

## THE GROTESQUE MOTIF IN THE WORKS OF JAMES JOYCE

Tran Thanh Binh. M.A  
Quy Nhon University, Vietnam

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2023.0550>

### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the basic characteristics of the grotesque motif in the works of James Joyce (1882-1941). The article highlights the characteristics in the artistic thinking of James Joyce and shows his contributions to modern art thinking.

**Keywords:** James Joyce, grotesque, Western literature, motif.

### 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 Ithaca... 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 this 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.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Thus, both masters of modern literature, James Joyce 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 created 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.

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, we seem to understand Tzvetan Todorov's comment on literature: "We have repeatedly raised the paradox of literature: literature only live 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 - the writers of the "*Modern Bible*".

#### REFERENCES

- James Joyce (2005), *The Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, Nguyen The Vinh (trans.), *Thế Giới Publishing House, Ha Noi*.
- Franz Kafka (2003), *The Collected of Works*, Writers' Association Publishing House, Ha Noi
- Milan Kundera (1998), *The Art of Fiction*, Nguyen Ngoc (trans.), *Da Nang Publishing House, Da Nang*.
- Tzvetan Todorov (2008), *Introduction to Fantastic literature*, Le Hong Sam – Dang Anh Dao (trans.), *University of Education Publishing House, Ha Noi*.