
THE ARTISTIC MOTIF IN THE WORKS OF JAMES JOYCE AND FRANZ KAFKA

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the basic characteristics of the artistic motif in the works of two great Western writers in the twentieth century: James Joyce (1882-1941) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924). Through the comparison of the similarities and differences in terms of artistic motifs in the composition of Joyce and Kafka, the article highlights the characteristics in the artistic thinking of each author and shows the contributions to modern art thinking.

Key Words: James Joyce, Franz Kafka, legendary sense, motif, Western literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Receiving foreign literature in Vietnam has a long history with many stages, characteristics and achievements. For Western literature, the process is a multicolored picture, with many perspectives and approaches, opening up an endless journey of cultural-literary exchanges, encounters and acculturation. Among those directions, an approach from the aspect of artistic motif emerges as a factor capable of opening up contagious schools, potential for receiving and teaching possibilities. From the survey of artistic motifs in Western writers' compositions, readers can open up endless horizons of the art world with colors "foreign countries", experience the good, beautiful things in the works of literary masters.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

First of all, it can be seen that, studying and teaching literature from the perspective of motifs - especially those motifs rooted in the depths of the human mind - is a long-standing approach. According to many researchers, motif has been recognized as a category of literary research since the early twentieth century, especially in the exploratory works of A.N.Veselovski and V.Ja.Propp - scholars examined motifs as smaller indivisible elements of text, language; those are things, images, and the smallest unit of folklore (the mirror of the god, the image of a foolish wife, the father-to-son battle, the snake stealing the princess). Originating from the study of all kinds of folk tales, motif gradually becomes an approach in the study of written literary works. Especially in the Western literary context from the early twentieth century onwards, legendary motifs mark the return and glow of old myths in a new sense, a new look, with works of Modernist writers such as James Joyce (1882-1941) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

James Joyce - Irish writer - is considered to be the prelude to the legendary writing of modern Western literature with the art of using motifs - the legendary archetype that paints a world of ambiguity, mixed with vanit and real. The legendary paradigm of his compositions has made a close connection between myth and modern novels. In *A Portrait of the Artist as A young man* and *Ulysses*, James Joyce shows that between a near-dead genre, legendary tales and twentieth century modern novels are interconnected. Using the legendary sample dictionary, taking the novel's name with the same name as the hero of the legend is one way that the novelist returns to the legend. Joyce's *Ulysses* title is a highly iconic title. Ulysses is the name of the heroic character in *Odyssey*, but in Joyce's novels, the reader does not see anyone who is Ulysses. The name Ulysses brings readers back to *Odyssey*. Due to the intertextual tactics that the writer shows us a modern Ulysses in the heart of Dublin is Bloom. Bloom carries many models still wandering between the modern city of Dublin. Following Bloom's footsteps to another place in Dublin on 16, VI.1904, we think of the cave of the fairy Calypso, the city of Ithaka... The association is received by readers, but it is the fact that the character's behavior is still going on in a modern society. In other words, a mythical motif in the novels reminds readers of the legend, while the contents and characters of the events are directed to the people living in the modern world.

After Joyce, many other writers also followed this path to expand the boundary of the novel. This shows that modern and postmodern literature not only continues Renaissance literature, which shows the rebirth of the passion for art and literature, in response to harsh laws, with the restrictive lifestyle without human spiritual freedom in the "Night in the Middle Ages" but it also promotes the writing activities of writers to develop in many different directions on the basis of fully exploiting the values of ancient Greek literature. Modern and postmodern novelists have developed one of the characteristics of literature that is multidimensional, vaguely suspended in both content and form. The authors not only aim to blurring boundary lines between genres, blend genres together to create new looks, new impressions, but also use old myths as materials to create modern miniatures with legendary colors. Legendary colors in the novels are associated with motifs, mythical archetypes.

The nature of the myth is illusive, fantastic, dreamy, so the myth is an aspiration, a dream even though that dream comes from the reality of life. Real life has so many inexplicable and unexplainable things, so people need dreams, need myths. Because of that, James Joyce chose the mythical archetypes as a place to exploit the human realm because the mythical archetypes are the way of the dream.

Seen from *A Portrait of the Artist as A young man* and *Ulysses*, James Joyce's archetypal tactics opens up a world of novels with constant innovations. The archetypes motivate novelists to return to myths, aspirations, and dreams. Only using dreams, novelists may be able to step deeply into the human realm. Kahlil Gibran (1883 - 1931) calls for "Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity".

As one of the pioneers in the innovation of fiction, James Joyce put dreams into his novels, in other words, he built the couple of novels *A Portrait of the Artist as A young man* and *Ulysses* along the path of the dream. It means using the mythical archetypes to realize the "aesthetic ambition" (Kundera): turning the real into dreams and dreams into realities in life. That is, from a paradigm in legend, an obsession about the Daedalus surname of the talented craftsman in legend, the author lets the character Stephen Dedalus reflect on his predecessor, think of life, about the world. The character falls into a dream realm and meets himself in that realm. And an image of the hero Ulysses in the legendary epic transforms into a mediocrity Bloom who turns in a long yawn of the stagnant Dublin's sleep. In that sense, *A Portrait of the Artist as A young man* is a dream. *Ulysses* is a dream. "Composing is creating a virtual world" (Nhat Chieu) and in that virtual world, the writer drives his character(s) to find dreams, to go into dreams. In pursuit of dreams, James Joyce linked functional novels to life by philosophical meanings, by inter-text, by parable, by myth, but it is clear that the writer also created for himself a chance to meet himself again in the novels, in the dream of life. James Joyce met himself again in Stephen, in Bloom while wandering in novels, wandering in the human realm. For this human realm, said as Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600-1681), is a dream that he wrote in *Life is a dream*, is a long dream.

Together with James Joyce, Franz Kafka - Czech writer, considered to be the pioneer of modern mythological-sensory literature, Franz Kafka very successfully used legendary motifs to express a sense of reality and open up a new reality. Entering Kafka's art world, we realize many legendary motifs that contain a weight of new thought and sense about life, in the connection and mingling, blending compassion with comedy, reality and vanity virtual, existence and nothingness. Here, we pay special attention to motifs: motifs **agnostic**, motif **deformation** - the motifs play a very important role in creating a grotesque view of reality of the writer. Among these motifs, there is a connection in the expression of a world of constant insecurity, filled with irrationality and corrupt anxiety. It is a world of nightmares rooted in the inhuman reality and the consciousness loneliness and crisis in *the age of losing God*.

In many works of Kafka, motif **agnostic** expresses the incomprehension, inaudibility, invisibility, is a motif with a very high frequency of occurrence and speaks to important problems in the sense of the reality of the writer. Kafka's world is one where many characters are incapable of perception, although it still has all of the senses. In *Metamorphosis*, the character Gregor, after awakening one night, turns into a bug with an unusual shape "*He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections.*" [2, p.15]. But more miserable for Gregor, with the incarnation, he had to give up the human voice to receive a slightly miserable sound of insects. Everyone, from his parents, his sister to the manager, could not hear, understand the voice of the human-beetle Gregor - the bizarre creature, the night before was still a son who earned a lot of money to support his family, was still a brother who is wholehearted to his younger sister, and was still the store's powerful salesman: "*All right, people did not understand his words any more, although they seemed clear enough to him, clearer than previously, perhaps because his ears had gotten used to them*" [2, p.26] In pain and despair, Gregor called for help: "*Mother, mother!*" crawling on the floor not far from his mother; it is the divine call of motherhood, a call waiting for a

supporting hand and a tender love of his mother. But at Gregor's bizarre form, at the call that ceased to be human, the mother only grew more terrified: his mother screamed again, then ran away, and fell into the arms of his father who rushed to help her. Not only that, along with the deformation of his form, the loss of human voice, Gregor also feels that human sounds become increasingly difficult to comprehend, especially the voice of his father: "*Behind Gregor the sound was at this point no longer like the voice of only a single father*" [2, p.32]. It can be said that the show *Metamorphosis* begins with the fact that Gregor turns into a bug after a nervous awakening in an early morning, followed by chains of ignorance and ending with the death of the main character. The ironic, tragic sense is reflected in Gregor's failure to find sympathy in his close family, when between him and them is the chasm between bugs and humans. He was pushed out of the margins of his family and the reel of society, he was no longer like them, so he would be excluded in a guilt of strangeness and exile.

Motif *Agnostic* also appears through short stories like *A Message from the Emperor*. At the beginning of the story, the emperor "*has sent a message, directly from his death bed, to you alone, his pathetic subject, a tiny shadow which has taken refuge at the furthest distance from the imperial sun*" [2, p.797] That message was carried by the strong messenger, running through the mazes of Lust, small backyard courtyards from palace to palace but he was never able to pass all to message to the man who had died. Because the man did not receive the message, he would not be able to read the message all his life, and of course, not know what the message was trying to say. Therefore, he also lost this contact with the world, with this life in loneliness and death: "*But you sit at your window and dream of that message when evening comes*" [2, p.798]. The world has lost the bonds of connection, the relationship between man and man, man and the world, man with himself is also deep in the depths of confusion and directionlessness.

The tragic fate of man in his grotesque gaze appeared hauntingly in the story of *The Bucket Rider*. The story depicts a strange contrast between the old man and his wife: A kind old man - an evil wife, an old man who is deaf but can hear - an ordinary wife who cannot hear the request of character *I*. The character *I* is like a soul floating in the cold snow, desperately in need of coal for heating: "*I must have coal; I cannot freeze to death; behind me is the pitiless stove, before me the pitiless sky, so I must ride out between them and on my journey seek aid from the coal dealer*" [2, p.794] But that fragile hope also shattered in the helplessness and incomprehensible tragedy between man and person: The deaf old man was touched by my character's request but was helpless; while the ordinary wife was ruthless at the request of "*One shovelful of the worst*" to resist the flesh-cutting cold of my soul: "*there's nothing here; I see nothing, I hear nothing; only six striking, and now we must shut up the shop*" [2, p.796]. And then, the character *I* "*ascend into the regions of the ice mountains and am lost forever*" in the anguish of human life as a grim destiny arranged. Man wanders indefinitely in an incomprehensible world, has no human sympathy, and dies in cold loneliness. People are deprived of the ability to learn and establish relationships with the world normally because humans are not masters but victims of the world! It is a tragic - comedic world, where man has lost the key to life's door, forever the door cannot be opened, and man cannot enter, to live as a human.

Parallel and closely associated with the motif *agnostic* is the motif *deformation*. Many researchers have commented that, along with insecurity and anxiety, corruption is one of the key words in the literature and arts of the early twentieth century. That corruption in Kafka's works concretely through the deformation of the characters, under many different forms. Gregor Samsa, an early awakening, finds himself transformed into a giant beetle: "*He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections. From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place*" [2, p.15]. When becoming a bug, he can move sideways, crawl along, cling to walls, ceilings; His voice is a bit miserable, human food makes him disgust. But paradoxically, precisely from that distortion, he began to become enlightened again, aware of things that when being as a person, he was not aware of. Those are thoughts of boring, arduous work, "*running around from day to day*"; About the plan to escape this miserable career in the future: However, the work machine still has terrible power, even when it becomes a bug, like an inertia, the burden of money and subsistence has not spared him. He still worried about being late for work: "*In any case, right now I have to get up. My train leaves at five o'clock.*".

Contrary to Gregor, the character Artist in *A Hunger Artist* is another distortion. The character becomes a crumb while using the absurdity of fast to counteract the absurdity of the discord between life and the artist. At first, when the fasting game was in full swing, the artist's performance attracted a lot of people to watch, "*Everyone wanted to see the hunger artist at least daily*" [2.p.760]. However, over time, people were distracted, and stopped paying attention to the artist's fasting performance, then the artist's life became really sad and tragic. The crib where he performed became a hindrance when people went to see the animals' pens. He died like a dry skeleton by the straw when he could no longer eat human food, re-adapted to human life: "*Because I had to fast. I can't do anything else*"; "*because I couldn't find a food which I enjoyed. If had found that, believe me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else*" [2, p.771].

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, both masters of modern literature, James Joyce and Franz Kafka often use legendary motifs in their writings with unique artistic senses. There is an encounter and similarity between them: by using mythical motifs, combining opposites and contrasts in an integrity artistic whole, Joyce and Kafka create a sense of limbo and vagueness which it is difficult to explain in the artistic images that they created. As a result, their works are always open to countless interpretations, and constantly beckoning the journey of discovery in the reader, and together with the writer, they can discover the hidden things of reality and within human being. However, between the two writers, there are also differences in the art of using legendary motifs: James Joyce returns to myths and ancient times to build new myths; Kafka discovers the legend in this boring everyday present and the bureaucracy is everywhere. Each person has their own unique unmixed artistic tone, voice and thought.

Understanding the characteristics of the artistic motifs of these two literary masters, teachers and learners have an additional key to decoding their artistic world. Through the drop of water, we can see the whole sky. Through artistic motifs, we can see the artistic thinking of the artist and the artistic poetry of a literary period. From there, expanding the problem, teachers and learners can access literature from cultural codes, decode literature from cultural codes, when contrasting literary works from other cultures. From there, join to co-create, expand their own interpretations of the art world in each work, and enrich each person's aesthetic sense.

With the journey of receiving and teaching the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka, we seem to understand Tzvetan Todorov's comment on literature: "We have repeatedly raised the paradox of literature: literature only lives in what everyday language calls contradiction. Literature takes on the antithesis between words and transparencies, between reality and illusion" [4, p.210] It can be said that these contradictions and ambiguities are what make the extraordinary attraction of James Joyce and Franz Kafka - the writers of the "Modern Bible".

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