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# Mythopoetic Space and Cultural Memory in Aigul Kemelbayeva's "Ike" and "Kökqiya": A Bounded Comparative Textual Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To examine how two short stories by Aigul Kemelbayeva organize space, cosmogonic imagery, death ritual, and culturally marked memory without treating literary character states as empirical psychological outcomes.

**Methods and Materials:** A bounded, qualitative comparative textual analysis was applied to "Ike" and "Kökqiya." A transparent retrospective evidence matrix distinguishes textual observations, interpretive codes, alternative readings, and contextual propositions. The corpus is purposive, not representative. No participant data, psychological measures, or independently documented inter-coder procedure were available.

**Findings:** In "Ike," burial, transgression, religious practice, landscape, and narrated remorse structure a morally charged spatial trajectory. In "Kökqiya," the blue-ox cosmogony, named stars, and lamentation connect mortal loss to narrative scale and remembered cosmological motifs. These are evidenced textual patterns, not demonstrated psychological mechanisms or population-level cultural traits.

**Conclusion:** The comparison supports a limited claim about the narrative uses of mythopoetic signs in two texts. Broader claims about Kazakh consciousness, readership, and psychological transformation require additional corpora and independent evidence.

**Keywords:** Mythopoetics, Kazakh Prose, Chronotope; Cultural Memory, Qualitative Textual Analysis, Interpretive Validity.

## Introduction

The analysis of mythology in contemporary prose is often framed as evidence that a writer preserves an entire community's worldview. That formulation risks collapsing three distinct levels: what a narrative explicitly depicts, how a critic interprets those depictions, and what may be inferred about people beyond the text. Mythopoetics offers a productive vocabulary for studying patterned imagery and narrative relations, but it does not turn literary symbols into direct observations of psychological processes or collective consciousness (Koblanov et al., 2025; Shanayev et al., 2023).

Aigul Kemelbayeva's short stories "Ike" and "Kökqiya" provide a focused comparison. Both enlist landscape and religious or cosmological signs in stories of mortality. Yet their narrative organization differs: "Ike" joins an account of transgression to subsequent religious practice and the material conditions of survival, whereas "Kökqiya" places a death narrative alongside celestial imagery and traditional lament. The difference merits attention before the texts are taken to exemplify a single undifferentiated national mythology (Kemelbayeva, 2015; Kemelbayeva, 2025).

In literary theory, the chronotope provides a way to examine how narrative time becomes perceptible through places, actions, and encounters; it is an analytic concept, not a measurable psychological variable (Bakhtin, 1981). Cultural-memory scholarship likewise allows one to discuss the textual organization and circulation of remembered forms without assuming that the beliefs of all members of a cultural group can be read from a fictional text (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Recent work on Kazakh mythmaking documents the relevance of inherited motifs as literary resources, while differing in corpus and inferential scope (Nurbayeva et al., 2025).

This article asks three bounded questions: (1) Which passages provide evidence of mythopoetic spatial or temporal organization in each narrative? (2) How do burial, remorse, celestial bodies, and lament function differently across the two texts? (3) What interpretations survive when claims about authorial intention, character interiority, national consciousness, and actual human psychology are kept separate? The contribution is a transparent comparative reading of two selected stories, not a representative survey of Kemelbayeva's output or an empirical study of readers.

## Methods and Materials

### *Design, corpus, and selection boundary*

This is a small-corpus qualitative literary study with a close-reading and comparative-interpretive orientation. The analytic corpus contains two purposively selected short stories, "Ike" (also romanized "Yke" in the submitted manuscript; Kazakh title "Ике") and "Kökqiya" (also rendered "Kökkia"; Kazakh title "Көкқия"). The publicly accessible Kazakh editions are identified in the references (Kemelbayeva, 2015; Kemelbayeva, 2025). The different online dates describe web editions, not necessarily first composition or print publication.

Selection was criterion-based: both stories foreground mortality and culturally legible spatial or ritual motifs, yet employ different organizing devices—an ethically charged life trajectory in "Ike" and a cosmological–lament sequence in "Kökqiya." This is a contrastive or information-rich selection, not a probability sample. It cannot establish prevalence, typicality, historical evolution, or representativeness across the author's prose, Kazakh fiction, or the readership. No wider inventory of all Kemelbayeva stories was sampled.

### *Units of analysis and documented procedure*

The unit of analysis is a bounded textual segment: a narrated action, a cluster of related images, or a complete short passage whose wording and immediate plot context are preserved. For traceability, the revised analysis uses six operational codes set out in Table 1. Inclusion requires an identifiable narrative feature, not merely a critical assertion about spiritual significance. A code can recur, and a segment may receive more than one code, but labels are attached first to what is present on the page. The example matrix in Table 2 records excerpt-level observations, readings, and plausible alternatives.

The analytic sequence applied to the presented evidence consists of (a) locating passages in the two named stories and

the quotations included in the submitted text; (b) describing narrative actions and symbols without interpreting their effects; (c) assigning the provisional codes in Table 1; (d) comparing the use and sequence of codes within and across the two cases; and (e) writing an interpretation that includes its strongest available alternative. The procedure is inspired by transparent qualitative organization rather than an assertion that a standardized psychometric coding scheme has been validated (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

The available manuscript did not contain the original annotation sheets, time-stamped code decisions, named coder assignments, recorded reflexive memos, or adjudication logs. Accordingly, the present matrix is a documented analytical reconstruction, not evidence that a prior team independently coded the stories. No inter-coder agreement statistic is reported or implied. A future multi-analyst replication should preserve versioned excerpts, log initial and revised codes, record rival readings, reconcile differences by returning to the Kazakh-language passages, and retain unresolved disagreements instead of forcing consensus. A reflexive log should also document analysts' linguistic proficiency, familiarity with Kazakh folklore, and assumptions concerning religion and cultural identity.

*Inference rules and language limits*

Three levels of claim are kept distinct. Level A is a directly observable textual feature (for example, a burial setting or a reference to a named star). Level B is a defended literary interpretation (for example, the narrative presents religious practice as a response to narrated guilt). Level C would be a statement about actual psychological change, national beliefs, readers, or the author's intent. Level C cannot be inferred from A or B without further independent evidence. The English phrases reproduced here follow the supplied English-language manuscript; they should be checked by a qualified Kazakh-language reader against the cited primary editions before final publication.

The study includes no participants, interviews, observations of behavior, psychometric measures, experimental manipulation, or causal tests. Terms such as remorse, consciousness, recognition, and cultural memory denote narrative representation unless explicitly identified otherwise. Where a figure is used, it serves solely as a display of interpretive steps, not as a fitted model or validated mechanism.

**Table 1.**

Operational coding guide for the bounded textual comparison

| Code | Inclusion criterion and exclusion boundary |
|---|---|
| SP \| spatial image | Named landform, water, route, dwelling, grave or passage. Do not infer "sacred" merely from scenery. |
| CT \| cosmic time | Stars, cyclical temporality, cosmogony or fate explicitly evoked. Do not assign a historical belief to every reader. |
| RT \| ritual action | Burial, prayer, prohibition or lament performed or described. Distinguish action from its evaluation. |
| NV \| narrative voice | Speech, quoted lament, narrated memory or focalization cue. Do not equate narration with measured emotion. |
| EM \| ethical sequence | Transgression, consequence, remorse or obligation linked by the plot. Causality belongs to narration, not psychology. |
| CM \| memory allusion | Explicit ancestry, folklore or tradition. Interpret as a textual allusion, not a census of cultural consensus. |

## Findings and Results

*"Ike": transgression, landscape, and narrated remorse*

"Ike" situates the protagonist in a plot that moves among travel, hardship, transgression, homecoming, and later religious practice. The graveyard episode is decisive for this reading. In the English rendering presented in the source manuscript, the narrator describes a man who survived by consuming part of a corpse and later experienced the memory of that action as a severe burden. The source depicts his learning to read the Qur'an and taking up regular prayer after the episode (Kemelbayeva, 2025). These are textual actions and narrated evaluations. They license a reading of moral retrospection, not a clinical claim about trauma, disorder, or verified psychological recovery.

The burial setting and the physical act of survival place bodily vulnerability in tension with norms governing the dead. The story's ethical design becomes more complex when read alongside episodes of prior unjust punishment, coercion, movement through the steppe, and the eventual famine. That broader plot resists a simple equation between a single transgression and a predetermined moral destiny. The religious practices can be interpreted as a narratively



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marked effort at restitution; alternatively, they may function as a conventional sign of later-life piety. The narrative itself does not isolate the mechanism that accounts for a change in the character's state.

Landscape contributes to the sequence through travel, water crossings, homeland, and the grave as a spatial limit. These settings are concrete plot locations before they become possible interpretive symbols. A reading that assigns water an unambiguous cleansing function or mountains an unambiguous ascent toward "truth" needs support from the passage's positioning and not a universal symbolic dictionary. In this text, the more defensible statement is that geography and bodily movement frame a trajectory of obligation, displacement, and remembered wrongdoing (Bakhtin, 1981; Smyth, 2023).

The phrase describing remorse as a net-like burden, quoted in the earlier manuscript, represents an affective state within literary narration. It does not establish a measurable intrapsychic transformation. The character's later generosity and prayer may strengthen an ethical reorientation reading, but the story does not prove a general cultural law of punishment, moral purification, or ancestral protection. The figure remains open to irony, social critique, religious interpretation, and the ambiguities of historical hardship.

### *"Kökqiya": cosmological scale and a communal death narrative*

"Kökqiya" brings the mythical image of a blue ox sustaining the earth into a narrative of instability and loss. The image is introduced as something elders used to say, an explicit narratorial cue that marks it as received speech rather than a present-day survey of literal belief. Its possible literary function is to amplify a mortal event by locating it against an imagined cosmic order; the passage does not establish that all Kazakh people share the same cosmogony (Kemelbayeva, 2015; Nurbayeva et al., 2025).

The constellation names Ürker and Temirqazyk and the "Seven Robbers" further distribute the death narrative across celestial and terrestrial registers. The text juxtaposes a named individual, Tüsipkhan, with repeated motion in the sky. This makes an interpretation of contrasting time scales plausible: finite human life appears against a recurrent astronomical pattern. Yet the stars may also operate as culturally familiar narrative vocabulary rather than as supernatural agents governing character behavior. Cosmic imagery is a property of representation, not evidence for the real-world dependence of psychological states on celestial bodies.

The lament sequence gives the study its clearest formal evidence. A voice evokes a white house, an island, a stumble, and the change from day to night; another voice intensifies the complaint about a transitory world. The alternation of voices allows grief to become more than a private declaration within the text. The island and the reversal of day to night offer images of isolation, interruption, and mortality, but the wider claim that this lament expresses a homogeneous "national consciousness" exceeds what these excerpts demonstrate (Kemelbayeva, 2015; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

The text's commemorative frame matters as much as its mythic imagery. The public edition identifies the story with a genealogical strand of the author's prose and describes a publication and commentary history. This contextualizes the lament as a form of remembered life, not simply as a psychological mechanism. Inference remains at the level of how individual loss is narrated through shared cultural forms; the actual mourning experiences of contemporary audiences are not observed.

### *Cross-case synthesis and counter-readings*

The shared pattern is not the empirical "transformation of consciousness" but the narrative coupling of material spaces and culturally resonant motifs. "Ike" uses the grave, travel, and remembered action to organize responsibility across time; "Kökqiya" draws on celestial movement and communal lament to position mortality within a wider imagined order. The functions are not interchangeable. Table 2 makes the evidentiary boundary explicit, and Figure 1 and Figure 2 schematizes the movement from observed textual features to conditional interpretations (Elepova & Kabanova, 2021; Shanayev et al., 2023).



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**Table 2.**

Evidence-to-inference matrix: textual anchors, readings, and limits

| Case and evidence anchor | Bounded reading and alternative |
|---|---|
| Ike \| burial and survival | RT + EM: the narrated transgression is later recalled as wrongdoing. Alternative: critique of extreme deprivation and social coercion; no clinical diagnosis. |
| Ike \| Qur'an study and prayer | RT + NV: piety is represented after remorse. Alternative: conventional moral closure rather than measured "self-discovery." |
| Ike \| travel and homecoming | SP: physical routes position exile and return. Alternative: primarily historical and plot-making geography, not automatic symbolism. |
| Kökqiya \| blue ox / elders' story | CT + CM: received cosmogony expands narrative scale. Alternative: quoted folklore, not literal shared belief or factual cosmo logy. |
| Kökqiya \| Ürker, Temirqazyk, Seven Robbers | CT + SP: finite life set against repeating celestial motion. Alternative: customary lexicon of place and season. |
| Kökqiya \| white house, island, day/night lament | NV + RT: an enacted mourning voice shapes loss. Alternative: poetic convention; no evidence of actual audience response. |

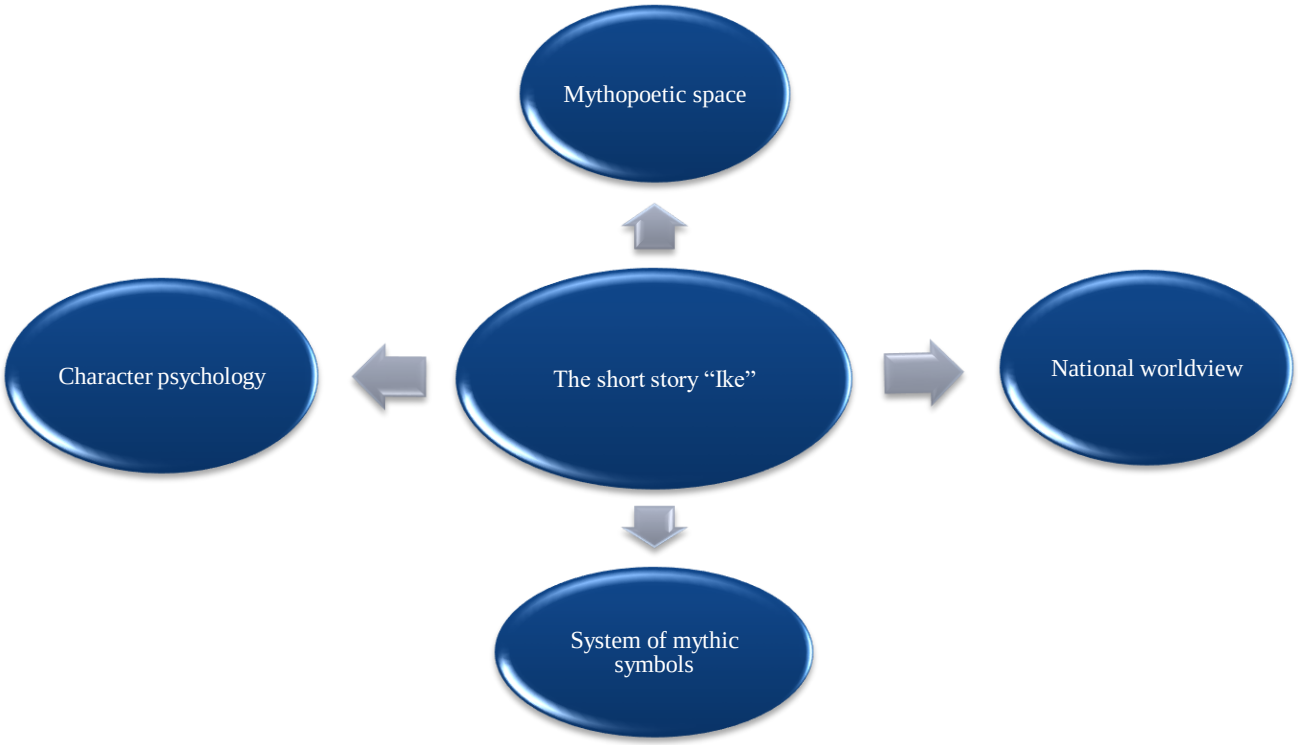



**Figure 1.**

*Model of mythopoetic space in the short story "Yke"*



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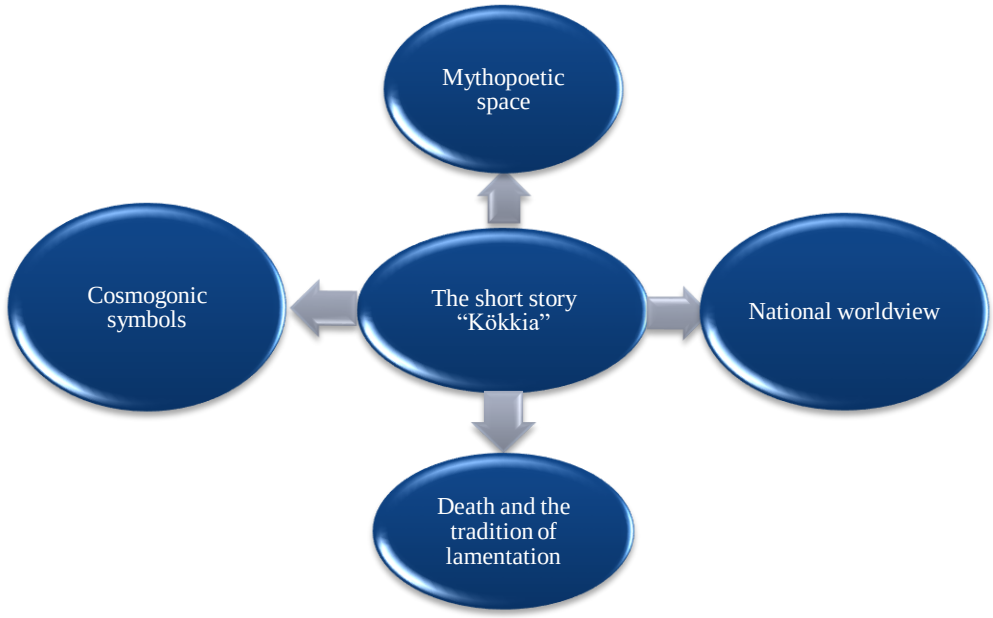



**Figure 2.**

Model of mythopoetic space in the *short story "Kökkia"*

## Discussion and Conclusion

### *What the comparison establishes*

The strongest shared conclusion is formal and interpretive: each story assembles cultural motifs to render human vulnerability in a spatially enlarged narrative field. That comparison accords with research treating mythopoetics as a literary method and attention to symbolic structure as distinct from empirical verification (Koblanov et al., 2025; Naimanbaev et al., 2026). The present study adds a restrained contrast between an ethically sequential narrative and a cosmogonic–commemorative one. It does not show that motifs exert psychological effects or that the two texts represent an entire nation.

The distinction among cultural context, textual representation, and individual response is especially important in interdisciplinary reading. Discussions of culturally embedded beliefs in psychosocial scholarship are based on different questions and evidence (Seyed Alitabar, 2023). Such work can motivate cautious questions about how stories are received, but it cannot supply missing participant data or validate inferences about the mental processes of Kemelbayeva's fictional characters. Likewise, accounts of "awakening" as a literary motif are not equivalent to longitudinal observations of human transformation (Naimanbaev et al., 2026).

The two cases also warrant different alternative readings. For "Ike," poverty, coercion, moral instruction, and historical catastrophe may explain the salience of the protagonist's choices as convincingly as an exclusively sacred narrative. For "Kökqiya," genealogy, elegy, and oral-poetic conventions may account for celestial imagery without positing metaphysical determinism. A strong literary interpretation identifies what those alternatives explain and resists treating preferred symbolism as a fact independent of the narrator's perspective.

### *Scope, methodological limitations, and next steps*

This two-story purposive corpus offers depth but does not demonstrate representativeness. The matrix records selected identifiable passages rather than a full, versioned, publicly deposited annotation of every sentence in both Kazakh originals. The English renderings come from the submitted manuscript and need independent translation checking. Historical and ethnographic claims about the prevalence of specific motifs would require additional primary documentation; authorial intention would require



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relevant author statements and publication histories; audience effects would require reception data.

The absence of contemporaneous reflexive notes and an independently recorded coding process limits claims of reproducibility. The published codebook and rival-reading column increase auditability but are not substitutes for a multi-coder reliability study. Future work could sample across periods and genres in Kemelbayeva's published prose, formulate explicit negative-case selection criteria, collect separate Kazakh-language readings, preserve coding audit trails, and document how disputes were resolved. Any empirical psychological hypothesis should specify participants, validated measures or interview protocols, ethics approval where applicable, and a design that can assess the proposed response rather than infer it from fiction (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

In "Ike," mythopoetic space is associated with a plotted sequence of burial, material vulnerability, remembered transgression, and religious action; in "Kökqiya," it is organized through received cosmogony, celestial naming, and collective lament. The evidence supports this comparison of narrative forms and carefully qualified interpretations of their cultural allusions. It does not establish clinical states, psychological transformation, representative national beliefs, or experimentally verified mechanisms. The resulting account remains a bounded literary analysis with explicit evidence and inferential limits.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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