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## THE SYMBOLS OF THE MOON AND WATER IN LITERARY TEXTS IN SECONDARY AND HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

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### Abstract

*In literary texts, symbols serve as crucial artistic tools, enabling authors to convey profound humanistic values and their thoughts in a subtle manner. Symbols not only enhance the vibrancy and richness of a work but also help readers gain a deeper understanding of its meanings and messages. In secondary and high school literature textbooks, the use and analysis of symbols are considered an essential part of learning, helping students develop analytical thinking, artistic appreciation, and the ability to grasp the multi-dimensional meanings of literary works.*

*Based on this reality, the paper "The Symbols of the Moon and Water in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Textbooks" aims to systematize and analyze the aesthetic meanings of the moon and water symbols in literary texts. By doing so, it explores the effectiveness of applying symbolic theory in literary analysis, providing students with a clearer and more scientific approach to symbols in literature. This study not only clarifies the role of the moon and water as specific symbols but also contributes to a broader understanding of symbolism in literature. Additionally, it serves as a valuable reference for students and teachers, enhancing their ability to appreciate literary works. Furthermore, the paper affirms the importance of teaching literature in a way that delves into deeper meanings, helping students engage with texts beyond surface-level interpretations and uncover their hidden layers of significance*

**Keywords:** Symbol, literary texts, moon, water, Secondary School, High School

## 1. Introduction

In literary texts, symbolism is an essential artistic tool that allows authors to express profound humanistic values and their thoughts in a subtle and nuanced way. Symbols not only make literary works more vibrant and rich but also help readers deeply understand the meanings and messages that authors intend to convey.

In secondary and high school literature textbooks, the use and analysis of symbols are indispensable components that foster students' critical thinking, artistic appreciation, and ability to grasp the multi-dimensional meanings of literary works. In the context of Vietnam's fundamental and comprehensive educational reforms, the study of symbols in literature, particularly those present in textbooks, has become more urgent than ever.

A preliminary survey reveals that the system of symbols in literary texts selected for textbooks is diverse and abundant. These symbols not only hold pure artistic value but also embody profound cognitive and educational significance. However, systematic research on these symbols and their role in developing students' literary competence remains insufficient. Traditionally, literary analysis often focuses on aspects such as the author's biography, historical background, textual segmentation, imagery, and language to highlight meaning. However, an approach based on symbolic theory offers a more comprehensive perspective—one that transcends time and space while enriching cultural understanding and interdisciplinary knowledge. As noted, "A symbol never belongs solely to a synchronic cultural framework; it always traverses this framework longitudinally, spanning from the past into the future."

Thus, introducing and analyzing symbols in literary texts is not only a crucial aspect of literature teaching and learning but also nurtures students' love for literature and their artistic appreciation. Symbolism enhances students' knowledge, broadens their perspectives, and lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning and personal development.

From this perspective, the study "The Symbols of the Moon and Water in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Textbooks" aims to systematize and analyze the aesthetic meanings of these two symbols in literary texts. By doing so, it explores the effectiveness of symbolic theory in understanding literary works and provides students with a clearer, more scientific approach to symbolism in literature. This research not only clarifies the role of the moon and water as literary symbols but also serves as a valuable reference for students and teachers to enhance their literary appreciation skills. Additionally, it reaffirms the importance of teaching literature through in-depth exploration of meanings, encouraging students to engage with texts beyond surface-level interpretation and uncover their hidden symbolic significance.

## 2. Research Content

### 2.1 The Concept of Symbolism

Symbols have become an indispensable part of the spiritual life of humanity. They not only reflect the shared cultural characteristics of different civilizations and religions but also carry the unique colors of each nation and ethnic group. "A symbol is something visible that carries a sign leading us to something invisible" (E. Jünger).

According to *The Dictionary of World Cultural Symbols* (Jean Chevalier): "A fundamental symbol differs from a sign in that a sign is an arbitrary convention where the signifier and the signified (the object or subject) remain separate. In contrast, a symbol assumes an intrinsic connection between the signifier and the signified, in the sense that it is a dynamic organizing force" [7; p.6]. Meanwhile, *The Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines symbolism as follows: "In a broad sense, a symbol is a distinctive feature of reflecting life through imagery in literary and artistic works. In a narrower sense, a symbol is a mode of semantic transformation in language or a special type of artistic imagery that carries strong emotional resonance. It not only encapsulates the essence of a phenomenon but also expresses profound concepts, thoughts, and philosophies about human existence and life." [3]. Vietnamese linguists have also studied symbolism and formulated their perspectives. Notable among them are scholars such as Hoàng Phê, Lê Bá Hán, Trần Đình Sử, and Nguyễn Khắc Phi. A symbol is not entirely a reflection of reality because it represents a reconstructed reality after being perceived. However, it is also not purely subjective, as it originates from the mental activities of the subject. A symbol is the subjective phenomenon of an object or event that has been perceived. In essence, a symbol is a form of language—a sign system.

When analyzing literary works, exploring the meanings of symbols is crucial. This process helps uncover the underlying messages, hidden spiritual worlds, and cultural layers within a text. Unlike cultural symbols, literary symbols, according to Hegel, can encompass all aspects of reality, dissolving into the essence and inner perception of objects to create an inseparable whole. Literary symbols are artistic constructs that emerge through linguistic signals in literature. Therefore, the primary role of artistic symbols in literary works is to reveal the author's personal thoughts and emotions while expressing latent meanings within their soul. With the influence of cultural and historical contexts, symbols in literary works often open up multiple layers of meaning, evoking different associations. Writers deliberately craft aesthetic symbols to enhance the expressive power and depth of their works. Aesthetic symbols always carry the potential to generate interpretations and compress multiple meanings. This quality provides readers with intellectual pleasure, contemplation, and a sense of both familiarity and novelty—an essential aspect of literature's allure.

### 2.2 The Symbol of the Moon in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Textbooks

#### 2.2.1 Survey of the Moon Symbol in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Textbooks

Table 1: Survey of the Moon Symbol in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Literature Textbooks.

Grade	Literary Work	Author
8	a. <i>Đồng chí</i> (Comrade)	a. Chính Hữu
	b. <i>Cảnh khuya</i> (Night Scene)	b. Hồ Chí Minh
10	a. <i>Tự tình</i> (Self-Lament)	a. Hồ Xuân Hương
11	a. <i>Đây thôn Vĩ Dạ</i> (This is Vĩ Da Hamlet)	a. Hàn Mặc Tử
	b. <i>Chí Phèo</i>	b. Nam Cao

The moon is a major cultural symbol that has appeared across human civilizations due to its richness and multiplicity of meanings. It embodies both tradition and adaptability, transforming to align with modern values. However, in every era, the moon retains symbolic significance that no other image can fully replace. The moon often appears in its constant form—simply as "the moon." However, it can also be encountered in variations such as *Nguyệt* (the full moon), *bán nguyệt* (crescent moon), or in different states such as bright moonlight or dim moonlight.

### 2.2.2 The Meaning of the Moon Symbol

Globally, in ancient Egyptian civilization, the moon was placed atop the head of the god Khonsu, meaning "the traveler" or "the guide." Khonsu was responsible for accompanying souls on their journey after birth, protecting them from evil spirits. To assist souls in navigating their path, a lunar map was engraved inside a 5,000-year-old burial tomb in County Meath, Ireland. This map was strategically positioned within the tomb so that moonlight would illuminate it as the moon moved across the night sky. Furthermore, it has been proven that the Dutch master Jan van Eyck was the first artist to paint a realistic depiction of the moon as perceived by the human eye. From that point on, the moon became a symbol of aesthetics, passed down from artist to artist and from century to century—like a mystical crystal sphere, a lens through which the soul of an era could be observed.

In Vietnam, the moon has long been an important symbol in spiritual beliefs and daily life. People have always been closely connected to nature, considering it a dear companion. Even in modern times, the perception of nature remains deeply ingrained. The characteristic distinction between civilizations—where Western traditions emphasize *conquering* nature, while Eastern traditions value *harmonizing* with it—still holds true. Many authors turn to nature to express their emotions, establish connections, and show reverence. The moon, in particular, is an ancient yet ever-renewing symbol that continuously offers fresh meanings upon each exploration. Throughout the course of literary history, the moon has remained a faithful companion, chosen by countless writers to convey their messages.

### 2.2.3 The Moon as a Symbol of the Harmonious Relationship Between Humans and Nature

In Hồ Chí Minh's poem *Cảnh khuya* (*Night Scene*), the moon appears in the second line as a lyrical image, contributing to the depiction of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, as well as the connection between the artist's soul and the surrounding scenery.

The stream's sound is as clear as a distant song,

The moon shines through ancient trees, casting shadows on flowers.

The midnight scene is like a painting, yet one remains awake,

Awake, for the worries of the homeland persist.

*"Tiếng suối trong như tiếng hát xa,*

*Trăng lồng cổ thụ, bóng lồng hoa*

*.Cảnh khuya như vẽ người chưa ngủ,*

*Chưa ngủ vì lo nỗi nước nhà."* [9, p.47]

(*Night Scene* – Hồ Chí Minh, excerpt from *Grade 8 Literature Textbook, Volume 2, Cảnh Điều* series.)

The verse "*Trăng lồng cổ thụ, bóng lồng hoa*" (*The moon embraces the ancient tree, its shadow blends with the flowers*) is particularly evocative and rich in expressive value. From a literal perspective, the moon is an integral part of the nocturnal natural landscape. The repetition of the verb "*lồng*" (*embraces/blends*) twice illustrates a seamless, delicate fusion between the moonlight, the ancient tree, and the flowers. The moon's light shines on the tree, casting its shadow, which in turn blends with the clusters of flowers. This layered composition creates a vivid, multidimensional scene with distinct shapes, contrasts, and depth. From an artistic perspective, the moon, along with other images such as the murmuring stream, the ancient tree, and the flowers, forms a complete natural painting. The parallel structure in the line "*Trăng lồng cổ thụ, bóng lồng hoa*" enhances the harmonious and balanced beauty of the scene. The combination of auditory imagery (the sound of the stream) and visual imagery (the moonlight) produces a multi-sensory aesthetic effect. Symbolically, the moon carries profound meanings of tranquility and peace. Amidst the hardships of war, the image of a bright moon in the quiet night conveys a rare moment of serenity. Under the moonlight, nature seems purified, returning to its most pristine beauty. The moonlight symbolizes purity, illuminating both the natural world and the human soul.

Similarly, in Hàn Mặc Tử's poem *Đây thôn Vĩ Dạ* (*This Is Vĩ Dạ Village*), the moon merges with the countryside landscape. Although the poem does not explicitly mention the moon, its presence is subtly woven into the serene rural setting, enhancing the simplicity and purity of Vietnam's countryside. The poetic depiction of the moon by different authors showcases diverse and sophisticated techniques. Artistic devices such as personification and metaphor are skillfully employed to highlight the moon's natural beauty. The artistic spaces in these works are also uniquely constructed, with the moon playing a crucial role in their composition. Whether directly or indirectly described, whether in vast or intimate settings, and regardless of its varying shades and moods, the moon consistently appears as a pure, untainted element of nature, portrayed with deep sensitivity and nuance. The moon's beauty is unblemished—a manifestation of nature's purity, contributing to the enchanting landscapes in Vietnamese literature. This not only reflects the artistic talents of the poets but also reveals the deep-rooted love for nature in Vietnamese culture.

In traditional literature, ancient philosophy regarded humans as a "*microcosm*" within the "*macrocosm*"—a worldview in which humans and the universe exist in mutual sympathy and connection (*thiên – nhân tương dưỡng, thiên – nhân tương cảm*). Accordingly, in classical literature, the moon was neither a mystical, distant entity like the Moon Goddess in folklore nor an immutable symbol as in folk songs ("*How many years old is the moon? How many years old is the mountain?*"). Instead, it was portrayed as an intimate and familiar presence in human life [8]. Furthermore, the moon—through its objective nature—brings a cool, magical light to human life in the darkness. When incorporated into poetry, it transforms into a truly artistic symbol, described in a uniquely vivid and sharp manner. Poets have skillfully used the moon within associative contexts, infusing it with various meanings. It may represent youth, happiness, beauty, and joy, or convey loneliness and despair. Sometimes, it takes on the role of a confidant, a beloved companion, or even a soulmate in life's journey.

### 2.2.4 The Moon as a Symbol of Ideals and Aspirations



In the poem *Đồng chí* (*Comrades*) by poet Chính Hữu, the moon appears as a bright yet resolute companion, standing by the soldiers as they dedicate themselves to the noble cause of sacrificing for their homeland:

Tonight, the desolate forest is covered in frost.

Standing side by side, waiting for the enemy to come.

The moon hangs at the tip of the gun."

*"Đêm nay rừng hoang sương muối*

*Đứng cạnh bên nhau chờ giặc tới*

*Đầu súng trăng treo."* [4, p.38]

(*Comrades* – Chính Hữu, excerpt from *Grade 8 Literature Textbook, Volume 2, KNTT&CS series.*)

As a natural outcome of the soldiers standing together in ambush, the image "*Đầu súng trăng treo*" (*The moon hangs at the tip of the gun*) emerges, leaving a lasting impression. The 2/2 rhythm of the line mimics the swaying of the moon above the gun, while the word "*treo*" (*hangs*) seamlessly connects the sky and the earth. At first glance, the line consists of just two elements—"gun" and "moon"—which hold a literal meaning: in the late-night hours, as soldiers stand guard, their only companions are their comrades, their guns, and the moonlight.

In mountainous regions, the sky often appears clearer, wider, and lower than elsewhere. As the night deepens, the moon seems to descend until it appears to rest atop the barrel of the gun. Symbolically, the "*gun*" represents war and the soldiers' duty to fight, while the "*moon*" symbolizes peace, the serene life of their homeland. Soldiers take up arms to protect this very peace, embodying their noble aspirations and ideals. This image is both romantic and realistic, evoking admiration even from the most unfeeling hearts. The poem naturally and profoundly praises the spiritual beauty of the soldiers: on one hand, they endure the harsh realities of war, and on the other, they carry a poetic, romantic soul that still appreciates the beauty of the moonlight.

These contrasting images—one of war and one of tranquility—are masterfully interwoven through the soldiers' perspective, who, despite being on the battlefield, remain sensitive to the beauty of nature. Though they wield weapons in combat, their souls do not harden. Instead, they continue to be moved by the moonlit sky. From this, "*Đầu súng trăng treo*" has become a symbol of the poetic, optimistic, and idealistic spirit of soldiers during wartime.

Ultimately, the moon serves as both a companion to the gun and the very thing that the gun seeks to protect—peace along the nation's borders and forests. Recognizing the beauty and tranquility of this scene, one deeply understands the price paid for peace and the motivation that drives soldiers to leave behind their "*fields*" and "*homes*" to march onto the battlefield. Indeed, the moon never ceases to amaze; each time it appears, its beauty takes on new and enchanting forms—sometimes resolute and unyielding, sometimes gentle and soothing, much like the light it casts.

### 2.2.5 The Moon as a Reflection of Human Emotions

Since time immemorial, the moon has been an endless source of inspiration for poets and writers. It can be seen as a lifelong connection woven by fate between the artist and the celestial body. In the eyes of poets, the moon is not merely a source of light in the night sky; it has evolved into a profound artistic symbol, a multi-

layered resonance that stirs deep emotions—happiness, sorrow, longing, love, and human fate.

In classical poetry, one often encounters images of solitary women—war brides, palace maidens, or noble ladies—gazing at the moon, lost in contemplation. Here, the moon is not the radiant, full moon of prosperity, nor the "*golden moon, jade moon*" of folklore, but rather the "*waning moon*," the "*crescent moon*," or the "*moon split in two*". The fragmented moon mirrors their incomplete, sorrowful lives. This is poignantly captured in Hồ Xuân Hương's poem, where she, in the silence of the night, drinks to drown her sorrow—only to find that drunkenness fades, and with it, her sadness grows even deeper:

The moon's shadow wanes, not yet full.

*"Vàng trăng bóng xế khuyết chưa tròn."* [10, p.47]

(*Self-Pity* – Hồ Xuân Hương, excerpt from *Grade 10 Literature Textbook, Volume 1, Cánh Diều series.*)

Through the eyes of these talented yet ill-fated women, the moon lacks the warm romanticism of poetic harmony. Instead, it exudes a melancholic, pale glow, a "*chilling cold that seeps into the bones*." Their longing for happiness and fleeting moments of joy never truly alleviates their deep wounds; rather, it etches their sorrow even deeper.

The moon, in this context, transcends its physical presence, becoming a *spiritual and psychological phenomenon* rather than merely an astronomical or geographical entity [2]. It is deeply internalized, saturated with human emotions and experiences. The moon becomes an object of yearning, passion, and silent communion—a confidant that unveils the hidden corners of the human soul. This is evident in Hàn Mặc Tử's poetry, where the moon embodies both love and torment. For him, even physical pain is intertwined with moonlight—it illuminates his leprosy wounds like a sharp blade cutting deep into his flesh. Yet, in the vast loneliness of his suffering, even his "*enemy*" becomes his "*lover*." The moon turns into a rendezvous partner, a source of agony, a sensual force calling him back into the realm of human desire:

Whose boat is anchored at the moonlit riverbank?

Will it carry the moon back in time tonight?"

*"Thuyền ai đậu bến sông trăng đó*

*Có chở trăng về kịp tối nay?"* [9, p.41]

(*This Is Vĩ Dạ Village* – Hàn Mặc Tử, excerpt from *Grade 11 Literature Textbook, Volume 2, Cánh Diều series.*)

In conclusion, an exploration of the moon's symbolism reveals the unique talents of poets. Each moon appears as a metaphorical *naïl* upon which poets *hang* paintings of emotions, fates, and lives. Over time, the moon's meanings have expanded, taking on new layers of interpretation. Though each era, each poet, and each reimagining of the moon's symbolism differs, the genius of these literary masters ensures that its resonance remains powerful—continuing to stir the hearts of readers, of those who have loved and longed, who have placed their hopes and dreams in its ethereal glow. As Hàn Mặc Tử once wrote: "*Only the moon and stars are eternal, Everything else shall pass away.*"

### 2.3 The Symbol of Water in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Literature Textbooks

### 2.3.1 Surveying the Symbol of Water in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Literature Textbooks

**Table 2: Survey of the Symbol of Water in Literary Texts in Secondary and High School Literature Textbooks**

Grade	Literary Text	Author
6	a. The Legend of Sword Lake b. Dong Thap Muoi in the Flood Season	a. Nguyen Dong Chi b. Van Cong Hung
7	a. Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea b. Alone in the Rain	a. Le Phuong Lien b. Do Bach Mai
8	a. Lao Hac b. Hue Singing on the Perfume River	a. Nam Cao b. Ha Anh Minh
9	a. Kieu at the Pavilion of Ngung Bich b. The Tale of the Nam Xuong Woman	a. Nguyen Du b. Nguyen Du
10	a. Autumn Fishing b. The Person at the Chau River Wharf	a. Nguyen Khuyen b. Suong Nguyet Minh
11	a. Chi Pheo b. Waves c. Day River d. Trảng Giang e. The Boat and the Sea f. Who Named the River?	a. Nam Cao b. Xuan Quynh c. Nguyen Quang Thieu d. Huy Can e. Xuan Quynh f. Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong

From the survey on the appearance of the water symbol and its variations in literary works, we classify them into three groups:

Water-containing spaces such as streams, rivers, waves, seas, etc.

States of water such as rain, floods, mist, tears, blood, etc.

Actions related to water such as swimming, bathing, crying, etc.

### 2.3.2 The Meaning of the Symbol of “Water”

The symbol of water in literary texts carries profound and diverse meanings. Water is often seen as a symbolic image in many literary traditions, reflecting philosophical, psychological, and cultural aspects. It can represent purification and rebirth, cleansing and creating a new beginning. Water is a source of life, an essential condition for the existence and growth of all living beings. At times, it embodies mystery, evoking images of adventurous journeys, exploration, and the unknown. With this perspective, we analyze several symbolic representations of water in literary works included in the 2018 literature curriculum for secondary and high school levels.

### 2.3.3 Water as a Symbol of Eternal Love

In many literary creations, the symbol of water is often associated with love. It recurs repeatedly, becoming an endless source of inspiration for great works. Water represents purity, gentleness, soothing wounds, and nourishing arid souls. It is also a symbol of nature—eternal and unceasing—just like love, which is why love and water are often intertwined in literature. One variation of water is the river and waves. The river is depicted as simple, pure, and gentle. Mentioning rivers brings to mind love for one’s homeland, connections such as rivers and bridges, rivers and wharves, forming layers of meanings. Meanwhile, waves exist only in the vast ocean, emphasizing the characteristics of love, which are

beautifully portrayed in Xuan Quynh’s poem *Waves*, written in 1967 during a field trip to the Diem Dien coastal area (Thai Binh). This journey enriched her poetic imagery, making waves a particularly powerful metaphor for love. Waves are dynamic and constant, making them an ideal poetic device to symbolize love.

"The river cannot understand itself,  
The wave seeks out the vast sea."

Sông không hiểu nổi mình

Sóng tìm ra tận bể

(*Waves* – Xuan Quynh, Literature Textbook, Grade 11, Volume 1, Cánh Diều series)

The images of "waves" and "I" (the poet) are closely paired, merging and reflecting each other, highlighting their richness and complexity. Like ocean waves, which can be fierce or gentle, the emotions of a woman in love fluctuate between intense passion and quiet tenderness. Waves crashing violently against the shore symbolize the turbulent emotions of love—passionate, intense, and sometimes overwhelming—while their calmer moments reflect deep, soothing affection.

Another variation of water is the **sea**, as seen in *The Boat and the Sea* by Xuan Quynh, included in the poetry collection *Chồi Biếc* (1963). This poem vividly expresses the poet’s concerns, longings, and struggles in pursuit of ideal love. The love story unfolds through the imagery of the boat and the sea, symbolizing unwavering, loyal love.

"And the sea’s love is boundless,

The boat sails forever without weariness."

Và tình yêu bao la

Thuyền đi hoài không mỏi

(*The Boat and the Sea* – Xuan Quynh, Literature Textbook, Grade 11, Volume 1, KNTT&CS series)

When describing the sea as a metaphor for love, one feels the sea’s vastness and purity—mirroring the depth and boundlessness of love itself. Like the waves of the sea, love moves in ebbs and flows, filled with longing and desire. The symbol of water here also highlights the inseparable nature of love, much like how water cannot be held or divided—it is fluid yet unbreakable. This reflects the enduring, unbreakable bond of love, which is why Xuan Quynh’s poetry always resonates with sweetness, yearning, and deep emotion.

The artistic construction of the wave symbol and its multi-layered meanings is rich and diverse. Similarly, Nguyen Du masterfully used water imagery in the excerpt *Kieu at the Pavilion of Ngung Bich* from *The Tale of Kieu*, subtly portraying Thuy Kieu’s emotions through nature.

"Gazing sorrowfully at the stormy waves,

The crashing waves roar around her seat."

Buồn trông gió cuốn mặt ghềnh

Ầm ầm tiếng sóng kêu quanh ghế ngồi

(*Kieu at the Pavilion of Ngung Bich, The Tale of Kieu* – Nguyen Du, Literature Textbook, Grade 9, Volume 1, Cánh Diều series)

This verse is a "golden dust particle" within the excerpt, demonstrating the unique way Nguyen Du employed the symbolic meaning of water to emphasize Thuy Kieu's emotions. Although the verse does not directly discuss love, the imagery of ocean waves serves as a rich metaphor, simultaneously describing the setting and conveying the character's emotions. The roaring waves embody her intense, uncontrollable longing—just as waves continuously crash upon the shore, her memories of Kim Trong surge relentlessly, overwhelming her. The phrase "waves roar" suggests her desperate, inescapable yearning, symbolizing the turbulence of a soul trapped in circumstances beyond her control. The vast, boundless ocean intensifies her feelings of smallness and confinement, reflecting her hopelessness and isolation. The sound of crashing waves becomes a lament for her fate, reinforcing the melancholic image of a woman bound by her tragic destiny. Through the symbol of waves in these verses, we see Thuy Kieu's passionate yet sorrowful love, exquisitely captured by Nguyen Du's poetic genius.

### 2.3.4 Water as a Symbol of Rebirth

In literature, the image of water is not merely a natural element or a symbol of life but also carries profound layers of meaning, ranging from the yearning for love to the power of purification and rebirth. It can also be associated with pain, loss, and the desire for a new life, erasing the past and offering opportunities for individuals to start anew, confront the past, and move toward the future. Water is not only a natural element that sustains human life but also a powerful symbol of rebirth, transformation, and renewal. In many literary works, water not only provides life but also serves as a means for characters to overcome hardships and setbacks to rediscover their true essence. The depiction of water in these works can represent a source of rejuvenation, cleansing the past, and initiating a fresh beginning.

In *Người ở bến sông Châu* by Sương Nguyệt Minh, the image of the river and other water-related symbols serve as key elements in encoding the artistic world of the writer. These images express various meanings of the river domain, such as the river itself, the bridge, the dock, and the boat. The novel frequently references the boat (10 times), the ship (12 times), the dock (9 times), the waves (13 times), and the river (18 times) [1, p.5], contributing to the distinct artistic style of the author. The Châu River is not merely part of the natural landscape but also a symbol of transformation, containing dreams, aspirations, and even the sorrows of the characters. The river, though gentle, flows persistently, symbolizing the ceaseless movement of life. It evokes deep emotions in the character Dì Mây regarding love before and after joining the military. She experiences heartbreak upon witnessing her lover marry someone else. Although the natural beauty of the Châu River remains unchanged, her emotions are filled with bitterness and sorrow as she returns to the riverbank, only to learn that her beloved, San, assumed she had perished and thus married another. On his wedding night, upon discovering that Mây was still alive, San sought her out, pleading to leave his wife and start anew with her. However, Mây wept and refused, saying, "One suffering and broken woman is already too much" [10, p.45]. Here, the river not only bears witness to her pain but also signifies her decisive severance from the past, marking the beginning of a new chapter in her life. Another manifestation of water in this context is tears—Mây's tears symbolize the purest expression of human sorrow, a raw outpouring of emotion that cleanses and alleviates her anguish. Standing at the crossroads of love, she bravely faces her decision, despite still harboring feelings for San. She firmly rejects his offer,

stating, "Enough! It's over! It's already too late! One woman's suffering is enough. Go home!" and "What's done is done. Try to live well together" [10, p.45]. The river symbolizes new opportunities and rebirth, a place where individuals can start anew and cleanse the stains of the past.

Similarly, the Perfume River (*Sông Hương*) in *Who Gave the Perfume River Its Name?* by Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường is celebrated for its unique beauty as it flows through Huế. The work, with its refined perspective on nature and humanity, showcases the author's erudition in history and culture, blended with poetic sensitivity. This essay, extracted from the book of the same name, reflects the lyrical and intellectual "I" of the author while portraying the breathtaking beauty of Huế's landscape. The Perfume River is not only a natural waterway but also a symbol of life, purification, and the rebirth of cultural and historical values. Through the ages and historical upheavals, the river continues to flow silently, witnessing and preserving countless national stories. From a historical perspective, the Perfume River is no longer a "wild gypsy girl" or a "dreamy beauty sleeping amidst Châu Hóa fields" but has transformed into a historical witness, bearing the weight of the nation's transformations. The river is described as "an epic written in the green of lush grass and foliage" [11, p.70]. Along this very river, the melancholic *hò Huế* (traditional Hue singing) naturally resonates, stirring deep emotions in listeners. The water of the Perfume River is not just the water of life but also a force that bridges past and present, connecting historical values across generations. In this work, the river embodies longevity and the enduring essence of culture, never fading with time. The water of the Perfume River represents rebirth, linking past and future, and preserving the timeless spirit of a rich cultural heritage.

In *The Soul of Trương Ba, the Body of the Butcher* by Lư Quang Vũ, the play is set in a butcher shop, symbolizing the greed and cruelty of modern society. Trương Ba's tears are not only an expression of sorrow but also a means of spiritual liberation. His tears go beyond mere sympathy; they serve as an act of cleansing the wounds of the past, awakening his consciousness, and renewing his inner self. In this work, tears act as a purification of the soul, allowing the character to overcome internal conflicts and suffering. Trương Ba, living in another man's body, gradually realizes that although he can physically survive, his spirit and true self must be freed. "Some mistakes can never be undone. Trying to patch things up forcefully only makes them worse. The only way is to never make such mistakes again or to make amends with a righteous act" [6, p.110]. His tears symbolize purification, a sign of spiritual rebirth, helping him reconnect with his true nature.

The imagery of water in literature is not merely a natural element but carries profound symbolic value. Water can represent rebirth, purification, renewal, or even human suffering and tragedy. Through notable literary works, it is evident that water is not just a part of nature but also a medium for expressing philosophical reflections on human existence, allowing individuals to rediscover themselves and strive toward higher ideals.

## 3. Conclusion

In summary, the symbols of the moon and water are not merely natural images but also deeply philosophical artistic materials, reflecting the intimate connection between humans, the universe, and time. The moon, with its gentle and mystical glow, evokes romantic love, nostalgia, and aspirations for beauty while serving as a mirror of the soul, capturing dreams and past memories. In

contrast, the ever-flowing and ever-changing nature of water symbolizes the passage of time, the impermanence of life, and the hidden strength within individuals.

From classical poetry to modern literature, these symbols have been powerful tools for conveying messages about life, love, nature, and philosophical reflections on human existence. Their inclusion in textbooks helps students appreciate the beauty of artistic language while gaining insight into cultural and ideological values. Studying the literary symbols of the moon and water is not merely an analysis of artistic images but an exploration of the depth of thought and the soul of a nation. The intertwining of nature and human emotions has endowed these symbols with enduring vitality, making them a bridge that connects generations of readers with the vast and poetic world of literature.

In the context of educational reform, the study and appreciation of these literary symbols in secondary and high school curricula are essential. Literary works that employ the moon and water motifs not only enrich students' literary knowledge but also shape humanistic thinking, enhance aesthetic perception, and help students explore the profound essence of life. By deciphering cultural symbols, one uncovers the scientific and humanistic values of an entire civilization. This is the testament to the immortal power of art, continuously renewing itself and touching the hearts of readers through every word and every symbolic image, serving as a spiritual bridge between past and present, tradition and modernity, and inspiring the imagination and creativity of future generations.

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