

# ANIMATING NATURE: PERSONIFICATION IN MALAYSIAN AND AMERICAN NATURE-THEMED POETRY

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**Abstract.** Figurative language is used in poetry to express emotions and thoughts beyond literal meaning. Therefore, poets employ figurative devices to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their literary works and reader engagement more effectively. Nature, for example, is a common theme among poets across traditions to convey complex human emotions. By personifying or animating nature with human traits and actions, poets make emotional and symbolic meanings more relatable to their readers. However, interpretations can vary considerably across cultural contexts because different communities attribute unique values and symbolic meanings to nature. This study examined the use of personification in Malaysian and American nature-themed poems. Through qualitative content analysis, personified expressions were identified and analysed in relation to the poets' cultural values. The findings show that personification is a culturally influenced way of understanding nature, morality and identity. In the Malaysian poem, personification is used to promote a collective moral critique and ecological responsibility. Conversely, the American poem employs personification to highlight individual resilience and independence. Pedagogically, these findings emphasise the importance of combining stylistic analysis with culturally informed interpretations in poetry education.

**Keywords:** *cultural values, figurative language, nature-themed poetry, personification, American poetry*

## Introduction

Poets rely on figurative language to convey abstract and affective dimensions of ideas (Gibbs, 2023; Abrams and Harpham, 2014). Aubakir et al. (2024) explain that through the use of figurative devices, poets can enrich the interpretive depth of poems by expressing their thoughts and emotions vividly and artistically. Beyond enhancing aesthetic appeal, these devices crucially shape reader interpretation and emotional engagement with the poem. For example, nature has historically been a central theme for poets exploring complex themes of emotion, spirituality, morality, and humanity. However, the symbolic value of nature varies across cultures as different communities ascribe distinct symbolic meanings to it (Peng et al., 2024). By examining the use of figurative language, particularly personification, in Malaysian and American nature-themed poetry, this research highlights how poets encode shared human experiences and concerns through culturally mediated worldviews.

## Literature review

This section reviews the available literature on Malaysian and American cultural values, nature in poetry, figurative language, specifically personification, and its use in both Malaysian and American literary contexts.

## Malaysian and American values

Understanding Malaysian and American values is crucial in understanding how cultural backgrounds shape literary expressions and attitudes toward nature. Malaysian values are anchored in its multicultural society, which emphasises harmony, politeness, and peaceful coexistence, aligned with traditions of tolerance and mutual respect (Lino and Hashim, 2020; Amir, 2009). These principles are reinforced by the Rukun Negara (National Principles), which provides a moral and civic compass centred on divine belief, loyalty, the supremacy of the constitution, the rule of law, and moral integrity (Salleh Abas, 2006). Such values are further reflected in communication norms that prioritise social cohesion and mutual support (Amir, 2009). In contrast, American values are generally characterised by individualism and personal freedom, highlighting self-reliance (Kim, 2004) and equal opportunity (Bazzi et al., 2020). They explain that these orientations are influenced by the country's history of immigration, frontier spirit, and democratic principles. However, while such contrasts are often highlighted, it is also important to acknowledge that cultural values are not monolithic (Spivak, 1987). To illustrate, there may be instances when Malaysians emphasise individuality or Americans embrace communal themes, revealing overlaps that complicate a straightforward East-West dichotomy. Thus, acknowledging these subtleties strengthens the analysis of how cultural contexts influence the use of personification in nature-themed poetry.

### ***Nature in poetry***

The available literature indicates that nature has cross-culturally been a longstanding, pivotal theme in poetry. This is supported by Ibrahim et al. (2024), who compare selected poems by William Wordsworth with the medieval poet Ibn-Khafaja. They conclude that, despite the centuries separating them, both traditions regard nature as a spiritual solace and a setting for peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, Jadhav's (2018) comparative analysis of English and Marathi poetry shows that a reverence for nature inspires poets to use literary devices across various traditions. Likewise, from an ecocritical standpoint, Okolo and Eyisi Jnr. (2018), who analysed selected poems by the English poet John Keats and Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara, argue that these poems advocate environmental mindfulness by underscoring the consequences of human arrogance on environmental decline. They further claim that harmony can help to mitigate this issue.

### ***Figurative language***

Figurative language serves as a vital tool for poets to articulate intricate concepts and evoke deep emotional responses, thereby intensifying the connection between the text and the reader (Saure and Jancinal, 2024). While Kirsznier and Mandell (2007) prioritise the identification of foundational devices, including hyperbole, metaphor, and personification, other scholars offer more functional and cognitive frameworks that reflect how we process meaning. For instance, Perrine and Arp (1983) organise the figurative devices into cognitive clusters such as comparison, association, and contrast. Keraf (2019) highlights the subjective yet context-dependent aspect of figurative language through structural categories such as comparison, contrast, repetition, and relationships. Collectively, these classification frameworks underscore the interpretive flexibility of figurative language, which explains that meaning-making remains a dynamic and multifaceted experience (Gibbs and Colston, 2012).

## ***Personification***

Traditionally referred to as prosopopeia (Melion and Ramakers, 2016), personification operates as a rhetorical device that gives inanimate objects or abstract concepts human traits, emotions, or intentions (Abrams and Harpham, 2014). While classical scholars such as Quintilian (1920) simply conceptualised it as a method of animating speech, modern cognitive theorists propose a deeper ontological role for it. For example, instead of merely an artistic flair, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) explain figurative language as a fundamental cognitive mapping that helps us understand non-human entities from the standpoint of human motivations and social agency. Hence, by making the unfamiliar more relatable, it creates an emotionally expressive bridge that encourages deeper reader engagement (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2002). According to Keraf (2019), personification in the context of nature helps to narrow the existential divide between human experience and the natural environment. Therefore, poets can enhance interpretive richness and the emotional and cognitive vividness of nature. Accordingly, expressions such as ‘the flowers dance in the field’ and ‘the raindrops touch the face gently’ invite readers to form deeper emotional and cognitive bonds, changing how we perceive and engage with nature. By transforming a passive subject into an active agent, personification fosters an empathetic relationship between humans and the natural surroundings (Indriyanto, 2024).

## ***Personification in the Western literary context***

Western poetic traditions frequently employ natural imagery to articulate individualistic perspectives, framing encounters between humanity and nature as intimate psychological challenges. For instance, not specifically examine the cultural or ideological underpinnings of Irish and American poetry, his study nonetheless suggests an underlying preoccupation with the self, an individualistic tendency. Poets frequently express feelings of alienation from nature during hardships or personal crises. Such attitudes, as observes, draw upon deep historical waves within Western civilisation, such as the classical antiquity of the Greek and Roman traditions and the Enlightenment, which privileged human superiority and mastery over nature. These philosophical foundations reinforce anthropocentric values alongside individual autonomy and hierarchical authority. Consequently, these enduring principles continue to shape Western society (Smith, 2023; Moore, 2017; Morton, 2016), influencing how people see themselves and their relationships with their environment.

## ***Personification in Non-Western literary context***

Past studies of non-Western poetic traditions position personification as central to contemporary environmental discourse and ethical accountability. Rather than treating nature as external to human experience, poets across these traditions frequently invest the natural world with conscious agency. For example, Mohseni and Asghari (2020) observe this tendency in the work of Iranian poet Fereydoon Moshiri and Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, both of whom animate landscapes to convey emotions and human-environment relationships. Similarly, African literary contexts yield comparable insights; Olaleru and Adaramola (2024) document how Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare constructs nature as a sentient, suffering entity directly wounded by human disregard. Likewise, FaqeAbdulla (2024) traces how Kurdish poet Zayneb Xan harnesses

personification to interrogate political struggle, resistance movements, and questions of collective identity. Overall, these studies indicate that the functions of personification within non-Western poetry serve purposes beyond aesthetic. Therefore, building on current analyses of personification in environmentally themed poetry, this study examines how Malaysian and American poets articulate contrasting cultural priorities. The investigation focuses specifically on how these poems render societal attitudes toward nature, individualism and collectivism, social responsibility, spirituality, and national identity. Rather than merely listing examples of personification, the analysis situates these expressions within the broader cultural contexts of Malaysia and the United States of America, allowing for a comparative understanding of the two cultures.

## Materials and Methods

This study examined the use of personification in nature-themed poetry by a Malaysian and an American poet. The qualitative content analysis method was adopted to systematically identify, categorise, and interpret instances of personification in the selected poems to reveal culturally embedded meanings. Through purposive sampling, the poems were selected by first assessing the poets' representativeness of their respective cultural backgrounds. Other selection criteria include focusing on nature-themed poems with clear instances of personification. The small sample size allows for in-depth comparative analysis of specific cultural traits in the poems. 'The Dead Crow' by the Malaysian poet A. Samad Said symbolically employs the figure of a lifeless crow to underscore the consequences of human negligence and accordingly appeal for environmental accountability. On the other hand, 'The Purple Clover' by the American poet Emily Dickinson celebrates perseverance and individuality by depicting the flower as a symbol of resilience and courage. The coding scheme, as shown in *Table 1*, was developed by synthesising and integrating key sources (Gibbs, 2023; Kerat, 2019; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003; Talmy, 2000; Lakoff and Turner, 1989) to capture the various ways human traits are attributed to nature in poetry.

**Table 1.** Coding scheme: Types of personification.

| Category                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Description and Example                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Emotional Personification [P1]<br>Attribution of human emotions or feelings (e.g. joy, fear, sorrow, anger, etc.) to nature                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                           |
| Example 1: The grieving sky wept all night                                                                                                                                                                                                               | A human mood is given to the sky to express sadness.                                                      |
| Example 2: The angry sea roared                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | The sea is given strong human emotions of annoyance and resentment                                        |
| Physical (Bodily) Personification [P2]<br>Attribution of human body parts or physical actions (e.g. eyes, hands, breathing, walking, etc.) to non-human entities                                                                                         |                                                                                                           |
| Example 3: The flowers shivered in the morning frost                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The flowers are given human physiological responses to cold temperatures                                  |
| Example 4: The sickly face of the winter sun                                                                                                                                                                                                             | The sun's surface is described as a sickly face due to the gloomy winter weather                          |
| Communicative Personification [P3]<br>Attribution of human speech, voice, or sound-making ability to nature                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                           |
| Example 5: The river whispered ancient stories                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The river is attributed a human capacity for sound-making, specifically the ability to whisper            |
| Example 6: The forest murmured softly                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | The forest is given the human ability to speak in a low, soft tone                                        |
| Agentive (Intentional) Personification [P4]<br>Attribution of human agency, intention, or purposeful action to nature                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                           |
| Example 7: The sun followed us home                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | The human capacity for movement and intent is given to the sun                                            |
| Example 8: The sea refused to share its secret                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The sea is given a human-conscious decision to disagree                                                   |
| Symbolic (Allegorical) Personification [P5]<br>Functioning at a symbolic, cultural, or ideological level, representing abstract ideas such as identity, morality, resistance, or harmony, and often expresses the relationship between humans and nature |                                                                                                           |
| Example 9: The land recalls its pain                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The land is given a human biological response to trauma. It is also an agent that can provide a testimony |

Example 10: The earth passed its judgment.

The earth is given the legal and social agency to decide the fate of those living upon it

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*Note: \*Examples of personifications are AI-generated.*

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The first category, emotional personification, invites readers to develop empathy as they encounter feelings projected onto nature. Secondly, physical or bodily personification encourages the attribution of visibility and tangibility, thereby engaging the readers through their senses. Communicative personification, however, creates a sense of dialogue and mutual understanding, as nature seems to share messages. Agentive (Intentional) personification shapes perceptions of agency and responsibility by ascribing will and purpose to natural elements. Hence, they become active players instead of passive backdrops. Finally, symbolic personification enables readers to connect abstract concepts and cultural values to concrete images, which deepens their engagement. Examples are included for each type to guide coders through the analytical process. Note that personified instances may fit multiple categories of personification depending on the co-text and context of the expressions. For example, ‘the angry sea roared’ in Example 2 can be categorised as emotional (P1) and communicative (P3) as the word ‘angry’ uses the human emotion of hostility, while ‘roared’ explains the sound-making capability given to the sea.

Prior to coding the data, each poem was examined through multiple readings to enhance our understanding of the literal and figurative dimensions. Instances of personification were first identified and subsequently coded into the five operational categories stipulated in the coding scheme (see Table 1). This is crucial in forming a structured approach to analysing personification in nature-themed poetry. For clarity and replicability, one full line from each poem was assigned to its corresponding personification code to capture the categories in context. Note that the interpretation of these identified lines may be guided by prior or later lines and the overarching theme. Following the coding phase, the coded expressions were further analysed for cultural values and attitudes toward nature as detailed in the Literature Review section. This analytical approach enables the research to move beyond merely cataloguing and describing personification by offering a deeper cultural interpretation that reveals how figurative language offers insights into the unique worldviews expressed in nature-themed poetry.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the coding work and the discussion on the comparative analysis are presented in this section.

### Coding results

The identified instances of personification in the poems are presented in Table 2. Note that some of the identified instances may belong to more than one type of personification. The Malaysian poet in ‘The Dead Crow’ mainly uses agentive/intentional and symbolic personification. The results of the coding work on the Malaysian poem ‘The Dead Crow’ by A. Samad Said are presented in Table 2. In Excerpt 1, the rivers are depicted as capable of independent action when freed from human control. The poet attributes attention and volition to the environment when he expresses, “I want the trees to grow, the rivers run free”. Yet, this regenerative capacity

is contingent upon human restraint. This underscores the tension between environmental exploitation and responsible stewardship. The poet highlighted the contrast between nature's potential vitality and its current state of destruction to reinforce his call for environmental accountability. In Excerpt 2, "I want the damned fools to leave the forest alone", the poet depicts the forest as having a right to solitude, both freedom and autonomy. In other words, the forest is portrayed as an entity with a boundary that can be disturbed or manipulated by selfish humans. Briefly, the attribution of human agency and intention to the rivers and forest exemplifies agentive/intentional personification.

**Table 2.** *Types of personification in 'The Dead Crow'.*

| Code | Type of Personification                | Evidence / Excerpt                                         |
|------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1   | Emotional Personification              | -                                                          |
| P2   | Physical (Bodily) Personification      | -                                                          |
| P3   | Communicative Personification          | -                                                          |
| P4   | Agentive (Intentional) Personification | 1. "the rivers run free"<br>2. "to leave the forest alone" |
| P5   | Symbolic (Allegorical) Personification | 3. "This land is so rich"<br>4. "The dead crow in a drain" |

Apart from the agentive/intentional personification, the symbolic personification is evident in Excerpt 3 when the poet expresses "This land is so rich". In this instance, the land is symbolically assigned its worth, not in monetary terms but in national value and identity. In other words, the word 'rich' functions at an ideological level as it expresses the relationship between human wealth and nature. Similarly, 'the dead crow' in Excerpt 4, beyond its aesthetic appeal, symbolises environmental destruction and moral failure. The poet advocates for accountability, respect, and care for both humanity and the environment for future generations. Analysis of the coding results for 'The Dead Crow' clearly shows that A. Samad Said employs a confrontational style to deliver a strong moral message on environmental destruction. His deliberate stylistic choice accounts for the absence of emotional, physical/bodily, and communicative personification. Instead, he personifies nature by endowing it with its own rights and desires to solitude and liberty from human interference. In other words, nature is personified through its actions and needs, not its appearance, to underscore the long-standing political and ethical tension that exists between humans and nature. Humans' irresponsible acts of polluting are not simply portrayed as physical changes to the landscape, but are positioned as a violation of nature's freedom and privacy. Nature's inherent desire and intention are also symbolically personified to portray Malaysia's values and identity. Collectively, personification is employed by A. Samad Said as a tool for political or environmental activism by highlighting the conflict between humans and nature. Most importantly, they are all presented from the poet's perspective. Emily Dickinson, on the other hand, employs a wider range of personification in her poem 'The Purple Cover', as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Types of personification in 'The Purple Clover'.*

| Code | Type of Personification           | Evidence / Excerpt                                                         |
|------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1   | Emotional Personification         | 1. "For pang of jealousy";<br>2. "Nor even of defeat aware"                |
| P2   | Physical (Bodily) Personification | 3. "Her face is rounder than the moon";<br>4. "Ruddier than the gown... or |

|    |                                        |                                          |
|----|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
|    |                                        | rhododendron worn”                       |
|    |                                        | 5. “Her sturdy little countenance”       |
|    |                                        | 6. “Surrendering the last”               |
| P3 | Communicative Personification          | 7. “Her progress by the bee proclaimed”  |
|    |                                        | 8. “In sovereign, swerveless tune”       |
| P4 | Agentive (Intentional) Personification | 9. “She doth not wait for June”;         |
|    |                                        | 10. “Contending with the grass”;         |
|    |                                        | 11. “Doth not retract a single spice”    |
|    |                                        | 12. “There is a flower that bees prefer” |
|    |                                        | 13. “And butterflies desire”             |
|    |                                        | 14. The humming-birds aspire”            |
|    |                                        | 15. “When cancelled by the frost”        |
| P5 | Symbolic (Allegorical) Personification | 16. “The bravest of the host”;           |
|    |                                        | 17. “Sweet litigants for life”;          |
|    |                                        | 18. “The purple democrat”                |
|    |                                        | 19. “Near kinsman to herself”            |
|    |                                        | 20. “Her providence the sun”             |

In Excerpt 1, Emily Dickinson presents the clover as emotionally resilient despite knowing it is losing its spotlight to flowers that bloom later. Instead of resenting, it continues to provide its nectar to the bees. Its experience of ‘jealousy’ doesn’t hold back its contribution. In Excerpt 2, the clover is given another human capability: to exist without fear of failure. It does not view its ending as a failure but as a source of dignity. This is the poet’s critique of humanity’s obsession towards aging and winning. The physical/bodily personifications are observable in Excerpts 3-6. In Excerpt 3, for example, the clover is given a face, which is crucial to human identity and expression. It is personified as a woman whose face rivals the moon. The petals of the flower are also described as a ‘gown’ in Excerpt 4, which implies the human act of wearing or dressing. Additionally, the natural colour of the clover fulfils its role of serving the bees. In Excerpt 5, the poet gives the clover a ‘countenance’, a sense of sentient, humble but ‘sturdy’ composure against the wind. The word ‘surrendering’ in Excerpt 6 transforms the biological wilting state into a human’s dignified physical act of holding on until the end. Excerpts 7 and 8 are identified instances of communicative personification. Emily Dickinson, in Excerpt 7, depicts the bees as performing the human communicative act of proclaiming the clover’s status. The bees are given the vocal authority to announce the clover’s status to their ecological surroundings. Excerpt 8, by contrast, personifies the clover’s presence to the voice of a ruler who speaks only the truth. Three instances of agentive (intentional) personification are identified from the poem. Excerpt 9 shows the clover’s independence and thus intentional refusal to compete within its environment. It is portrayed as having its own timing and being a diligent worker. In Excerpt 10, the clover is given the human act of ‘contending’, striving to rise above the grass around it, while in Excerpt 11, the clover is personified as a generous provider who deliberately refuses to ‘retract’ or resent but continues to serve the bees. Excerpts 12-14 illustrate how the poet personifies the entire landscape by attributing insects and birds (observer agency) with human capabilities to ‘prefer’, ‘desire’, and ‘aspire’, while Excerpt 15 attributes ice crystals (frost) with the human capability of cancelling.

Finally, Excerpts 16-20 are identified as symbolic (allegorical) personification. The moral and military symbolism in Excerpt 16 personifies the clover as a heroic soldier in the field. It highlights that character supersedes appearance. Meanwhile, the allegory of the courtroom is used in Excerpt 17 through the use of the word ‘litigant’ (a person

involved in a lawsuit). The modifier ‘sweet’ is added to depict a kind and graceful attempt to seek justice. The clover is portrayed as having human-like persistence, personifying dignified survival. “The purple democrat” in Excerpt 18 becomes an allegory for the ideal citizen. The clover is personified as an individual who is not passive in asserting its individual worth within a democratic system. It claims equal standing, regardless of its humble origin (wild grass). Excerpt 19 illustrates the poet’s use of family and kinship cultural concepts to describe biological relations. The clover is depicted by the allegorical ideal of self-reliance—a unique human trait that enables it to maintain its dignity or fulfil its existential purpose. Excerpt 20 serves as the final example of the allegory of faith and duty, where the poet depicts the clover as a devout believer in the divine. The sun is referred to as its ‘providence’. Thus, the clover relies on the sun as the divine source of life, sustenance, and protection. Coding analysis reveals that nature in ‘The Purple Clover’ is associated with a social being with strong physical presence and agency by using emotional, physical/bodily, and communicative traits by giving it a ‘face’, ‘gown’, and ‘pang of jealousy’. Nature is also personified to resemble a human society through agentive/intentional and symbolic (allegorical) personifications. The clover’s purpose is not to seek liberty from humans, but to be a ‘democrat’, ‘litigant’, and ‘kinsman’. Briefly, by employing all five types of personification as a tool for philosophical observation, Emily Dickinson addresses social and existential issues, rather than political or ethical ones. Most interestingly, the complete perspective of the biological community in the field is presented through subject agency (the clover) and observer agency (other community members in the field) to balance the clover’s will with the motives of the others.

### ***Personification in ‘The Dead Crow’ and Malaysian cultural value indicators***

The coding results for A. Samad Said’s ‘The Dead Crow’ reveal that personification is deeply tied to Malaysian socio-political values, particularly the sanctity of land and the right to sovereignty. This aligns with Lino and Hashim (2020) and Amir (2009), who describe Malaysians as valuing harmony, politeness, and peaceful coexistence above individual assertion. He deliberately avoids emotional, physical (bodily), and communicative personification to emphasise the issue rather than aesthetically presenting it. This approach also aligns with the National Principles (Salleh Abas, 2006). He concentrates on Agentive (Intentional) and Symbolic (Allegorical) personifications to mirror homeland (tanah air). By giving rivers the agency to “run free” and the forest “to be left alone”, the Malaysian poet portrays nature as deserving respect and freedom-values that reinforce collectivism and mutual respect rather than individual dominance (Amir, 2009). Environmental destruction becomes a violation beyond mere pollution, but of the land’s inherent sovereignty. The “rich land” set against the “dead crow” in a man-made drain serves as an allegory for the erosion of national identity, framing the issue as a moral struggle between irresponsible development and harmoniously living with a dignified, autonomous landscape. This mirrors Ibrahim et al.’s (2024) finding that poets across traditions regard nature as a setting for harmony and spiritual solace. Furthermore, the Malaysian poet’s critique of environmental decline caused by human arrogance, and the call for harmony as a mitigation strategy aligns with Okolo and Eyisi Jnr’s (2018) ecocritical analysis. Overall, A. Samad Said’s approach generally aligns with a broader pattern in non-Western poetry (FaqeAbdulla, 2024; Olaleru and Adaramola, 2024; Mohseni and Asghari, 2020), where personification serves beyond its aesthetic appeal. Yet the

Malaysian poet's direct, confrontational expressions of the issue contradict his societal values of indirectness, politeness, and harmonious communication (Amir, 2009). This tension is consistent with Spivak's (1987) observation that cultural values are non-monolithic.

### ***Personification in "The Purple Clover" and American cultural value indicators***

Emily Dickinson in 'The Purple Clover' shows how personification, while common globally as an expression of nature reverence (Jadhav, 2018), carries distinctive American values of individualism and personal freedom. She predominantly employs Agentive (Intentional) personification, which evokes self-reliance and autonomy. Her preference for Agentive (Intentional) personification reflects a wider Western tendency to depict nature through personal, psychological struggles. Instead of sitting and not doing anything, the clover "doth not wait" and is "contending with the grass". The frontier spirit: the need to assert oneself as an individual; is clearly illustrated in these excerpts. The clover is also used to represent equal opportunity, as highlighted by Bazzi et al. (2020). The poet is essentially democratising nature itself by showing that everyone is equal, as there is no rigid class system. Emily Dickinson's use of emotional and physical (bodily) personifications further illustrates how cultural values operate in the poem. The flower has a "sturdy little countenance" and experiences a "pang of jealousy": both suggesting individual interiority and self-expression. These reflect the American emphasis on self-reliance (Kim, 2004), a central tenet of American literary traditions. The American poet portrays the clover as an individual agent pursuing its own desires and goals, rather than as a member of a harmonious collective group. The "sweet litigant" image depicts the clover's battle for its rights within a competitive social hierarchy, mirroring the American emphasis on equal opportunity (Bazzi et al., 2020), personal agency and the rule of law. Briefly, Emily Dickinson embodies the Western anthropocentric tendency by granting human political and emotional life to nature (Smith, 2023; Moore, 2017; Morton, 2016). However, it should be noted that while the clover's individual emotional interiority reflects American values of self-reliance (Kim, 2004), its decision to set its jealousy aside for communal benefit (Eastern value) complicates a straightforward interpretation. This duality aligns with Spivak (1987) argument that cultural values are not monolithic. The fluidity is illustrated in the poem by the poet's binary emphasis on American individualism and Eastern communal care and harmony.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analysis confirms that personification is deeply shaped by cultural context, with distinct typological patterns emerging across Malaysian and American poetry. In A. Samad Said's 'The Dead Crow', personification focuses on Agentive (Intentional) and Symbolic (Allegorical) forms by deliberately ignoring Emotional, Physical (Bodily), and Communicative types, reflecting Malaysian values of communal harmony, respect for sovereignty, and indirectness. Conversely, Emily Dickinson's 'The Purple Clover' employs the full range, projecting human political identity and individual interiority onto nature, reflecting Americans' focus on self-reliance, equal opportunity, and personal agency. Notably, both poems exhibit internal tensions that challenge the monolithic characteristic of the East-West binary of cultural values. While A. Samad Said presents a direct environmental critique which contradicts Malaysian

norms of indirect, harmonious communication, Emily Dickinson presents the clover as prioritising communal benefit against resentment. Several limitations constrain the generalisability of these findings. First, the sample comprises two poems which were written a century apart by poets of different genders facing completely different circumstances. The Malaysian poet responded to specific environmental and political issues in the country during the post-colonial context of rapid urbanisation, whereas the American poet wrote in the late nineteenth century, exploring individual consciousness. The two poems also differ in length and structure. Hence, while the analysis reveals interesting patterns, generalising these conclusions to broader Malaysian and American poetic traditions must be done cautiously. Despite these limitations, this study shows that personification works as a cultural code. Pedagogically, the implications for poetry education are clear. It is crucial to integrate cultural analysis into the curriculum to help students understand figurative language in poetry as a culturally embedded tool. Additionally, by moving beyond purely aesthetic readings, the students can be motivated to use poetry as a medium for expression and advocacy. Future research should expand the sample size to include more poems from each tradition and incorporate comparative analysis of other Western and non-Western literatures. Researchers may also move away from the current focus on nature-themed poems to include other themes such as relationships, war, or migration. To strengthen the methodological rigour of the study, future research could opt for a mixed-methods approach. Finally, by shifting from authorial intent to reader reception, future studies can explore how readers from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret personification in poetry.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research.

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