environmental-philosophical approaches. Naess (1973) and Plumwood (1993) call attention to the limitations of anthropocentric thinking and stress the need to recognise ethical relations between humans and the natural world. This position corresponds closely to Aitmatov's representation of nature as vulnerable, sacred, and morally responsive to human actions. In this sense, Mother Earth in Aitmatov's prose may be interpreted not only as a cultural image, but also as an ethical category associated with care, vulnerability, responsibility, and ecological justice.

While these foundational studies within Kazakh and Kyrgyz literary scholarship have firmly established the cultural and philosophical significance of nature in Aitmatov's works, more recent international research has extended this inquiry by applying contemporary cognitive, ecofeminist, and semiotic frameworks to further illuminate the mechanisms through which these meanings are linguistically and narratively constructed. Recent international studies have also shown growing interest in the ways culturally significant concepts are structured and transmitted through language. In cognitive and cultural linguistics, such concepts are viewed as carriers of collective memory and ethical norms, revealing the close relationship between language, culture, and worldview (Zhunussova

et al., 2025). Similarly, Guo and Wu (2025), in their ecofeminist reading, interpret Mother Earth as a figure that symbolically connects women's experiences, vulnerability, and life-sustaining labour with the land itself. Studies of cultural memory and post-Soviet identity also demonstrate that literature serves as a space in which national identity, ethical norms, and historical memory are preserved and reinterpreted, often through nature-related imagery (Alieva et al., 2025; Ysmailova et al., 2024). Using a semantic-semiotic analysis of Aitmatov's novels, Sardarbek kyzy and Krutikov (2024) found that natural imagery forms part of the writer's spiritual and moral axiosphere and functions as a means of ethical evaluation. Aslar (2024), through a sociological analysis of Aitmatov's early stories, showed that natural elements operate as active forces that influence characters' behaviour and moral choices.

Taken together, conceptual metaphor theory explains how the Earth is understood through maternal, animate, and moral imagery, while cultural linguistics situates these representations within culturally shared models of land, ancestry, care, and responsibility. Mythological approaches clarify the sacred and archetypal meanings of Mother Earth, whereas ecocriticism reveals how these meanings function in evaluating ecological destruction and human conduct. Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that nature in Aitmatov's prose is symbolic, spiritualised, morally significant, and closely connected with cultural memory and ecological responsibility. However, these dimensions have generally been examined separately, and their organisation into a recurrent conceptual-semantic system across several works remains insufficiently explained. To address this gap, the present study analyses how Mother Earth is constructed in *The Scaffold*, *Farewell, Gulsary!*, *The White Ship*, and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* through lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and culturally marked features.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

The empirical material of this study is drawn from four prose works by Chingiz Aitmatov: *Farewell, Gulsary!* (originally published in 1967), *The White Ship* (1970), *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980), and *The Scaffold* (1986). These works were selected because they represent different stages of Aitmatov's creative development and contain conceptually significant representations of the relationship between human beings and nature. In these texts, nature is not limited to the function of setting, but appears as a meaningful element of ethical, cultural, and ecological experience. The corpus was compiled from the source-language texts actually used in the analysis. The nine passages from *Farewell, Gulsary!* were selected from the Kazakh-language text included in Aitmatov's collection *Aq keme: Povester* (Aitmatov, 2005, pp. 5–151 [KZ]). The nine passages from *The White Ship* were selected from the Russian-language digital text *Belyy Parokhod (Posle Skazki)* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a [RU]). The eight passages from *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* were selected from the Russian-language digital text *I Dol'she Veka Dlitsya Den'* (Aitmatov, n.d.-b [RU]). The eleven passages from *The Scaffold* were selected from the 2010 Russian-language edition of *Plakha* published by Detskaya literatura (Aitmatov, 2010 [RU]). Because complete publication details are not provided in the supplied digital files of *Belyy Parokhod* and *I Dol'she Veka Dlitsya Den'*, page references to these two works follow the pagination of the digital files used in the analysis.

The final corpus consisted of 37 passages in which land, soil, steppe, water, mountains, animals, plants, sky, and other natural elements acquire semantic, symbolic, emotional, or ethical significance. Particular attention was paid to passages in which nature is personified, associated with motherhood or care, represented as a source of life, connected with memory and ancestry, or presented as a moral authority responding to human action.

The original publication year of each work is retained to indicate its literary chronology, while each quotation identifies the edition or digital text actually consulted. Where a later-dated edition was used, both dates are given, as in Aitmatov (2010); the two undated Russian-language digital texts are cited as n.d.-a and n.d.-b. The labels [RU] and [KZ] identify whether the quoted passage was translated from Russian or Kazakh. Where a parallel-language version was available, it was consulted for semantic comparison and verification; however, each passage was counted only once and was

translated from the edition explicitly identified in the citation. Appendix 1 provides the passage IDs, source works, source languages, page locations, and conceptual classifications for all passages included in the corpus.

3.2. Procedure

The study follows a qualitative conceptual-semantic procedure based on close reading, semantic categorisation, and interpretative analysis. At the first stage, the selected works were read in full in order to identify episodes in which nature performs more than a descriptive function. Passages were included in the corpus of analysis when natural images were connected with one or more of the following meanings: life, care, protection, suffering, moral judgment, memory, continuity, ecological responsibility, or the sacred value of the native land. At the second stage, the selected passages were examined according to their lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and culturally marked features. Lexical analysis focused on recurrent words and expressions related to land, steppe, soil, water, animals, mountains, sky, and ancestral space. Metaphorical and figurative analysis focused on personification, maternal imagery, sacred-land motifs, and expressions that present nature as a living and responsive presence. Narrative analysis considered the role of each passage within the development of character, conflict, memory, and ethical evaluation. At the third stage, the identified features were grouped inductively into recurrent conceptual patterns. This procedure made it possible to distinguish four interconnected conceptual models of Mother Earth: Mother Earth as a source of life, Mother Earth as a maternal protector, Mother Earth as a moral authority, and Mother Earth as a keeper of memory. These models were not imposed in advance, but were derived from repeated semantic and narrative patterns found across the analysed texts. Finally, the conceptual models were compared across the four works in order to determine how they function in different narrative contexts. All quotations were translated by the authors from the source-language editions identified in the citations.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the conceptual-semantic analysis of Mother Earth in Chingiz Aitmatov's four prose works. The results are organised according to the four conceptual models identified through the analysis: Mother Earth as a source of life, as a maternal protector, as a moral authority, and as a keeper of memory. For each model, textual evidence is provided with accompanying analytical commentary. The section concludes with a cross-textual comparison of how these models operate across the four works under investigation.

4.1. Mother Earth as a Source of Life

The first conceptual model presents Mother Earth as a source of life. In Aitmatov's prose, this model is constructed through the semantic fields of land, steppe, soil, water, breath, home, and continuity. Nature is not represented as a passive background to human events. It appears as the primary condition of human existence and as a living force that sustains both physical life and spiritual belonging. This model is especially visible in *The Scaffold*, where the Earth is described as an enduring presence that exceeds the limits of individual human life: *"The day was drawing to a close, radiating merciless heat from the setting sun and from the earth heated throughout the day. The sun and the steppe are eternal magnitudes: the steppe is measured by the sun, by the vastness of the space it illuminates…"* (Aitmatov, 1986, pp. 35–36 [RU]). The parallel between the sun and the steppe presents the natural world as a lasting order that exceeds individual human experience. The scale of the illuminated space also emphasises the vastness and continuity of the land.

The same meaning is developed through the image of the steppe as a living and spiritually significant space: *"Today we shall bid farewell to our land, the land that raised us… while we are still here, we shall be at home"* (Aitmatov, 2010, p. 88 [RU]). The expression "the land that raised us" gives the native landscape a nurturing function. Land is represented not simply as territory, but as the source of belonging and collective identity.

In *Farewell, Gulsary!*, the source-of-life model is connected with Tanabai's intimate perception of the native steppe. The description *"The snow melted, and the earth's green growth began to rise… The horses regained their condition and colour"* (Aitmatov, 1967, p. 21 [KZ]) gives the landscape a

bodily and animate quality. The melting snow and the return of green growth mark the renewal of the natural cycle. This recovery is reflected in the horses, whose restored strength links the vitality of animals directly to the regeneration of the land.

A similar semantic structure appears in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, where the Sarozek steppe is understood not as a barren desert, but as a space that forms the human soul. Edigei's words are especially revealing: *"The steppe is vast, and man is small. The steppe is indifferent; it does not matter to it whether life is good or difficult for you; you must accept it as it is… So it is with a person at the Sarozek railway stops: unless one commits oneself to the work, takes root in the steppe, and becomes established there, it is difficult to endure"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-b, p. 75 [RU]). The metaphor of taking root connects human endurance with attachment to place. The steppe sustains life, but it also requires adaptation, commitment, and acceptance of its conditions.

Thus, Mother Earth as a source of life is realised through natural lexemes, personification, and images of *nourishment, renewal, rootedness, homeland, and continuity.* Across the analysed works, the Earth is represented as the foundation of human existence and as the living ground of moral responsibility.

4.2. Mother Earth as a Maternal Protector

The second conceptual model represents Mother Earth as a maternal protector. In this model, nature is associated with care, tenderness, forgiveness, protection, and emotional refuge. This model is most clearly developed in *The White Ship*, where the child protagonist finds in nature the warmth and reliability that he does not receive from the human world. The child's emotional relationship with the natural environment is one of the clearest examples of this model: *"The shiraljin plants are faithful friends… The clouds know that you are not feeling well"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a, p. 29 [RU]). The plants and clouds are presented as emotionally responsive companions. By offering concealment and comfort, the natural environment provides the child with the sense of safety that is absent from his human relationships.

The legend of the Mother Deer develops this maternal model at a mythological level: *"The Horned Mother Deer… fed them with her milk and warmed them with her body at night"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a, p. 29 [RU]). The Mother Deer therefore represents both sacred ancestry and an ethical boundary that human beings are expected to observe. The child's desire to become part of nature further strengthens the protective function of Mother Earth: *"I will become a fish. Do you hear, grandfather? I will swim away… The boy walked farther, went down to the river, and stepped straight into the water. No one yet knew that the boy had swum away as a fish down the river"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a, p. 29 [RU]). The imagined transformation into a fish expresses the child's desire to escape the cruelty of the human world. Water becomes an alternative space associated with freedom, purity, and release from suffering.

Another passage deepens the same model: *They would not have gone far if the Horned Mother Deer had not fed them with her milk, warmed them with her body at night…"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a, p. 29 [RU]). Milk, bodily warmth, and protection from wild animals construct the Deer-Mother through concrete maternal actions. Her care is both life-sustaining and protective, making her an archetypal figure of motherhood.

The maternal model is also developed in *The Scaffold* through the representation of animal motherhood: *"The she-wolf's heart began to beat faster; it was filled with courage and the determination to protect from danger those she carried within her… The great natural instinct of preserving offspring spoke within her… the need to caress and warm the future cubs and give them her milk"* (Aitmatov, 1986, pp. 22–23 [RU]). The passage grounds maternal protection in the instinct to preserve unborn life. Courage, warmth, and milk connect the she-wolf's physical motherhood with the broader continuity of the natural world. *Across these episodes, maternal protection is realised through shelter, nourishment, bodily warmth, and the preservation of vulnerable life.*

4.3. Mother Earth as a Moral Authority

The third conceptual model presents Mother Earth as a moral authority. In this model, nature evaluates human actions and reveals the consequences of ethical failure. The Earth does not remain

neutral in the face of violence, greed, ecological destruction, or spiritual indifference. It becomes a measure of justice and responsibility. In *The Scaffold*, this model is expressed through the idea that human beings exploit nature without recognising their obligations toward it: *"This method… destroyed the soil: the land would remain unusable for at least two hundred years"* (Aitmatov, 1986, p. 237 [RU]). The passage shifts attention from immediate damage to its lasting consequences. The destruction of soil for two hundred years reveals the contradiction of addressing one social problem through another form of harm. Nature is thus placed within an ethical framework in which human intervention carries long-term responsibility.

This ethical meaning is reinforced by another statement: *"The Moyunkum savanna, however vast and expansive it may be, is only a small island… increasingly pressed year after year by newly ploughed virgin lands… canals and roads advance upon it… and technically equipped people on wheels and engines intrude ever more insistently"* (Aitmatov, 1986, p. 30 [RU]). The contrast between the apparent vastness of the savanna and its description as a "small island" reveals the vulnerability of natural space. Roads, canals, and machines appear as advancing forces that steadily restrict the habitat of animals. In *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, moral judgment is conveyed through images of pollution and human neglect: *"The entire route of the trains was littered with scraps of paper and crumpled newspapers, broken bottles, cigarette butts, twisted tin cans, and other useless rubbish. The stench from the necks of the unbroken bottles was especially foul"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-b, p. 75 [RU]). The accumulation of broken bottles, cigarette butts, and metal waste transforms the steppe into a record of human negligence. The foul smell intensifies the image of contamination and gives ecological damage a strongly negative evaluation.

The same model appears in the representation of technological violence against the Sarozek steppe: *"The sky seemed to collapse overhead… A man, a camel, and a dog… fled in panic"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-b, p. 75 [RU]). The image of the collapsing sky conveys the overwhelming force of technological destruction. By placing the man, camel, and dog together in flight, the passage shows that such violence threatens human and non-human life alike. A further passage depicts the mass killing of saigas: *"The shooters drove the saigas farther, firing at them with automatic weapons at close range and without aiming, mowing them down as though they were hay in a garden… The savanna paid the gods a bloody tribute for daring to remain a savanna; heaps of saiga carcasses rose in the truck beds"* (Aitmatov, 1986, p. 47 [RU]). The comparison of slaughtered saigas with mown hay exposes the loss of moral restraint in human behaviour. The phrase "bloody tribute" personifies the savanna and turns the killing into an accusation against those who treat living nature as an expendable resource. In this model, ecological damage becomes evidence of moral failure, while nature exposes the consequences of human violence and irresponsibility.

4.4. Mother Earth as a Keeper of Memory

The fourth conceptual model represents Mother Earth as a keeper of memory. In this model, the land preserves personal, ancestral, and historical experience. Nature is not only a place where events occur; it is a space in which the past is retained, transmitted, and ethically interpreted.

In *Farewell, Gulsary!*, the native land is closely connected with Tanabai's personal memory and identity. The phrase *"Everything from long ago came alive… Nothing ever disappears completely from memory"* (Aitmatov, 2005, p. 29 [KZ]) shows how memory is attached to concrete natural details. The past is represented as something that can return to life and pass again before the individual's eyes. Memory is therefore not static; it is reactivated through the journey and the surrounding landscape. The same model appears in the description of the steppe at dawn: *"Where the mourning procession passed, a broad dark strip remained, mottled by horses' hoofprints. It was as though the people were marking Shora's final road"* (Aitmatov, 2005, p. 145 [KZ]). The hoofprints left by the funeral procession turn the road into a visible trace of loss. The landscape records the final journey and preserves mourning in material form.

In *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, the memory model acquires a broader historical dimension. Edigei's statement *"Of all that belonged to the past, only the Ana-Beit cemetery remained in that region… the most revered burial place in the entire Sarozek area… The descendants of those*

buried at Ana-Beit were justly proud that they had shown special honour to the memory of their ancestors" (Aitmatov, n.d.-b, p. 75 [RU]) connects land with ancestry and continuity. Ana-Beit connects burial, land, and respect for earlier generations. As the most revered place in the region, it functions as a physical centre of collective memory and ancestral continuity. This idea is expressed even more directly in the statement: *"To take away a person's memory… [is to] tear out the roots of what remains until the final breath"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-b, p. 75 [RU]). The metaphor of tearing out roots presents memory as the foundation of human identity. Its destruction is treated as a greater violation than physical injury because it separates the individual from name, ancestry, and cultural belonging.

In *The White Ship*, collective memory is linked to the river, sky, land, and the idea of common ancestry: *"Here is your river. Here is your sky. Here is your land. Here are we, born from the same root"* (Aitmatov, n.d.-a, p. 29 [RU]). The sequence of river, sky, and land locates human identity within a shared natural space. The image of a common root and the memorial stone connects the landscape with ancestry and the transmission of memory to future generations. Mother Earth as a keeper of memory is closely connected with the other models identified above. Because the Earth gives life, protects, and judges, it also remembers. In Aitmatov's prose, memory is not abstract. It is embodied in steppe, soil, water, animals, stones, and ancestral land. Through this model, Mother Earth becomes a bridge between past and future, individual destiny and collective history.

4.5. Linguistic and Stylistic Realisation of the Mother Earth Concept

Across the corpus, the four conceptual models are realised through recurrent natural lexemes, metaphor, personification, emotionally marked vocabulary, and culturally significant images. Expressions of nourishment, renewal, and rootedness support the source-of-life model; images of milk, warmth, and shelter construct maternal protection; destruction, pollution, and torn roots convey moral judgment; and references to names, ancestors, roads, and burial places connect nature with memory. These linguistic devices frequently overlap within the same passage. Table 1 summarises their principal functions and provides verified examples from the corpus.

Table 1
Linguistic and Stylistic Realisation of the Mother Earth Concept

Conceptual model	Main linguistic markers	Verified example	Passage*
Source of life	milk, green growth, renewal, roots, homeland	*"The drifted snow melted, and the earth's green growth began to rise…"*	QG-02, p. 21 [KZ]
Maternal protector	milk, warmth, body, protection, shelter	*"The Horned Mother Deer… fed them with her milk and warmed them with her body at night…"*	AK-03, p. 29 [RU]
Moral authority	destruction, bloody tribute, poisoned soil, torn roots	*"The savanna paid the gods a bloody tribute for daring to remain a savanna…"*	PL-04, p. 47 [RU]
Keeper of memory	memory, roots, ancestors, name, descendants	*"…to take away a person's memory… and tear out the roots…"*	GD-04, p. 75 [RU]

* Check Appendix 1 for the IDs.

Table 1 shows that the Mother Earth concept is constructed not through a single device, but through the interaction of lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and cultural markers. These markers give the concept its semantic depth and allow it to function simultaneously as an image of life, care, justice, and memory. To make the conceptual structure of the analysis more explicit, Figure 1 presents the four interrelated models through which the Mother Earth concept is realised in Aitmatov's prose. The diagram shows that these models are not isolated categories, but overlapping semantic dimensions that together construct Mother Earth as a life-giving, protective, moral, and memory-bearing presence.

Figure 1
Conceptual-Semantic Model of Mother Earth in Chingiz Aitmatov's Prose

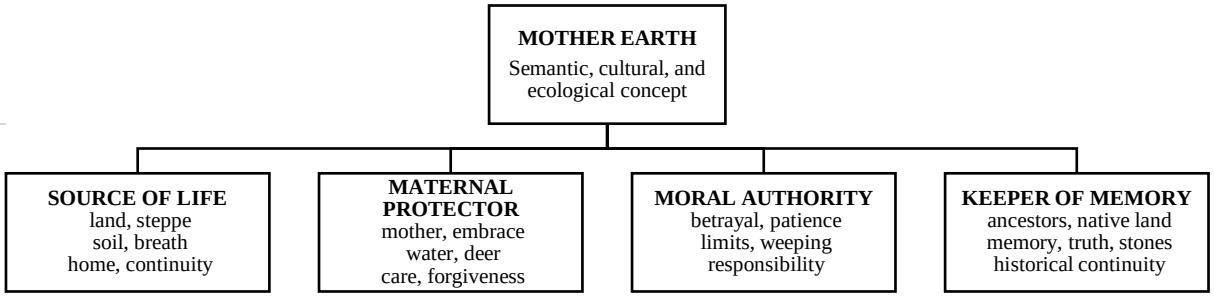

Figure 1 shows that the Mother Earth concept in Aitmatov's prose is formed through the interaction of lexical, metaphorical, narrative, and culturally marked elements. Mother Earth appears as the source from which life emerges, the maternal space that offers protection, the moral authority that exposes human irresponsibility, and the keeper of memory that preserves personal, ancestral, and historical experience.

4.6. Cross-Textual Comparison of Conceptual Models

The four models overlap across the selected works but differ in emphasis. *Farewell, Gulsary!* connects natural space most strongly with renewal and personal memory; *The White Ship* foregrounds maternal protection and the violation of the sacred; *The Scaffold* gives particular prominence to ecological violence and moral responsibility; and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* links the steppe with rootedness, ancestral memory, and technological threat. These differences show that Mother Earth functions as a flexible conceptual frame rather than as a single fixed image.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that Mother Earth in the analysed texts operates as a stable conceptual frame rather than as an isolated metaphor. It combines several interrelated meanings, including life, care, justice, responsibility, and memory. These meanings are realised through natural imagery, personification, and culturally marked expressions, extending earlier interpretations of Aitmatov's nature imagery as spiritual, sacral, and ethically active (Abdigaziuly, 2012; Aşlar, 2024; Isaev, 2010; Sardarbek Kyzy & Krutikov, 2024). This observation supports earlier interpretations that emphasise the spiritual and sacral dimensions of nature in Aitmatov's prose (Abdigaziuly, 2012; Isaev, 2010). At the same time, the present study develops this position by showing how these meanings are linguistically organised through personification, emotionally marked vocabulary, repeated land-related imagery, and culturally marked expressions. This is also consistent with Sardarbek Kyzy and Krutikov's (2024) view that nature in Aitmatov's novels acquires a spiritualised and personified character. Similarly, Aslar (2024) shows that natural elements in Aitmatov's early prose function not merely as background, but as active forces that shape human behaviour and moral choice.

These findings directly answer the research questions of the study. First, they demonstrate that the Mother Earth concept in Aitmatov's prose is constructed through interconnected conceptual domains including life, protection, memory, justice, and moral responsibility. Second, they show that these meanings are realised linguistically through conceptual metaphors, personification, culturally specific lexical choices, and recurring images of land and nature. Rather than functioning as isolated stylistic devices, these linguistic patterns collectively organise the conceptual representation of Mother Earth across the selected works.

At the same time, the discussion returns directly to the research question by showing that this conceptual frame does not remain identical across the selected works. While all three texts construct Mother Earth as a morally and culturally significant presence, each work foregrounds a different aspect of that presence. In *The White Ship*, nature is most closely associated with childhood consciousness, emotional refuge, and the fragile possibility of moral purity. In *The Scaffold*, the image becomes more conflictual and tragic, highlighting ecological destruction, violence, and the ethical consequences of human cruelty. In *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, the steppe is connected more strongly with historical memory, rootedness, and the tension between continuity and technological transformation. These distinctions show that Mother Earth in Aitmatov's prose is not a fixed symbolic repetition, but a flexible conceptual structure whose emphasis shifts according to narrative focus, ethical problem, and historical context.

These cross-textual differences can also be interpreted through the theoretical framework adopted in this study. From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Mother Earth functions as a culturally grounded source domain through which abstract concepts such as morality, protection, historical memory, and responsibility are understood. Cultural Linguistics further explains the stability of these meanings across the texts by viewing them as shared cultural conceptualisations rooted in Turkic perceptions of land, ancestry, and the sacred relationship between humans and nature. Although the conceptual frame remains stable, its linguistic realisation changes according to the narrative context of each novel. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions also help explain these patterns. The emphasis on collective responsibility, respect for ancestors, intergenerational continuity, and harmony with nature reflects collectivist values and a long-term cultural orientation, where the relationship between humans and the natural environment is understood as a shared ethical obligation rather than an individual concern.

Another important result concerns the persistent tension between the generosity of nature and the harm caused by human actions. In Aitmatov's prose, ecological destruction is never presented as neutral; it is interpreted as a form of moral failure and spiritual decline. Mother Earth therefore functions as an ethical boundary that marks the limits of acceptable human behaviour. This reading aligns with studies linking Aitmatov's worldview to Turkic mythological and animistic traditions, where the land is perceived as living, sacred, and morally responsive (Konyratbaev, 2001), as well as with research highlighting the ecological dimension of his later works (Myrzakhmetov, 2018; Seitkazin, 2015). It also corresponds to broader cultural and environmental approaches that reject an instrumental view of nature and emphasise ethical relations between humans and the natural world (Naess, 1973; Plumwood, 1993). In this respect, the study also extends Cakın and Gunay's (2021) interpretation of Aitmatov's prose as a grand narrative in which myth, memory, and moral experience are brought together within a wider cultural discourse. The findings further resonate with recent work on cultural codes and collective memory, which shows that concepts related to land and sacred space often function as carriers of ethical and cultural meaning (Tabishalieva, 2025; Zhakupov et al., 2023).

The implications of this analysis are twofold. First, it demonstrates that conceptual analysis can offer a precise and text-oriented way of interpreting literary representations of nature. By identifying recurrent lexical markers, metaphors, personifications, and narrative functions, the study shows how the Mother Earth concept is constructed within the internal structure of Aitmatov's prose. Second, the analysis shows that Aitmatov's works encode culturally specific models of ecological responsibility that remain relevant in contemporary discussions of environmental ethics, cultural memory, and human responsibility before nature. These

findings may be applied in teaching cultural linguistics, lexical semantics, and literature, particularly when discussing how language reflects and shapes ethical attitudes toward the natural world.

More broadly, the study demonstrates that literary discourse reflects culturally shared systems of values. Integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural Linguistics, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how linguistic choices encode cultural models of ecological responsibility, collective memory, and moral obligation in literary texts. The explanatory power of this framework also points toward several promising avenues for extending the present analysis beyond the scope of Aitmatov's selected works. Future research could extend this approach in several directions. Comparative studies across Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and other Turkic literatures would help clarify both shared and divergent models of Mother Earth and related concepts of land, ancestry, and ecological responsibility. Corpus-based studies could reveal broader patterns in the use of land-related lexemes, metaphors, and personifications in Aitmatov's prose and in Turkic literary discourse more generally. Finally, reception-oriented studies could explore how contemporary readers interpret the Mother Earth concept in the context of current environmental challenges. Such work would deepen our understanding of how literary language mediates between culture, memory, moral imagination, and ecological thought.

Acknowledgments

The authors used an AI-based tool solely for linguistic polishing. The ideas, interpretations, and analyses presented in this paper are entirely original and the sole responsibility of the authors.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

Funding

This article was prepared under the grant financing of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2025–2027 within the framework of the project AP26103909 "Corpus of folklore texts: linguistic and IT solutions in the digitisation of the Kazakh language."

Data Availability

Extended literary passages are not reproduced publicly; however, the complete coding record may be made available to the editor or reviewers for confidential verification upon request. Supplementary materials, including the corpus inventory, brief source-language excerpts, author-prepared English translations, and analytical coding, are also available to readers upon request.

Ethics Declaration

The study analyses published literary texts and did not involve human participants, personal data, or animals.

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Appendix 1

List of Passages Included in the Corpus (The final corpus comprises 37 passages: 9 from *Farewell, Gulsary!*, 9 from *The White Ship*, 8 from *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, and 11 from *The Scaffold*)

ID	Literary work	Author-assigned passage label	Original language	Page(s)	Conceptual model
QG-01	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The World in a Mouthful of Milk	Kazakh	7	Source of life / Maternal protector
QG-02	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	Spring Renewal	Kazakh	21	Source of life
QG-03	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	Nothing Vanishes from Memory	Kazakh	29	Keeper of memory
QG-04	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Road of the Pacer	Kazakh	29	Keeper of memory
QG-05	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Instinct to Protect the Herd	Kazakh	53	Maternal protector
QG-06	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Shackled Return	Kazakh	69	Moral authority
QG-07	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Fall under the Rope	Kazakh	75	Moral authority
QG-08	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Ruined Sheepfold	Kazakh	103	Moral authority
QG-09	*Farewell, Gulsary! (Qosh bol, Gulsary!)*	The Road of Final Farewell	Kazakh	145	Keeper of memory
AK-01	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	Nature as a Place of Refuge	Russian	4	Maternal protector
AK-02	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	River, Sky, Earth, and Common Roots	Russian	26	Keeper of memory
AK-03	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Deer-Mother's Nurturing Journey	Russian	29	Maternal protector / Source of life
AK-04	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Blessing of a New Homeland	Russian	29	Source of life / Keeper of memory
AK-05	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Sacred Cradle	Russian	29–30	Source of life / Maternal protector
AK-06	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Sacred Mother Deer	Russian	29–30	Moral authority / Keeper of memory
AK-07	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Final Transformation into a Fish	Russian	74	Maternal protector / Moral authority
AK-08	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	The Destruction of the Sacred Mother	Russian	69–70	Moral authority
AK-09	The White Ship (*Belyy parokhod*)	Conscience as the Seed of Truth	Russian	75	Moral authority / Source of life

ID	Literary work	Author-assigned passage label	Original language	Page(s)	Conceptual model
GD-01	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	Taking Root in the Steppe	Russian	11–12	Source of life
GD-02	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Polluted Steppe	Russian	8	Moral authority
GD-03	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	Ana-Beit as the Ancestral Pantheon	Russian	73	Keeper of memory
GD-04	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Destruction of Living Memory	Russian	75	Moral authority / Keeper of memory
GD-05	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Mother Restores the Son's Name	Russian	83–84	Maternal protector / Keeper of memory
GD-06	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Bird That Commands Remembrance	Russian	85	Keeper of memory / Maternal protector
GD-07	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Erasure of Sacred Land	Russian	225	Moral authority / Keeper of memory
GD-08	The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (*I dol'she veka dlitsya den'*)	The Sky Collapses under Operation Hoop	Russian	236	Moral authority / Keeper of memory
PL-01	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Unborn Life under Maternal Protection	Russian	22–23	Maternal protector / Source of life
PL-02	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	Learning the Land under the Mother's Guidance	Russian	33	Maternal protector
PL-03	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Shrinking Habitat of Moyunkum	Russian	30	Source of life / Moral authority
PL-04	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Savanna's Bloody Tribute	Russian	47	Moral authority
PL-05	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Lost Cubs and the Occupied Den	Russian	51–52	Maternal protector / Moral authority
PL-06	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Poisoned Soil	Russian	237	Moral authority
PL-07	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Burning of the Reed World	Russian	261–262	Moral authority / Source of life
PL-08	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	Nature as a Repository of Loss	Russian	363–364	Keeper of memory / Maternal protector

ID	Literary work	Author-assigned passage label	Original language	Page(s)	Conceptual model
PL-09	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	Maternal Tenderness toward a Human Child	Russian	369–370	Maternal protector / Source of life
PL-10	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Native Land That Raised Us	Russian	88	Source of life / Keeper of memory
PL-11	The Scaffold (*Plakha*)	The Eternity of Sun, Steppe, and Sky	Russian	35–36	Source of life / Keeper of memory

Note. The descriptive passage labels were assigned by the authors for identification and analytical purposes; they are not section titles used in Aitmatov's original works. Page numbers refer to the specific editions used in the study.