PANDANUS '03

Nature Symbols in Literature

Edited by Jaroslav Vacek

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Contents

Preface

It was at the Pandanus session in 2002[1] that we discussed the need to tackle a more general analysis of the semiotics of nature in literature and possibly also a comparison with other literary traditions. This year we have decided to do justice to this request. For the most part, the present volume of Pandanus is the result of a workshop held originally in Czech on May 23, 2003. The purpose was to invite also colleagues dealing with general semiotic problems (V. Zuska, P. Michalovič) and to put together a number of contributions on nature as reflected in Indian literature and art (M. Hříbek, J. Vacek), Chinese literature (O. Lomová) and Japanese literature (Z. Švarcová, M. Tirala). For comparison we have also included a paper on the Latin American reflection of nature in literature (A. Housková). Additional papers were accepted for the volume (a paper by Tiziana Pontillo and Paola Rossi read at the Pandanus meeting a year earlier, and two more papers by D. Marková on an Indian topic and P. Holman on a topic from Czech literature).

Consequently, the volume covers a broad field of practical interest and the workshop was especially interesting from this point of view – offering the possibility of comparing the practical reflection of nature

[1] Cf. the previous volume: *Pandanus '02, Nature in Indian Literatures and Art.* Edited by J. Vacek and H. Preinhaelterová. Charles University, Faculty of Arts; Signeta, Praha 2002, 186 pp. The volume was dedicated to the memory of Bernhard Kölver.

in various literatures of South Asia and East Asia with that of Latin America, while having also a reaction of the more theoretical vision of semiotic interpretation.

Apart from that, it is obvious that joining hands particularly in this type of study between several Asian regions will be very useful *for future investigation* of both very practical questions and more general presentations of the individual systems of expression (establishing the basic sets of symbols, their hierarchies, actual use and combinations in texts, etc.; in brief the 'paradigmatic and syntagmatic' properties of the respective natural codes on the purely linguistic level as well as on the semiotic level). All of that should be studied against the background of a more general semiotic consciousness, which will show, we hope, whether the individual literatures have their own separate codes, or whether those codes still share some universal properties.

The idea of studying the nature symbols in literature occurred to the author of these lines in the early 1990s when he first met Prof. Bernhard Kölver and both shared the feeling that much of the use of nature in Prakrit and Sanskrit literatures is very analogical with that of old Tamil Sangam poetry. The difference being that the Tamil tradition provides a very systematic interpretation of the meaning of nature symbols used in the old poetry, while the Prakrit and Sanskrit poetics underline different poetic principles.[2]

[2] To be just, we have to say that there are early statements of the parallels by G. L. Hart (*The Poems of Ancient Tamil. Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts*. Berkeley, etc. 1975) and even earlier by S. Lienhard, e. g. Palai Poems in Sanskrit and Prakrit, *Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri Felicitation Volume*. Madras 1971, pp. 416–22; Tamil Literary Conventions and Sanskrit Muktaka Poetry. *Wienter Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, XX, 1976, pp. 101–110. Further cf. also G. Pellegrini, Sattasaî and the *pālai* poems of Aiṅkuṟunūṟu. In: *Pandanus '98. Flowers, Nature, Semiotics. Kāvya and Sangam*. Signeta, Prague 1999, pp. 103–136.

Though we are far from having achieved any systematic results,[3] we have reached a point when we feel the need to start looking for more insights and for comparison with other literatures. Hopefully this will be a useful inspiration to be utilised for achieving a better understanding of the individual traditions.

The first two papers by V. Zuska and P. Michalovič are intended to offer a few ideas concerning the theoretical vision of the problem of nature in literature. V. Zuska's paper discusses the specific aesthetic appeal of the so-called natural symbols as reflected in artistic texts. P. Michalovič's paper adds some thoughts on the symbolism of nature and poetic language.

Two papers are devoted to other than Asian topics, viz. A. Housková's discussion of the use of nature images in Spanish-American literature introduces e. g. the images of the inland, jungle and garden in the forest. P. Holman's paper discusses *Galium verum*, which was often used by the Czech symbolist Otokar Březina.

Three papers deal with the Chinese and Japanese literary traditions. O. Lomová's paper discusses the nature symbolism of Chinese literary creation, particularly as represented by the orange tree. Z. Švarcová's paper deals with some practical examples of nature symbolism in Japanese short poems and introduces another dimension of Far Eastern nature symbolism. The Japanese literary tradition is further discussed in the paper by M. Tirala with regard to the four seasons and place names.

[3] This will require more time and energy. Most of the studies performed so far are concentrated on individual symbols from either the literary and semiotic perspective, or from the purely philological point of view. The web page of Pandanus (at the address http://iu.ff.cuni.cz/pandanus) offers some electronic Kāvya texts for further research and a database of plants, which hopefully will keep growing to serve as a source of information.

The Indian tradition is represented by four papers. M. Hříbek adopts the ethnobiological approach to natural motifs in the oral literature and village art of Bengal. D. Marková discusses the symbolism of the dog in the Hindi new short story. T. Pontillo and P. Rossi offer a systematic study of the symbolism of the sea in the pre-Kāvya literature (the Mahābhārata and the Pāli Canon). J. Vacek's paper gives a brief account of the symbolical code of Old Tamil literature as it is represented in the Sangam tradition.

We offer this small volume of papers to the public hoping that it will provide further practical and theoretical inspiration for the study of the important subject of nature as reflected in literature. I should like to thank PhDr. H. Preinhaelterová, CSc., for kindly having read the contributions, for commenting upon them and recommending the volume for print. Our thanks are also due to Dr. Mark Corner for reading and correcting the English version of the papers.

Editor

Symbolic meaning as a figure against the background of nature's horizon

VLASTIMIL ZUSKA

Nature as a theme is a "task" which covers a wide range of topics and as such it demands an inevitable narrowing of focus. Within the scope of the aesthetic problem of nature, or alternatively the beauty of nature, which as a theme alternately arises and withdraws (suppressed for example by ecology), what is offered is the issue of symbol and its meaning in texts with nature as a theme, or the role of symbols whose primary meaning refers to nature, nature elements, and a human being's place in nature, including the use of these symbols as expressive tools for situations, problems and tension within culture, within civilization, that is, within the sphere opposing nature in a certain sense.

What is proper to a wide range of scientific disciplines is the analytic approach, the decomposition of the examined whole into small units and their consequent thorough analysis. Therefore it is not only in art history that different symbols (a mouse in Gothic painting, a toad in Hieronymus Bosch's works etc.) are examined and observed against the more or less blurred background of the global meaning. Consequently, the principal elimination of the higher (that is, more complex, fuller) manifestation takes place. This also occurs in the case of a conscious mutual relation and continuity of individual symbolic meanings, in the case of textual interpretation conforming to the hermeneutic maxim formulated already by Schleiermacher (namely proceeding from the whole to its parts) where the analysis often stops in front of one of the main factors – the factor excusing the very

existence of artistic texts, be it poetry, prose, a picture, a theatre play – in front of the aesthetic appeal. Thus, an artistic text as an aesthetic object is the manifestation of an even higher rank. The level of its meanings lies at the level of the offer of symbolic and literal meanings of the text serving as an object pole of the constitution of the aesthetic object.

My intention is therefore to point at and present the relatively specific aesthetic appeal of so-called nature symbols, an appeal, which could add another substantial point of view on nature and its manifestations in artistic texts. I will stop by the concept of symbolic representation for a short time, then I will pass to the nature symbols' specificity, and finally I will briefly outline the scenario of the nature symbols' aesthetic appeal within the plan of the distinction between natural and aesthetic beauty – or more generally aesthetics.

The key factor in the constitution of a symbol – be it verbal symbol or image – is to provide meaning with the help of (another) meaning. Unlike polysemy, unlike "the foundation" meaning, its relation is vertical, it is based on the more or less literal meaning. To use Paul Ricoeur's words, *"primary, literal, secular, often physical meaning refers retroactively to the figurative, spiritual, often existential, ontological meaning which is in no case given outside this indirect designation. The symbol compels us to think, it calls for interpretation exactly because it says more than it says."* This seemingly paradoxical claim implicates the time character of symbol interpretation, the symbolic representation process taking place in an expanding meaning space which is not given in one go. The symbol therefore says more totally than it does actually. The multiple meaning, once again in Ricoeur's delimitation: *"the meaning appeal where one expression designating one thing simultaneously designates another thing without stopping to designate the first one"*, this multiple meaning contains within itself both the simultaneity of appeal and (and this implicitly) the indispensability of the semiosis diachronic process. Thus symbol refers both to its

symbolic meaning and to its primary meaning where it originated, and this simultaneously – even though the actual weight of reference changes in the course of the text's reception. To use Daniela Rossella's example, a poetic image of a bee sucking from a lotus flower may evoke, therefore it may mean, a selfish lover, a gourmet, a person thinking only about their own benefit, or an expert in poetry, while the primary meaning – that is, a bee as a (useful) kind of insect – is not being lost. The multiple meaning of the symbol is then extended in several dimensions: from the symbol to the secondary multiple meanings, from the symbol to the primary literal meaning, and behind its symbolic meanings to the other symbolically referring texts, for example to the relevant language and cultural circle context, its historical development included. The genesis and the actual state of the meaning field where the symbol introduces its recipient (its reader) thus creates the very space of the meaning events of the text in question, where the oscillation among individual symbolic meanings, meaning digressions to the previous aesthetic experiences of the same and analogous symbols, and the oscillation among symbolic meanings and literal meanings structures the aesthetic reception process. In this way the aesthetic object gains its necessary complexity or – in Nelson Goodman's words – semantic repleteness, the symptom needed for an adequate, that is, not a brief and superficial, aesthetic experience. Or, to put it differently, symbolic reference in poetry and other art genres prevents the experience of "beauty easy to get" for the benefit of "beauty difficult to get" (S. Alexander), it leads to the aesthetic reception process or, what is with a slight change of emphasis the same, to the constitution of an aesthetic object which is throughout the reception not smooth and harmonious, but demanding an effort of synthesis overcoming conflicts and contrasts. If we want to develop the undoubtedly correct partial conclusion of the already quoted D. Rossella, that *"it is possible to deduce various moral implications from the natural ambivalence of*

natural events", then we can deduce that from the multiple symbolic meaning parallel to the literal meaning, it is possible to get the whole set of various aesthetic qualities and consequently values, synthesized in a resulting aesthetic object with a total aesthetic value for which we can in some cases use the category of beauty, in other cases sublimity.

The semiotic description of the suggested situation would operate with the terms of sign and metasign, while the symbol takes the position of metasign, that is, the sign having another sign for the denotatum, without cancelling the possibility of referring "directly" to the extralinguistic reality, that is, also to nature or its elements. Chronologically, it is however often a case of moving from the literal to the symbolic meaning, thus first of all the recognition of, for example, a bee, a cloud, or a sandal tree, the realization of the primary meaning of the verbal symbol in the case of a written text, and the consequent return reference to the symbolic meaning. Thus it refers to a movement from the sign to the metasign and successively from the metasign to multiple denotations including the observance of the metasign position towards the primary sign. Once again we are getting to a meaning space picture where the recipient is made to follow a succession of trajectories, meaning digressions often opposing one another, and (s)he is made to hold this event "in the height" if (s)he is to get aesthetic and possibly also moral and cognitive satisfaction. The frequency of connections between the metasign and the sign, between the metasign and multiple meanings, is then the function of the aesthetic experience complexity and therefore also of its intensity. The problem of possible excessive complexity can be solved in several ways which I will only briefly enumerate given our topic: from the point of view of psychology it is the narrow character of human consciousness, its limited capacity to perceive, to interpret, to grasp; from the point of view of aesthetics it is the move between beauty and sublimity, or possibly the inability of the synthesis of the too complex whole resulting in a turning away from the text. In this connection,

that is to say in connection with the indicated oscillating move in the semiosis field, we cannot forget to mention Hegel's opinion of the nature of Indian consciousness and its relation to the world, as he formulated it in his *Aesthetics* with his typical "delicacy": *"Contrarily, the Indian view jumps equally naturally from this supersensuality to the wildest sensuality. As the natural and immediate, and so the peaceful identity of both parts is surpassed, what has become in its place the basic type is* the difference *in the scope of identity, therefore this conflict throws us without mediation from something sovereignly finite to the divine, from the divine again to the sovereignly finite; then we live among the forms originating in this mutual overturning of one part into another as in the enchanted world, where no definite form is resistant when we hope to hold it, but it transforms suddenly into its own opposite, or it puffs out and it opens out into extremity."* The view on Indian culture, art and philosophy has definitely changed since Hegel's times and we can hardly agree with such a simplified opinion, nevertheless the basic insight about the oscillation in the field of "fantastic symbolism" is, I suppose, valid so far and this not only for Indian culture.

To support the suggested oscillation process of aesthetic experience, it is possible to present the two following symbol characteristics in the sense observed and examined, which offer space for the aesthetic reception movement: firstly, as has been already said in different terminology, we are speaking about second rate symbols, about metasigns, that is, about symbols based on first rate symbols, that is to say verbal symbols with a literal meaning. The second factor is the dual direction character of the symbolic reference, that is, from the perception or the idea to the verbal symbol: to quote Whitehead, *"language also illustrates the theory that out of consideration for the pair of two things related in an appropriate way, it depends on the perceiving subject constitution which role is to be assigned to the symbol and which one to the meaning. The word "forest" may evoke the memory of the forest, but equally a look at the forest or a memory of the forest may evoke the word*

"forest"." This observation from the chapter about "Symbolic reference" in *Process and Reality* leads us to the role of ideas, memories and perceptions in the aesthetic reception process concerning works of art with nature symbolism, that is to say works with a symbolic content referring to nature. The nature and role of ideas in the functioning consciousness is the lasting theme of the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, psychology and aesthetics. We will disregard the conflict between the advocates of the theory that ideas are coherent, integrated and self-sufficient representations of scenes or objects, and the opinion that ideas are epiphenomenal, that the only form of mental representation is the connected range of symbols corresponding to propositions. The prevailing theory of imagination favours the second opinion and this is relevant also to our topic. Other implications are as follows: the mental processes leading to the connected range of symbols corresponding to an idea are similar to those creating the basis for the perception of an object. An important consequence of this conception is that *"it is possible to refer to one and the same element or part of an object by many different propositions that altogether form the object's description."* (P. Johnson-Laird: *Mental Models*) In addition to the affirmation of the polysemic field of the symbolic reference within the scope of the work of art's reception where the oscillation process of aesthetic reception takes place, what we can deduce from this mental models conception is that it is possible to refer to nature or to its elements practically in an infinite number of ways. However, these references evoke connected ranges of descriptions, together forming "a mental model" of nature for every recipient of the work of art in question. Given the nature of nature itself – character, more generally the world's nature, this is a case of a fundamental difference in reference. Nature does not form a closed object to be grasped, the centre of a limited number of descriptions, but an open horizon within the scope of which we can refer to only some of its segments.

This is the moment to summarize "the scenario" of the experience of the aesthetic object with the part played by the symbol whose metadenotatum is nature: from the primary representation of a natural object (for example the above-mentioned bee), in the case of a literary work of art the recipient progresses to the idea of a bee, which develops in the given context within the secondary symbolic meaning's richness. If we use for an illustration the well-known visual perception characteristic of the emerging and emphasizing of an object of perception – a figure and its background, then the secondary, multiple meaning symbol emerges as a figure against the background of the text with its boundaries in question. The text itself then refers through the primary meaning of the secondary symbol to the denotation field of the primary symbol, that is, to nature in the sense of a symbol series, forming a part of the mental model of nature as the horizon. The united whole of the aesthetic object with its boundaries then emerges and acts as a complex figure against the background of the uncircumscribed, into connotations escaping the understanding, parts of the meaning series which are getting lost from the actual horizon of consciousness. The background in our illustrating pair "figure – background", however, forms an integral part of the perception whole, thus in our case the aesthetic experience whole of the work of art in question, and so it is experienced together with the figure of, for example, poetic work. The aesthetic reception process suggested in this way nevertheless brings into the game the difference between natural and artistic (beauty), the difference between the aesthetic perception of nature and the perception, more exactly the reception, of works of art.

From traditional distinctions to contemporary ones, several differentiating factors of the following types repeat: we perceive nature through all our senses, while works of art are perceived preferentially by the so-called distance senses, that is, by sight and hearing; we enter nature and we are surrounded by nature, while we

observe works of art from a certain distance (as for literary works of art, it is a question of mental modelling, the aesthetic object constituted on the basis of the acoustic forms of words, the meanings of verbal symbols, a series of symbols whose basis is propositions); art is intentional, nature is not; art is concerned with the expression of emotions, ideas, values, and intentions, while nature is not. The evolution theory of the aesthetic relation to nature then operates with the concepts of view and refuge. A more appropriate difference for our interest is in that case Arthur Dante's opinion finding dissimilarity at the level of conceptualization : in art, aesthetic properties are the function of the concept, and under its cover, category classification, an object is perceived and valued. If we compare a work of art with its physical base (for example in the case of a picture the so-called painting which is a complex of coloured spots, and a picture itself with representations of let us say soldiers on night duty), then knowledge that it is a work of art transfigures this base, and therefore a work of art has properties that a basis lacks. The symbolic reading of a poem is in this sense the transfiguration of the text understood only literally. Aesthetic perception of nature does not demand this conceptualization, and the concept, notion, and operation of categorization are even lethal poison to the perception of Kantian "pure", that is, natural beauty. In the case of our aforementioned scenario, we find ourselves in a certain intermediate position between an aesthetically aimed stay in nature (although in the mode of mental representation, even if what can also be evoked here are, for example, memories of olfactory perceptions of a forest or a meadow) and the reception of a work of art led by conceptualization which is as direct as for literary arts. The destructive superiority of cognitive conceptualization and categorization to the characteristics of the most common, utilitarian-manipulative attitude, is however diminished partly by the aesthetic attitude, the distance in the face of one's own

experience, and partly by the development of a multiple secondary meanings field. The reference to nature is thus multiple and stratified thanks to the nature of the complex sign – the artistic text which "overflows" into nature's horizon, also with its aesthetic qualities and eventually with its readings over "tangents", pointing connecting lines to the verbal symbols' primary meanings. This way it adds (apart from other things) another connected symbol series to the propositional description – a mental representation of nature.

In conclusion, a question presents itself about what role the observed type of works of art plays in human life and therefore in respective cultures too. A convincing answer can be found when reading Cassirer: *"Only one look at the development of different symbolic forms may suffice to show that their principal performance is everywhere based not on their ability to reflect the outer world into the inner world, or to project the already complete inner world simply outside, but in the fact that it is only in them and through them that both moments of "the inner" and "the outer", the moments of "the self" and "reality", gain their determination and their mutual delimitation."* Therefore it is not a question of a noncommittal and harmless game of imagination and emotions in the meaning field, however amusing and/or aesthetically self-rewarding such a game is or could be, but it is a question of fundamentally changing the boundary delimitation of the self, the surroundings, culture and nature.

Nature's horizon, without boundaries as the background of an artistic text figure, thus diminishes the point denotations also of the primary symbols. Furthermore the multiplicity of the secondary symbols' meanings, in a field with the marked boundaries of an artistic text in the role of a figure, elevates the fragment of nature in the background to the role of aesthetic object.

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Translated by Eva Fričová.

Nature, 'the view' and poetic language

PETER MICHALOVIČ

If one is to choose between nature as chaos and nature as cosmos, one will prefer the latter. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, any classification is better than chaos to a human being; even classification at the level of qualities perceived by the senses represents a stage along the way towards rational order. If we are to classify a pile of various fruits into relatively heavy ones and relatively light ones, the right place to begin will be the distinction of apples from pears, even though form, colour and taste are in no relation to weight and volume; bigger apples are, however, easier to distinguish from smaller apples when we compare them among themselves, rather than keeping them mixed up with fruits of different appearance. This example already shows that classification on the level of aesthetic perception also has its own value.[1]

We classify both on the level of everyday language and on the levels of poetic language and scientific language. Each of these languages – dominated by any function – tries primarily or secondarily to master chaos, which, as we already know, is unacceptable for a human being.

In our culture, scientific and poetic languages are located in a common space. Each of them, however, inhabits an opposite end of

[1] LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude: *Myšlení přírodních národů*. Dauphin, Liberec 1996, p. 31.

the spectrum. This is shown by the fact that science wants to perceive. To be more precise, it would like to perceive the world from a perspective, which enables it to see the world as it is. And consequently, science would like to find a language, which could describe such a perception so that perception and description reflect each other like two opposing mirrors. By way of contrast, poetic language tries to maintain the uniqueness of the individual view, the uniqueness of the perspective proper to a concrete human being in a concrete historical period and geographical space. It follows from that that poets do not search for that fabulous *point of view* enabling them to see the world, for example, in the way its creator sees it, but on the contrary they try to present what their eyes have seen. *My eyes, my vision!* – this is what the basic thesis of a poetic programme could sound like.

It is possible to view the world from an infinite number of perspectives, partly because the places we look from can be changed, and partly because the world itself is changing, it is a world in a state of becoming. If a poet wanted to describe his/her view most accurately, a separate language would have to exist for each view. We know well, however, that nothing like this exists. On the contrary, if language is to be language, then it has to be generally comprehensible and its structure, language as a code, has to be repeatable. A poet has to solve the paradox embedded in the conflict between a unique view and a universal language. How can the paradox be solved? The only method is to describe the unique view using language, which is in principle in a state of instability. This means that a game will take place in the language, an infinite substitution within a limited set. According to Jacques Derrida, the field enables unlimited substitutions to take place precisely because of its limited character, that is, precisely because – while not being inexhaustible as the classical hypothesis wanted it to be, nor being unmanageably large – it lacks something, to

be precise it lacks a centre, maintaining and funding the game of substitutions.[2]

The game of substitutions, now reduced to the game of replacement of the literal by the metaphorical, is the basis for the creation of new meanings. In Bakhtinian terms, a poet has to appropriate his/her language as an autocrat for the needs of his/her poetic game, (s)he has to take the same responsibility for all the moments of the language, to subject them exclusively to his/her intentions. Every word has to express immediately and directly the poet's intention, says Bakhtin (and I add: it has to describe the poet's view); even a minor distance between the poet and his/her speech must not take place. The poet has to take the language as a unified intentional whole for his/her starting point, and no language stratification, no conflict of dialects, not even conflict of languages should therefore be somehow more substantially reflected in the poet's work.[3]

By means of the poetic game, the poet makes words not only forget their previous life in different contexts, that is, forget their past meanings, but (s)he even makes words perform their new meanings. The literal and the metaphorical create the basic circulation where a new meaning is added to old words, where new metaphors are born and capture the specific character of a certain view more accurately. It is only by means of this circulation that the conflict between the uniqueness of 'the view' and the universal character of language can be solved, evidently always only for a short and precise time.

The circulation takes place not only between the literal and the metaphorical, but also between the daily and the poetic languages. The

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[2] DERRIDA, Jacques: *Struktura, znak a hra v diskursu věd o člověku.* In: *Texty k dekonstrukci. Práce z let 1967–1972.* Archa, Bratislava 1993, p. 191.

[3] BACHTIN, Michail, M.: *Román jako dialog.* Odeon, Praha 1980, p. 74.

poet as the Bakhtinian autocrat appropriates the daily language, (s)he makes its individual words forget their previous lives, (s)he separates them consistently from the contexts where they used to function, and (s)he makes them step into the process of metaphorization where words and sentences become living metaphors (to use Paul Ricoeur's term) that capture the poetic view's newness. Obviously, "living metaphors" become "dead metaphors" (to use Ricoeur's term again) by continuous usage, while the individual graves of "dead metaphors" create the lexical level of our daily language.

The poetic language and its metaphors, understood in the most general sense, maintain the uniqueness of 'the view' for eternity. In other words, it is as if the metaphors of poetic language extract from the view what Deleuze and Guattari call the *percept*, while "*percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of the state of those who experience them.*"[4]

Percepts as poetic language elements therefore try to maintain the view's uniqueness, to create a *non-human* landscape of nature by means of poetic language elements. Even though a view is always a view of something, we cannot say that percepts refer mechanically to a certain object. To be more precise, they resemble, or they want to resemble something, whereas "*it is (...) a resemblance produced with their own methods.*"[5]

So far we have considered only one poetic game dimension focused on the transmission of information capturing the view's newness. However, metaphor creation can also be focused on capturing the

[4] DELEUZE, Gilles – GUATTARI, Félix: *Co je filosofie?* Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2001, p. 142. English quotation: DELEUZE, Gilles – GUATTARI, Félix: *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson. Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 164.

[5] Ibid., p. 144. English quotation: ibid., p. 166.

relation of the one who can see to the seen (or to the percepts preserved for eternity). This poetic game type results in affects (to use Deleuze and Guattari's term). Here again it should be underlined that affects are not affections, but extracts from affections, extracts, which have to be self-sufficient. This means that the poet does not express his/her feelings and experience by his/her poetry, but (s)he creates affects which outlive a human being. Every period of art history has its own affects; love affects, for example, are different in Romanticism and different in Modernism.

We can exemplify the poetic language game by colours. Every language disposes of signs to articulate the spectrum of colours, but the number of signs indicating also a number of colours and colour shades differs between different languages. This is a well-known fact and therefore we will focus only on new designations which function solely within the scope of certain historically valid (poetic) languages. In 18th-century-"dandy" culture, for example, there existed specific names of colour shades like *grenouille évanouie*, which could be translated as the colour of a fainted frog. Another example is that of Leo Tolstoy, who wrote in his *War And Peace* that a character put on trousers in a colour of *cuisse de nymphe effrayée*, which we could translate as the colour of a frightened nymph's thigh. The effort within the creation of such designations stems from a maximally accurate distinction of a certain colour shade from other ones; it is the creation of percepts that would correspond to a certain concrete individual view.

When reading such designations we find that we understand them but we do not know what colour shade corresponds to this very designation. Frankly on the level of perception we may never find out what such a shade looks like, as the probability of us meeting a frightened nymph is practically zero.

Apart from the creation of new percepts, new colour designations, it is also interesting to observe the development of colour symbolism which stems from colour percepts. The purpose of this operation is

not to create new designations, but to join the visible to the invisible, the effort to relate colour as physical quantity or physical factor to a certain hidden order of things and people. In order to be able to reveal the hidden, symbolic meaning of colours, we should know more than the code of some (daily) language: in that case we also have to bring into the game cultural competence, knowledge of the symbolic milieu of the culture in question – and even this may not suffice.

Translated by Eva Fričová

Translating nature into images in Spanish America

ANNA HOUSKOVÁ

The encounter with virgin nature is a dominant feature in American literatures. Unlike the realms of thousand-year-old cultural traditions, the newly discovered world puts man into an elemental situation, which has been lost elsewhere through cultural development. Culture is being born here by means of the "translation of nature into images". These are José Lezama Lima's words in his essay *The American Expression* (1957). Spanish-American literature apparently starts from nothing at the moment of the Spanish clash with the new world: "... the awe of the chroniclers is given by nature itself, by the landscape yearning to be expressed which throws itself on the surprised missionary, on the surprised student, whose happy end with a degree in literature was interrupted by the adventure".[1] Thus the poet reads nature as a text, which must be decoded, translated into a different language.

This is an old metaphorical concept of "the book of nature", frequent in Spanish-American literature, too. In his hermeneutics, Octavio Paz stresses that it is an understanding of signs referring to an invisible reality; he hints at a similar idea of Baudelaire's; the idea of

[1] "... en los cronistas el asombro está dictado por la misma naturaleza, por un paisaje que ansioso de su expresión se vuelca sobre el perplejo misionero, sobre el asombrado estudiante en quien la aventura rompió el buen final del diploma de letras." José Lezama Lima. La expresión americana. In: *Confluencias*. Editorial Letras Cubanas, La Habana 1988, p. 226.

			Ja II 442, 15-16	*paripūrā samuddam sāgaram paripūrenti · sāgaraṃ saritaṃ patiṃ*
			Th 168	*· tvañ ca me maggam akkhāhi añjasam amatogadham / aham monena monissam gaṅgāsoto va sāgaram*

Nature as symbolic code in Old Tamil love poetry

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0. This paper is designed to offer, for purposes of comparison, basic information about the system of Old Tamil poetic 'use of nature' expression and on the basis of a few examples, about the manner of 'reading' poetic creation. Then I will offer one possible explanation of the functioning of this code and its interpretation.[1]

Old Tamil literary tradition divides poetic creation into two main spheres, the public sphere (*puṟam*) and the private sphere (*akam*). The first sphere includes poetry relating to the king. It describes his acts, military exploits, generosity etc. Here, too, nature symbolism plays an important role, but for the time being we shall leave this aside, and devote our attention to the more interesting sphere, viz. *akam*. Our further exposition will deal only with the latter sphere.

1. The exclusive topic of *akam* is love in its various forms and in various social environments, which are identified in terms of specific geographical environments by Old Tamil poetic interpretation (start-

[1] It should be underlined, however, that this code has been described many times in various specialized and general books and publications on Sangam literature, suffice to mention the works of K. V. Zvelebil 1973, 1974, 1975, and especially Zvelebil 1986, Takahashi 1995, or earlier works by Thani Nayakam 1966 and Varadarajan 1969. Our aim here is to present a brief survey for purposes of comparison and to offer one semiotic interpretation of the functioning of the Sangam 'code'. The reader should refer to the quoted works for more detailed information.

ing from the grammar *Tolkāppiyam*). We cannot provide an exhaustive description of this code. With regard to the 'interdisciplinary' character of this meeting, however, we cannot do without several basic concepts and major contours of the system of expression. We shall try to show, using several characteristic features, that such a systematic code really exists, and also how it operates in concrete poetic creations.

The classification of this system is based on the ***fivefold*** division of the 'living environment' in Tamilnadu, while using plants and flowers typically occurring in the individual environments to designate those regions. At the same time these plants need not occur in the texts too often.[2] Besides these plants the respective regions are characterised by a number of other plants and also animals and many natural phenomena typical of those regions, which all carry various degrees of concrete or general symbolical meaning and the implication of a 'story' behind each individual lyrically tuned poem.

In other words we are confronted with a symbolic use of flowers and plants in general (but also animals) in a special sign system of 'literary regions' (*tiṇai*) or 'interior landscapes' (A. K. Ramanujan) or 'physiographic regions' (K. V. Zvelebil). There are five symbolic landscapes reflecting various geographical spaces in correlation with specific social and psychological characteristics. The landscapes bear the names of typical plants, which are used as elements of the 'metalanguage' of the indigenous literary theory and symbolise all the basic attributes of those landscapes – the environment, the love situation, acting figures, etc. Specifically, they are the following 'landscapes':

kuṟiñci – (coniferous tree or mountain pine, *Strobilanthes kunthianus*) – hilly region; premarital love

[2] For the descriptions of the basic plants designating the individual regions, cf. Vacek 2002a, p. 184, note 71. The numbers of occurrences, ibid. pp. 170, 184: *kuṟiñci* (19x), *pālai* (19x), *marutam* (22x), *mullai* (107x), *neytal* (109).

mullai – (jasmine, *Jasminum auriculatum*) – forest and pasture region; family life, patient waiting

marutam – (tree with red blossoms growing near water, probably *Terminalia arjuna*) – cultivated agricultural region (growing rice); unfaithfulness, sulking of the wife

neytal – (white or blue water lily, *Nymphaea lotus alba, Nymphaea stellata*) – sea-side region; separation, anxious waiting

pālai – (probably an evergreen tree, which can resist dry conditions, *Wrighia tinctoria*) – waste tract, dry steppe or desert region; elopement of girl with boy, difficulties, separation from lover or from parents[3]

Another dimension, which is reflected in the creative space, is ***poruḷ*** (subject, subject matter, meaning, contents). Old Tamil literary theory distinguishes three types of subject matter:

A. *mutal*, or primary subject matter or 'First things' (Zvelebil 1973, p. 69), represents the setting of the poem in space in general, which also includes time, we might say that it involves the embedding of the

[3] In most cases the exact identification of these plants is also rather varied and may require a botanist to establish their exact identity:
kuṟiñci – Strobilanthes kunthianus (TL); Phelophyllum kunthianum, Nees. (Cīnivācaṉ)
pālai – Deyer's oleander (Samy 1972), Easter tree (Rāj 1982), Wrighia tinctoria, R. Br. (Cīnivācaṉ); Mimusops Hexandrus (Singaravelu 1966)
marutam – Terminalia arjuna W. A. (Cīnivācaṉ); or "Queen's flower; pride of India", Lagerstroemia flos-reginae, Retr.
mullai – Jasminum auriculatum, Vahl.
For references and some more details cf. the author's Introduction to *A Tamil Reader* (J. Vacek and S. V. Subramanian, Madras 1989. Vol. 1, pp. XVIIff.) and Glossary of literary terms (ibid. Vol. 2, pp. 87ff.).

poem in *space-time*. The physical space is delimited by the individual above-mentioned 'landscapes', to which also belong various times – times of the day and times of the year.

B. *karu*, or natural subject matter or 'Native things' (Zvelebil 1973, p. 69), includes gods, people and nature, both animate and inanimate. We might almost feel like saying that this is something like an '*inventory*' of the respective poems, in whose midst the story takes place. As for people, this also includes their culture in the broad sense of the word – entertainments, occupations, food and the like. Nature includes both plants and animals. This is in fact an important component, which greatly conditions the interpretation of the individual poems, we might say that it is the most conspicuous code, which creates the picture of nature, of the environment in which the story takes place.

But at the same time, both *mutal* and *karu* need not be explicitly expressed in the poem. Both represent an auxiliary code, which helps to de-code the last element of the subject matter, viz. *uri*.

C. *uri*, or the proper subject matter or 'Appropriate human feelings' (Zvelebil 1973, p. 69), which is the essential feature of a poem. It represents *erotic experience*, it implies the story against the background of which the poem was written, in other words it implies the manner of contact between partners (of various types) and it is the expression of its psychological representation / experience. The manner of contact between partners, however, is not expressed explicitly, it is only implied and is closely connected with the emotion accompanying it and also indicating it.

As for the ***hierarchy*** of the three types of subject matter – the most important is the last one, viz. *uri* / proper subject matter – it is formally always expressed in various ways (by a sigh, implied in a

question, a complaint, and the like), while A and B, space-time and 'inventory' are expressed explicitly (if they are expressed) and help the proper understanding of the 'proper subject matter'.

There is of course the question whether we could think of the descriptions of nature in their literal meaning as descriptions of nature without any more implications. If we were not 'at home' in the Sangam code, most of the poems would probably not appear to us to be in any way 'allegorical'. Translations without a further explanation could certainly create that impression. This, however, involves the question of trans-cultural translation, when the 'uninitiated' lacks the ability to discover the proper meaning of the text, not to mention the ability to appreciate and experience its implications.

It is also interesting to note the link between nature symbolism and 'anthropomorphic factors',[4] e. g. *eye-flower, face-lotus*, and the like. This feature is probably also shared by the classical Kāvya literature in Sanskrit and Prakrit and would deserve more systematic comparison in future.

There is also the question of what is primary, whether it is nature, which determines the manner of expression, or whether nature is only used for a purpose. If we leave out the European tradition for a while, which is summed up e. g. by T. Hlobil in his work from 2001, the Tamil theorists have also considered this question. E. g. M. Varadarajan (1969, pp. 13–14) speaks about the impact of nature on man as follows: *'Those were days when man was more dependent upon Nature and therefore his habits and tastes were moulded by his environment in the world of Nature, and he himself was more or less a product of Nature's handiwork. The poets of the age have made this fact evident in their compositions, especially the passages on love.'*

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[4] On the anthropomorphic elements in the idiom of the Old Tamil poets, cf. Vacek 2000, p. 259; 2001, p. 154; Wilden 2002, p. 165n.

But in a different place he agrees with the view that ***nature provides the means of expression, the background,*** etc. (ibid., p. 18): *'External nature is only illustration, or background for the human emotions that they depict. Descriptions of Nature are neither evocative nor revelative but are only frames for bright pictures of love or war or any other subject.'*

The main implication, however, lies in the fact that nature (not necessarily formally designated) is not the primary subject matter of the poems, which are human feelings, experience and the like. The whole creates an impression of something like a complex of mutually interconnected features. Varadarajan (1969, p. 22) expresses it in the following words: *'All these prove the fact that Sangam literature deals directly and primarily with the passions and feelings of man, and Nature has an equally prominent, though not the primary, place in it and serves to illustrate or stand as the stage for the role man has to play in pleasure or pain.'*

Should we try to briefly sum up the general character of the ***relation between karu and uri,*** it is in fact a relation between the ***sign*** and the ***signifié***, if we put it schematically in semiotic terms.

Here we must content ourselves with this general statement and sketch of the main outlines. We cannot go into details and it should also be added that the individual elements of nature (flowers, animals etc.) will have to be investigated in their specific contextual distribution in the individual poems and their classification will have to be prepared in order to enable us to assess more exactly their functions, or possibly also the loss of their distinctive functions in certain contexts (neutralisation, cf. below).[5]

2. Now let us try to show a few examples of how such poetic use of nature symbols is implemented in individual poems.[6]

[5] For more specific information cf. the Table of *Attributes of the Five Landscapes* (Zvelebil 1973, p. 100) or the Table *Classification of Karupporul ('Objects')* (Singaravelu 1966, table attached after p. 22).

[6] I use the Tamil Lexicon transcription. There is a transcription method, which does not require diacritics and which is used for some electronic transcriptions of Tamil texts, e. g. in the database at the web page of the University in Köln am Rhein at the address: http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/indologie. In Czech we use a slightly different type of transcription for the general public, it was most recently used e. g. in our publication, cf. Zbavitel, Vacek (1996).

2.1.
vaṇṭu tātu ūta tērai tevitta
taṇ kamaḻ puṟaviṉ mullai malara
iṉpuṟuttaṉṟu poḻutu ē
niṉ kuṟi vāyttaṉam tīrka iṉi paṭar ē (*Aiṅk.* 494, 1–4)

Jotimuttu (1984, p. 151):
The season is pleasant (3)
as the *mullai* blossoms in the cool fragrant forest, (2)
as the bees suck the honey and as the toads cry out. (1)
We have succeeded to return in your time.
Now, you be relieved of your distress. (4)

Varadarajan (1969, p. 5):
The bees buzz and the frogs croak;
the pastoral region is cool and fragrant with bloom of *mullai*;
the pleasant season accosts;
And I have returned as promised. Be not downcast and dejected.

tiṇai: *mullai*
mutal: beginning of the cold season, a reminder that the hero should have returned
karu: *vaṇṭu* (bee), *tērai* (frog), *mullai* (jasmine)
they serve as the background for the love situation described in the poem

uri: the girl is impatiently expecting the arrival of her lover, who promised to come back. He is returning and joyfully announces that the time has come. The time is defined exactly by the nature pictures. It is also expressed grammatically – it is the time *when* jasmine blossoms, frogs croak and bees buzz or suck the honey (from flowers).

2.2. But nature need not be expressed otherwise than in the form of inanimate nature (in this case it is the description of the place, i. e. *mutal*) and only from the general tone of the poem is the type of poem inferred together with the subject about which the poem speaks (cf. Vacek, Subramaniam, 1989, Vol. 1., p. 3 ff.).

yāy um ñāy um yār ākiyar ō
entai um nuntai um em muṟai kēḷir
yāṉ um nī um e vaḷi aṟitum
ce pula peyal nīr pōla
aṉpu uṭai neñcam tām kalantaṉa ē (*Kuṟu.* 40, 1–5)

(Vacek, Subramanian 1989, Vol. 1, p. 3):
1 Who were my mother and your mother?
2 Through which relationship were my father and your father relatives?
3 In which way do you and me know (each other)?
4 Like rain water (on) red (rich) land,
5 hearts (full) of love themselves merged.

tiṇai: *kuṟiñci*
mutal: *cempulam* (red/rich land)
karu: zero
uri: premarital love of the lovers

2.3. There are also cases where there is a confusion of landscapes and some of the characteristic nature features occur in a different context than we would expect (*tiṇai-mayakkam*) (Vacek Subramanian 1989, Vol. 1, pp. 20 ff.):

nōm eṉ neñcu ē nōm eṉ neñcu ē
puṉpulattu amaṉṟa ciṟu ilai neruñci
kaṭku iṉ putu malar muḷ payantāaṅku
iṉiya ceyta nam kātalar
iṉṉā ceytal nōm eṉ neñcu ē (*Kuṟu.* 202, 1–5)

(Vacek, Subramanian 1989, Vol. 1, pp. 20–22):
1 Oh, my heart pains, my heart pains!
3 Like the fresh flower, sweet for the eye,
2 of the small-leaved *neruñci* thickly growing on dry land
3 produces thorns,
4 (so) our lover, who made pleasant things,
5 made (also) unpleasant (painful) things. Oh, my heart pains.

tiṇai: *marutam*
mutal: *puṉpulam* dry land (belongs to *mullai*)
karu: *neruñci* (cow's thorn, *Tribulus terrestris*) (belongs to *mullai*)
uri: sulking (*ūṭal*, this is appropriate for *marutam*)

So it seems that the tradition (because it was tradition which established the classification of this poem) attributes the greatest significance to *uri* and the established nature signs appear to lose their function of attributing the respective poem to a specific landscape. This is obviously one of the forms of ***neutralisation*** of the significance of the sign(s), as will also be mentioned below.

3. The process of designation seems to take place on two levels. The individual plants (or animals, etc.) function as independent signs, but they are combined or individually they imply a whole picture of the natural scenery, which also has a sign value. This represents a figurative or metaphorical manner of expression, where even one sign from the whole set characterising the respective landscape is sufficient to allot to an otherwise abstract lyrical poem a firm position in the system and together with that also a specific symbolic meaning. At the same time this is a hierarchically organised sign system, where the individual signs can also lose their sign value (neutralisation, as we saw with example 2.3.). It is also possible to establish certain typical syntagmatic characteristics in the system, because some symbols often appear together (e. g. an elephant and a tree, and the like). This aspect, however, is not sufficiently described and represents a topic for further investigation of the Sangam texts.[7]

In this connection there may be a proposal for the interpretation of the above described process of signification as a process of two steps or levels: not only are the individual elements of nature to be considered as signs (flowers, animals etc.; *primary signs*), but they are also combined and in combination, or sometimes also individually, they imply the whole picture, which in turn becomes a sign

[7] A note in the margin: to a certain extent, some images and 'signs' of nature symbolism are used in a similar manner also in *classical Sanskrit and Prakrit Kāvya poetry*, though the indigenous literary theory does not mention this feature as a systematic interpretation basis, as it is done in Old Tamil poetry. This similarity was noticed by several scholars, who have found an 'agreement of expression' with the Old Tamil code in a number of Sanskrit and Prakrit Kāvya poems. E. g. S. Lienhard (1976) and very similarly Hart (1975). Cf. also Vacek (1998) on the parallels between Kālidāsa's classical poem *Meghadūtam* and the Old Tamil landscape of the *neytal* type.

(a *secondary sign*) not only for a static situation, but for a whole story to be decoded behind the nature picture.

The first level or primary signifié is the respective (simple or complex) ***picture***, to which the simple sign (one word) refers, or a (complex) picture provoked by a complex sign (a phrase or a set of phrases), or possibly it may also be a ***process*** (could we designate what we have just called a complex picture as a 'paradigmatic or dynamic picture'?). In the communicative use of language the process of signification most often ends up at this level, particularly in scientific prose, where another level of designation may not be desirable, unambiguousness being the main communicative target of such a type of expression. Thus we could say that the picture, which represents the respective concrete reality, is the ***primary* signifié *or signifié of the first level***, and the process of designation can stop at this level.

In literary usage, particularly in poetic language (but not exclusively), however, the process of signification does not finish with this picture, there is usually another level of reference, the hidden or symbolical meaning. Then the primary *signifié* (simple or complex picture or process) acquires the function of a ***secondary sign***, which refers to a hidden or symbolic referent (***secondary* signifié**, or **signifié *of the secondary level***).[8]

(primary)			|| SECONDARY		
SIGN	→	primary *signifié*	|| SIGN	→	secondary *signifié*
(*signifiant*)	(nature picture)		|| (*signifiant*)	(symbolical meaning)	

[8] I have discussed this suggestion in greater detail in my earlier paper (cf. Vacek 2002a, especially pp. 179f.). This classification and the following reflections are inspired by various readings in Mukařovský's structural analysis of poetic language, though it does not exactly reproduce any of his own terms. Cf. J. Mukařovský, Studie z poetiky (Studies in Poetics), Prague 1982.

In my earlier paper I used the following wording (Vacek 2002a, p. 180):

"The ***secondary signifié*** is something that can be communicated intentionally or (perhaps in some cases) unwittingly. It is quite clearly culturally conditioned, particularly in such cases, as the one we are dealing with, viz. a specific literary world, which is, or is believed to be, a world in itself, governed by a system of "literary conventions", in other words, which has a standardised or accepted set of "secondary meanings". And the conventional character or the poetic expression lies not so much in the primary signifié (described nature picture), but rather in the secondary signifié (the implication, the metaphorical meaning of the picture). However, and that should be underlined, the secondary level of signification need not always be present, not all of the literary creation, not every word of it necessarily carries another (hidden) meaning."

This also follows from the above-mentioned neutralisation of the symbolical meaning of some key literary signs, where it is obvious that in such cases the symbolical meaning can be suspended, that it is not present. It is hardly imaginable that a text should be loaded with a symbolical meaning throughout.

There is also one more thing we have to consider, viz. the existence of various types of signs, some of which "are more 'engaged' or engaged in a specific manner (such as the five respective flowers/plants in Sangam), while other signs may be just ***subsidiary***, accompanying the ***principal*** ones. There is obviously a ***hierarchy* of signs** (functionally speaking), and their meanings are implemented in various contexts in various degrees, conditioned by the other components of the respective contexts (we have mentioned above the anthropomorphic aspects of nature signs and the possibility of their being catalysed by the presence of the 'human element' on the level of 'expression'). The hierarchy of signs obviously functions in a dynamic and paradigmatic manner conditioned by the individual contexts. We

could even theorise that the principal signs will be more often engaged while the subsidiary ones will be more often free. But of course it would remain to show, which are the principal and the subsidiary signs. Maybe even this is a ***reality in flux***, changing from context to context." (Vacek 2002a, p. 181).

We have further seen that "the accepted secondary meaning of a sign may be ***neutralised*** in some contexts, even if the sign is one of the principal signs. In other contexts the meaning may, on the other hand, be 'foregrounded' and underlined by other contextual elements." (ibid.). For more on the neutralisation processes cf. Vacek 2002a, p. 181–2.

Finally, let me add that "the above-described process of signification cannot be considered simply in terms of a relation between the 'literary object', the 'reality' and the ***author*** of such a piece of literary work. We must also take into consideration the fact that there is a ***recipient***, who participates in this complex process of ***communication***. The communicative process involves a system of 'encoding' and 'decoding', and it is in this process that the cultural conditioning takes place. Besides that, there are ***two types of recipients***. The principal recipient is the mother-tongue speaker of the time who is addressed by the respective works." (ibid., p. 182) (e. g. the Tamilian contemporary with the Sangam literary idiom). "He is the ***intra cultural recipient*** in the true sense of the word. Other recipients may find it difficult to understand the texts without an extra instruction" (ibid., p. 182). (This also includes the present-day Tamilians, who have the same difficulties in understanding many of the pre-sixth-century texts as an Englishman would have with Beowulf or a similar text).

Concerning the ***extra cultural recipients***, in my paper (2002a, p. 182) I referred to the proposal of J. Lotman, which I summarised as follows: "When describing a culture B by way of the language of a culture A, it necessarily involves misunderstandings and

misstatements, because the 'filter' of language A will not 'fit' the cultural context of language B and will necessarily 'contaminate' and misinterpret some of the concepts when 'filtering' them." This is also true in the present case. "Only ... we seem to have one more filter, viz. that of the literary theory we use. In that sense we could speak of a 'double filter'. We are not confronted with the language-plus-cultural filter alone, but also with the filter of the theoretical frame of mind. I hope that by developing various theoretical 'frameworks' in the process of breaking the very special cultural code of these texts, we do not create greater obstacles for properly understanding their implications than we would face without them."

CONCLUSION

Finally I should like to conclude by saying that the presented description of the Old Tamil code represents basic information on the problems and on the system, which should be further elaborated from the cited publications. I have tried to show in which way a certain literary idiom can be coded and stylised, and I have offered one outline of the possible functioning of the process of designation with the help of nature signs. I have left out of consideration some equally interesting problems, such as the question of orality, the quantitative investigation of the texts from the point of view of the use of certain clichés (formulas), which are very typical of this type of literature. Let me add that these questions are a subject of an intensive study carried out by several scholars mainly in Europe, but also in India. Investigating Old Tamil literature from the point of view of some questions asked in a new manner (the function of nature, quantitative investigation, existence of formulas) is only a beginning and it will possibly require the work of another generation of scholars to be able to formulate more general conclusions about the characteristics of Old Tamil literature from these points of view. It is at the same time necessary to underline that no investigation can do without an intimate knowledge of the indigenous tradition and the presentation and interpretation of the system of the Old Tamil tradition of poetic theory.

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