

## CHARACTER BUILDING METHOD FROM PROTOTYPE IN WRITER NAM CAO'S SHORT STORIES BEFORE THE AUGUST REVOLUTION

Dang Thuy An and Tran Thi Tuyet Lan

*Social Department, Nam Dinh Teacher Training College*

**Abstract.** Based on the elements that constitute the literary characters and story characters, we generalize the methods of character building from the prototype in the Nam Cao short stories before the Revolution in four aspects: Tell the background and character appearance specification from point to point; Dialogue and monologue complex language; The art of expressing unique and diverse character psychology; Characters act to experience social life. Through these four aspects, readers will find out from real life prototypes, Nam Cao has built his character to become highly lively and typical people. At the same time, Nam Cao's talent, enthusiasm and stature as an excellent writer who is truly critical of modern Vietnamese literature is once again confirmed.

**Keywords:** Short stories, characters, prototypes, Nam Cao, method of character building.

### 1. Introduction

For more than half a century, the studies on Nam Cao have affirmed his position and contributions to modern Vietnamese literature and critical literary realism. Up to now, the study of Nam Cao has been raised to a new level. The authors of the study are not content to stop at the confirmed results but always try to explore and discover new levels in the literature source of Nam Cao. Although in-depth studies on Nam Cao have been associated with the names of many great literary critics such as Ha Binh Tri, Ha Minh Duc, Phong Le, Nguyen Dang Manh, Tran Dang Tuyen, Lai Nguyen An and Hoang Ngoc Hien, Nguyen Hoang Khung, Nguyen Van Hanh But the studies on Nam Cao author and his work are still an attractive area for the generation of researchers especially young researchers and people who are passionate about Nam Cao literature.

Surveying the studies on Nam Cao, we can see that the researchers were interested in the prototypes of characters in Nam Cao's short stories early on.

The writers and written friends of Nam Cao such as To Hoai, Chu Van, Pham Le Van, are also very passionate about discussing Nam Cao in real life and Nam Cao in

---

Received July 17, 2019. Revised September 5, 2019. Accepted October 2, 2019.

Contact Dang Thuy An, e-mail address: [dangthuyan0307@gmail.com](mailto:dangthuyan0307@gmail.com)

composition. They wrote a lot about him and his writing career as: To Hoai with *Nam Cao and his work* [1]; Chu Van with *Only once met Nam Cao* [2]; Pham Le Van with *Some memories of Mr. Tri* [3]

Van Gia, a literary critic, is very interested in the subject prototypes in Nam Cao's compositions, this interest has been shown in the article. The guilty burden in Nam Cao's life and writing life [4].

Professor Nguyen Dang Manh - one of the leading professors in the field of modern Vietnamese literature research, has exploited Chi Pheo, Thi No, Ba Kien prototypes and recorded in full detail in this work - *The Memoirs* [5].

Ms. Tran Thi Sen (wife of the writer) also added a lot of materials about Nam Cao's prototype through the article *Memoirs...* [6; p499-521]

Studies, prototypes of Nam Cao's short stories before the August Revolution are no less, but the study of how to build characters from prototypes in his short stories is still a potential land, needed to be concerned and exploited in a deeper way.

## **2. Content**

### **2.1. Nam Cao and his short stories**

Nam Cao (1917-1951) 's real name is Tran Huu Tri. He was born in a farmer family in Dai Hoang village, Cao Da district, Nam Sang district, now in Hoa Hau commune, Ly Nhan district, Ha Nam province. Dai Hoang village is a remote village, far away from the province, so the powerful officials of the village have a chance to take action. This is a land of "the great fish eats the small", so the lives of people are extremely miserable.

Nam Cao was born into a poor peasant family, his life was extremely hard. In his family only he could go to school. Hunger, poverty and misery clung to him from childhood.

He used to do many jobs to earn a living like: private school teacher, writing, tutoring... In 1943, he joined the National Salvation Culture Group, when the National Salvation Culture facility was strongly suppressed, he returned to his hometown to join the Viet Minh movement. During the August Revolution, he participated in robbing local authorities and was elected chairman of the commune. After that, he was sent to Hanoi to work at the National Salvation Culture Association. After the war broke out, he followed the South delegation into South Central. In 1947, he went to Viet Bac to work as an editor for the Viet Bac National Salvation and National Salvation Newspaper and the work of propaganda officials. In 1951, on the way to the enemy area, Nam Cao died.

Nam Cao is a great talent, an excellent writer who has contributed to innovating and modernizing modern Vietnamese short stories. He has an important position in the critical realist literature of Vietnamese literature. Nam Cao's whole life is a process of uncompromising struggle to have a beautiful personality - personality in life and personality in artistic creation. He is known for his pen names: Nguyet, Thuy Ru, Xuan Du and Nhieu Khe.

Nam Cao made his first appearance in the literature of Vietnamese literature in 1936 with *The final scene* (printed on the novel Saturday number 123 on October 21, 1936) but until 1941, when *A well-matched couple stories* (Doi Moi Publishing) was born, his name really left a mark on the readers.

The writing career of Nam Cao lasted 15 years (1936 - 1951), divided into two stages: the previous period and the period after the August Revolution. He composed in many different literary genres such as short stories, long stories, novels, diaries and plays. In the period before the Revolution, he was particularly successful with short stories.

On the way of his writing, Nam Cao did not follow the path of critical reality senior writers like Ngo Tat To, Nguyen Cong Hoan and Vu Trong Phung. He truly gave himself a distinctive style with works of short stories that truly reflected the stifling, dark life of feudal colonial society.

Based on real prototypes, he vividly expressed the fate of suffering, the impasse of the poor bourgeois intellectuals and the peasants who suffered in short stories before the August Revolution. Exploiting prototypes to build characters is a typical method of exploiting reality of realistic literature lines in general and Nam Cao author in particular. This is a kind of realistic and convincing realistic character building. This type of character building contributes a lot to the process of modernizing Vietnamese literature, especially in terms of reflecting the reality of the era as it is.

## **2.2. Method of character building from the prototype**

### **2.2.1. Tell the character's background and appearance specifications**

In order for the reader to have an initial look at the character, the writer has used the technique to tell the background and character appearance specifications. With just a few details of the character's background and appearance, the reader was able to take a preliminary look at the character that is the result of the art of telling the background and character appearance specifications from the point to the space of the writer.

Surveying characters built from prototypes, we found that, in order for readers to have initial visualizations of the characters, the writer specifically used the two main ways: appearance specification, combining background and appearance specifications.

However, no matter what method the writer uses in the above two ways to provide the reader with an initial view of the character, the writer only provides some typical features in appearance and background for readers to have visualizations of the character. So we call this method the method of telling the background and the appearance specification from the point to the space.

#### **2.2.1.1. Character appearance specification**

The creative perspective of critical reality writers dominates the art depicting character appearance. Many characters built from prototypes in Nam Cao's short story before August Revolution are only described their appearance but have absolutely no background like: Tri in *The unplayable face appears*, Ho in *Excess life*, Dien in *Tears...* These characters are described by the writer with a method that specifies the appearance as "through the voice he recognized the singer, through the sculptural features, he recognized the silver maker" [7;p.2]. That is, just through a few features of the

character, the reader can not only visualize the character but also can feel the initial (maybe these feelings are only vague) about the person of the character and about what the writer intended to say.

Typically we can learn how to describe the writer's character Ho: "His thick eyebrows were wrinkled together and slightly slanted. Bright eyes seem protruding. The forehead is wide and slightly wrinkled. The cheekbones stood high, on that cheekbones the two deep holes are sleeky. Both the high and straight nose is also sleeky. That emaciated face, tilted above the book, looked miserable to fierce" [8; p77].

His thick eyebrows, bright eyes, wide forehead showing the quality of Ho but the horny cheekbones, the high, straight and sleeky nose, the emaciated face signify life is not very smooth, not very quiet of the Ho. These are just the opening lines of the short story of *The Redundant Life*, but we can see, we can feel about such a literary guy Ho.

Still with the face, Tri in *The unplayable face* appears with other lines: "I understand you want to say: my face is cold like ice and awkward and ungainly, and ridiculous and enough" [8; p.9]. Those bad lines suggest that the person who is exposed to the unpleasant sensation and discomfort is transformed into moody words by Nam Cao:

"Oh God, whom people are rumored to be righteous and just do all the things, why do you give me such a disastrous face? A face... how is it! Anyone who only met me once had to have an unpleasant feeling about me, even though I tried to make myself not to be a hateful guy when meeting everyone. I'm polite, I'm courteous, or intimate, depending on the situation. I chose each opinion to please people. It is meaningless! So people have to hate me, hate me although there is no reason to hate me. Am I contemptuous? Am I arrogant? Am I misleading? Or on the other hand, I was crippled, I was too mean. Or I'm vulgar. No no, they did not say that. They know I don't have anything like that. But, my face looks... like something. Alas, so I know what to do now! Born my face is heaven" [8; p 9].

When describing the character appearance, Nam Cao screened, selected the most expensive, most representative, most prominent details to describe the character appearance. Through one and more details of the appearance, the reader may have a sense of character that is the ingenuity of the method from the point to the space in Nam Cao's describing appearance.

#### 2.2.1.2. *Combine telling the background with character appearance specification*

Many characters of the short story before the Revolution were built by the writer from real life, the writer himself confirmed this "Ba Kien, Ly Cuong, Chi Pheo, Binh Chuc... are true, of course, writing is cut and polished. Every village has this type... But I would like to introduce: Wanting to find Trach Van Doan, Mr. Thien Loi, you try to go to... Tam Tinh fork, the meeting place between Red River and Luoc River. Evil land, guys! If we go by ship through Ba Trai, hungry, buy crackers and peel off, then ... clay. Arriving at Tam Tinh fork, the ship owner must care: robbery as a meal. Robbery all day. Thai Binh wanted, it ran to Hung Yen; Hung Yen knowed, he went to Ha Nam. This river is considered Luong Son Bac of the river robbery. I know lots of players. Sometimes real people are even more violent than characters..." [9; p 528]. However, we also know that literature is associated with fiction, Nam Cao has been very much

fictional about his background and appearance for his prototypes to go into the work and become typical figures for a kind of person in society.

Most of the characters, Nam Cao points some typical traits but still shows us a comprehensive and full view of personality and nature, even the life of the character. Beside that, there are characters whose writers are particularly interested in appearance specification and background, typically, the two main characters in *Chi Pheo* are Chi Pheo and Thi No. These are the two most representative characters for the art of building characters built from Nam Cao's prototypes. Through the character, we can clearly see the writer's ingenuity in the art of telling the background and appearance characteristics from the point to the space when building characters from real life prototypes.

In the relationship of a well-matched couple, Nam Cao was very intentional in describing Thi No and Chi Pheo as a couple of births.

An unpolished, clumsy Thi No is characterized by appearance: "Her red nose went down and fell out", "Long hair hanging down to bare shoulders and chest... Her two bare hands surrender, her mouth open, gaping on the moon and sleep or die; the legs stretched out in front of them, the black skirt was rough... On the other side, perhaps it was because she broke the scrawny dress to dislodge the rib" [9; p 49]; "...a girl who is as dumb as idiots in fairy and too ugly. Her face is really an irony of creation: it is so short that one can imagine the width is greater than the length, it was disastrous when both of her cheeks came back, if her cheeks were plump, her face would be like a pig's face, which was more capital than expected, on her neck. The nose is both short, big, red and hard like an orange peel, and want to squeeze together with lips trying to not lose the big nose: maybe because they tried so hard they cracked like reefs. Not only that, she also ate betel nut, her thick lips were supported once more, she was also able to match the betel nut, covering the color of the gray buffalo meat. Not only that the very big teeth came out: surely they think the balance cures some of the ugly" [9; p 50].

Not only was the ugly appearance, Thi No was also told by Nam Cao that the background was worth avoiding: "she is the same lineage of ghost" [10; p 108].

According to the rules of life, appearance, the background of Thi No is also suggestive of events coming to her so Nam Cao summarizes those events into "a well-matched couple" with Chi Pheo. It is a well-matched couple, people stay away from Thi No, people also stay away from Chi Pheo. Thi No is ugly, Chi Pheo is also ugly.

In a visit to Nam Cao writer's hometown, we met with teacher Tran Van Do - Literature teacher at Nhan Hau secondary school, Hoa Hau commune, Ly Nhan district, Ha Nam province - people who have been studying Nam Cao for many years. He discussed with us many stories about character prototypes in Nam Cao's short stories such as Thi No, Ba Kien and Lao Hac prototypes.... Prototype character of Chi Pheo through his words: "Chi are tall, big, fat, healthy", and Chi in the story is very well described by the writer from background to appearance.

Chi Pheo's original identity is not clear: "A brother who dropped a tube of eel, a dull morning saw him naked and gray in a skirt to the side of an abandoned brick oven." [10; p 82], and appearance is getting worse over time: Chi was originally a "healthy farmer" [10; p 82], then "looks like a snakehead! The head is bald, the teeth are shaved

white, the face is black but very cocky, the eyes are glaring at how disgusting! He wore black pants with a yellow shirt. The open chest, full of dragon carvings, phoenix with a monk holding a pawn, both arms too.” [10; p 82-83], and not only that, Chi Pheo is so distorted that people do not know whether he is young or old, his face is no longer the same as a human face but like the face of a strange animal.

Chi Pheo is a character built from a prototype that is well-known by the writer for his background and appearance specifications. With only that background, that appearance, people also partly imagine the personality, life and fate of Chi Pheo, a man of little gentleness and inferiority but who wishes to be honest.

As researcher Tran Dang Suyen commented: “When building a character, Nam Cao makes an impression in two ways: either a detailed description, a description of the appearance, or just a fleeting moment of not drawing specific details about the appearance of the character” [11; p 183]. In the art of telling the background and appearance characteristics of the character built from the prototype, Nam Cao attaches great importance to the authenticity and utility of the details. Any details that Nam Cao uses to describe the background or character appearance specification also have a relatively independent meaning. Meaning that beyond the reflection of the realistic pen, it also shows implicit signs suggesting, forecasting about people, fate, life of characters. Only through a few points that the author has prompted the reader to see the appearance of the character, expressing the character of the character, through which the character appears as a type of typical person in society. This is a special point in the pen reflecting reality of Nam Cao.

### **2.2.2. Language of the character**

The stories of the told, recorded prototypes do not talk much about the language of the prototype. Therefore, in the process of learning the art of character building from prototypes, we can only survey, analyze and give the most common points about the language of the characters built by the writer from the prototype.

#### *2.2.2.1. Dialogue language of characters*

In form, in the dialogue language, characters from Nam Cao's prototypes used are often very close to the people's daily speech, which is a short dialogue language (usually simple sentences and single sentences) and highly informal (the language used in ordinary folk sentences).

If you only consider the work of the *Excess life*, in the dialogues from Ho - Tu; Ho - Trung – Mao, the characters participated in the turnout session 34 times, ie 34 times the characters talked to each other. Most characters use informal sentences - simple dialogue language, easy to understand, close to life.

- Hey! guys!...
- It's not related! The poet is the one who keeps himself young and forever pure.
- Fortunately, I am *also not* a poet.
- Not following *any* girl!
- For what?
- Then I *leave*. I have to leave so that I don't run out of trains.

- Not kidding anymore... Actually, I have to go home, *that's all*.
- Is there a *goal*?
- *No, that's not it!*... I know... But going through this side, why should you go home urgently?? We drink beer...

However, in the type of character built from prototypes in the short story before the August Revolution, Nam Cao sometimes still uses long sentences but not in large numbers.

In the whole *Excess Life* work, most of the dialogues of the characters built from prototypes are short sentences, the amount of long sentences that Nam Cao uses for the characters Ho to communicate is very little. According to our survey, Ho participates in 18 times of turns, only 3 times in turns to answer that Ho uses long sentences (using 7 long sentences / 64 sentences).

In *Lao Hac*, We counted 5 conversations: 2 conversations between the teacher - Lao Hac; teacher - wife; teacher - Binh Tu; Lao Hac- cau Vang. The character of Lao Hac participated in 27/42 times of turns, in which Lao Hac used 13 long sentences / 87 sentences.

With an overview, G.N. Fospelov confirmed: “The characters' words often reveal their unique psychological state characteristics” [12; p35], this is true for Nam Cao's short stories. The works *Lao Hac* and *Excess Life* are two works that represent two themes of poor intellectuals and poor farmers. We can see, the dialogue language of these two types of characters has a clearly informal language. It is a universal language, simple, easy to understand, very consistent with the trend of massification of this period literature. However, Nam Cao did not arbitrarily put the informal language into his work. Every character's dialogue is his passion, it is in line with the artistic intentions that the writer has included in the work, because his aspiration is to compose literary works to “praise love, charity and justice” and leave “people closer to people”.

#### *2.2.2.2. The inner monologue of the character*

As the researcher Dinh Ngoc Hoa wrote: “If the language of dialogue promotes a vivid expression of personality through the richness of the characters' relationship with the outside world, then the inner monologue leverages its strength in expressing its true spiritual face, complex mood development, deeply moved to the emotional world of readers because it touched the depth of the human soul” [13; p 123].

Conscious of the strengths of monologue in building short story characters in general and in character building from prototypes, Nam Cao pays special attention to describing psychological life through the character's inner monologue. Inner monologue becomes the basic means to enlighten the world of the human soul, the hearts of the characters in the writer's story.

Considering the whole system of characters built from the prototype in the Nam Cao short story before the Revolution, we see with the main characters and central characters (classified according to the role of the characters in the composition of the work) in these short stories are all very focused by Nam Cao to exploit the inner world through thoughts and streams of consciousness.

Nam Cao also exploits the inner world of the sub-characters through inner monologue but the mark is not bold so when surveying, we only perform in characters built by the writer from prototypes but as main characters and central characters like Chi Pheo (*Chi Pheo*), Ho (*Excess life*), Dien (*Bright Moon*), Tri (*The unplayable face*), Lao Hac (*Lao Hac*), aunt Hao (*Aunt Hao*), Dan (*A wedding*), Dien (*Tears*), I (*Buying House*), I (*Untelling stories*)...

In terms of form, the inner monologue of Nam Cao is clear, easy to receive, to go into people's hearts.

The inner monologue of the character is mostly associated with the author's lead: *He told himself..., thought silently..., Dien thought, He just dressed and whispered in his mind, He was sad, and sometimes he pondered and worried...*

*"Dien thinks of the stinginess of women. They sew clothes to take away. And buy a chair so no one will sit. Dien intended to protest..."* (*Bright Moon*) [8; p 55 - 56].

*"He was wearing clothes and whispered in his mind: I am not going anywhere today ... Getting the money and then going back ..."* (*Excess life*) [8; p.87].

*"He fears: Alas! Tu looks so pitiful. No wonder Tu suffered a lifetime."* (*Excess life*) [8; p. 92].

*"And sometimes he thought about himself and worried. In the past, he only lived by robbery and intimidation. What if there is no more energy to rob and threaten to rob? Well, he was only strong because of recklessness. But he vaguely finds that there will be a time when he cannot risk it anymore. Now it is dangerous! Oh my God! He craved honesty, he wanted to make peace with everyone! Thi No will pave the way for him. She can live peacefully with him, why others cannot. They will again accept him in a flat, friendly society of honest people ..."* (*Chi Pheo*) [10; p.118 -119]

In the inner monologue of the characters that were built from the prototypes we consider, most monologues are often long, short, pure monologues close to the daily language of the people. In particular, in monologue, this type of character often uses questions *"In the past, he only lived by robbery and intimidation. What if there is no more energy to rob and threaten to rob?"*, *"Dien's wife is better than Dien in taking care of the housework?"*; and exclamation *"Now it is dangerous! Oh my God! He craved honesty, he wanted to make peace with everyone!"*, *"Alas! Tu looks so pitiful."* The monologue of the short story before the August Revolution that Nam Cao used to express the types of characters built from easy-to-understand, expressive prototypes, rich in drama with diverse types of sentences, especially exclamation and questions. The use of this type of sentence in monologue is the basis for the psychological character anatomy of the writer. The character of the writer appeared on the page with many distinctive features by each character, when the inner monologue they show clearly the specificity of the scene, the psychology that the characters themselves experience.

## **2.3. Psychology of the character**

### **2.3.1. Psychological state of character is diverse**

The art of character psychology has been incubated in Western ancient literary works, but it only really became the art of building important characters around the XVIII - XIX century with famous Western writers such as Stendha, Turgenev,



Tolstoy, Dostoevsky,... In Vietnamese literature, it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the art of exploiting character psychology was employed by writers. The method of exploring the character psychology of modern Vietnamese writers was directly affected by the method of romantic and realist work of Soviet and French writers.

Nam Cao is a writer of critical realism, and he and similar writers all artfully master the so-called dialectic of human soul. This mastery is evident in the art of exploiting short story characters before the Revolution from August from his prototype.

He built a system of characters from prototypes in extremely rich short stories of a variety of personalities. Each character - person in the story has his own psychological and personality traits, and Nam Cao exploits very skillfully psychological developments. However, when placing story characters in relation to prototypes, we can clearly see that the psychological developments of real-life prototypes are recorded almost very limited. Writers can approach prototypical prototypes through words (Chi Pheo, Thi No, Ba Kien, Lao Hac ...) or over several contact times (Aunt Hao); Particularly with the subject prototype, the writer has a more complete approach because it is the real person of the writer. From the real base on the psychology of the prototype, the writer can contact us to affirm in the process of composing, the writer has to be very much fictional so that his character can live and be true as "real person in real life".

Nam Cao has recreated the character with a plentiful, concrete and diverse process of forming human thoughts and intentions. Nam Cao step by step explaining why Lao Hac (*Lao Hac*) must sell his dog, must eat dog poison; explain why Dien (*Tear*) is angry with his wife and children; explain why Tri (*Unplayable face*) has a guilt...

Considering only the scene of the character I (*Buying house*) going to meet the two children who lost their place, the psychology of the two children gradually shows up through every detail, action and words of the characters in that scene. But the miraculous feature in Nam Cao's dialectic is that through the spiritual changes of the sister, the writer wants to express his torment, pity, and struggles in his soul – the person who buy a house.

"I don't dare to look at his two children for long. Looks like I'm ashamed with myself..."

After a while, having entrusted the brother to someone, the daughter was near me, watching the house. I have the opportunity to look at her closely. She is so thin. Wrists and ankle so small. Her faces were scowling. Clothes were worn and torn. Its teeth were pitying so badly. I suddenly hesitated. I let out a sigh. Then I blurted out:

- Have you eaten anything since morning?

She didn't answer, just shook her head lazily. Looks like she's busy thinking about something. Her eyes narrowed. Her face kept scowling. Maybe just because of the sun. But she seems to hate me very much. I whispered in my mind: If I don't buy then other people...

The sesame seeds are finished. The carpenter began to remove the wood. The sound of a chisel rang continuously. The solid sounds resounded. I saw her eyes blink. She doesn't show her teeth anymore. Her lips fluttered. Her cheeks bulge a little. Just like

that, she did not say anything then ran to the neighbor's house. What is she going to do? My heart filled with vague worry. Suddenly I heard a child crying and sobbing:

- Mummy!...

My heart skipped a beat. Then it staggered, then I staggered slightly. Now I can't hide my thoughts anymore. I'm evil! I'm evil! I have a lot to confess...

Yes, I'm so evil, Mr. Kim. Here, regret will give a dark shadow into my new home, more spacious and clean than the previous one. The cold winter, a gecko hiding on a crossbar, will click the tongue to remind me: I am so evil! I'm so bad! ... But that's all, Mr. Kim! Think about what to do? In our situation now, happiness is just a narrow blanket. One is covered another is left outside the blanket. I don't want to be bad? But how to do it? Just because life is so strict? People can still think of me, but no one will be hurt!..." [8; p 74 -76].

The torment in the soul of the homebuyer is existent in many levels: shyness and hesitation, to acknowledge it as being hated in the eyes of the child who must self-criticize "I don't buy, others will...", But I still wonder, still worried, "My heart has some vague worry." and the writer pushed the torment in the heart of the buyer to the peak with the baby's cries. Homebuyers or writer themselves must repeat twice: I am so evil!... But then I find a way to motivate myself but it is also an excuse for my own conscience: "Think about what to do? In our situation now, happiness is just a narrow blanket. One is covered another is left outside the blanket. I don't want to be bad? But how to do it? Just because life is so strict? People can still think of me, but no one will be hurt!

The description of character psychological developments with dialectical view is the bright spot in the art of character building from prototypes in Nam Cao's short story before the Revolution. The character is portrayed by psychological developments that experience social life with the miraculous transformation of human souls.

To prepare for a life, a new destiny is much more than real life, characters are built from archetypes set by writers in specific social life situations. In the context of that social life, the character has partly revealed the psychological reactions through actions and characters also revealed psychological developments through monologue and dialogue. This shows that, in the art of depicting characters from Nam Cao's prototypes, there is a strong connection with the language and action to make the characters and backgrounds appear realistically. One unified block is personality. Because of these things, the literary critic Ha Van Duc has affirmed that: "boldly go their own way and still not fall into style, fussy, still follow the life and describe the guests. Real life - Nam Cao pen shows quite clearly the unique character of a talented writer" [14; p 490].

### **2.3.2. The psychological state of the character is unique with psychological awakening**

Nam Cao is very interested in describing the inner world of the character whether that is a completely fictional character or a character created from a certain prototype in real life.

In the psychological developments of the pre-Revolution short story character, many prototypes were described by the writer as people with complex psychological state of mind, of conscience. With 15 works that Nam Cao uses prototypes to build

characters, we find there are 4 Nam Cao works that create a state of awakening in the psychology of characters: *Chi Pheo*, *Tears*, *Bright Moon*, and *Excess Life*. The four works focus on the awakening of the four main characters, Chi Pheo in *Chi Pheo*, Dien in *Tears*, Dien in *Bright Moon*, and Ho in *Excess Life*. In order to describe the awakening psychological state of the characters, the writer always directs the pen into pressing characters, letting characters struggle, fight, fight and then awaken. However, the awakening of the character always has an impact character as a “catalyst”.

Nam Cao pressed Chi Pheo with a series of details, events to bring the character to the extreme of the soul's life, he was lonely to the extreme. Loneliness from birth: Chi Pheo was born without a parent, no relatives, no house, no space for plucking. He was born in an abandoned old brick kiln, in a dress. His childhood was helpless, “became a slave for a house then another”. At the age of twenty, he went to work as a farmhouse for Ba Kien.

To increase the pressure on the characters, the writer borrowed Ba Kien's hand to bring the character into a world of extreme. The great magnate Ba Kien because of jealousy gave Chi Pheo to the prison and then let Chi imprisoned. That colonial prison received the old man of great courage to arrest Chi, innocent and then let go of a fierce, vicious Chi Pheo.

Then, the psychological pressure on the character increased as the character left prison, returned to the village. Chi Pheo became unfamiliar to the villagers and unfamiliar with himself. I do not recognize myself, I am alien to myself is an extreme corruption that Nam Cao places on a farmer like Chi.

However, the writer's talent and humanitarian spirit are in the verge of the writer's conscience who has deliberately described the awakened psychological state of the character, so that the character can be returned to be the right follower means “Catalyst” for the awakening in Chi's soul is Thi No. The appearance of the character Thi No in the work has a unique meaning. Thi No, who are ugly “ghosts and demons” are the source of light that shines on Chi Pheo's dark place, awakening, calling up the humanity of Chi Pheo, lighting a cold, dark heart over the months day spurned.

Nam Cao not only talked about the awakening of the farmer's soul, but also about the awakening in the inner world full of torment before the miserable life because of the rice of the intellectuals. The character Dien in *Tears* is also Nam Cao in turn to ironically turn to lose the gentle nature of the writer, making him over and over again to be pressured mentality.

First pressure: Both Dien and his wife take care of Chuyen being sick. Early in the morning, Dien went out of the house when his wife called him and reminded to buy medicine for Huong. Dien had a heart disease, had no money so he could not take medicine anymore, so Dien thought that Huong's illness would go away on his own. According him, medicine can not cure any disease, you can only drink to fill the stomach. He thought again and again, he wanted the shirt, wanted the book... but he still decided to buy medicine for his children. He distressed him... he sighed deeply for his life.

The second pressure: He walked 20 kilometers to the station, the team station received and sympathized with him making him miserable, embarrassed because there

were no three trenches for his son to station when he accidentally met it. The more important he was in the station, the more his son and his son, the more sad he felt.

The third pressure: He went on a field trip, the bad secretary clashed with him, giving him torn coins (rural cannot be spent). Back and forth he lost a coin, crowded crowded, he accepted. Money is torn to three dongs and one is lost. He regrets money.

Final pressure: At night he came home, his wife asked for medicine, he forgot, his wife grumbled again. "Forget! Only forgetting for a lifetime... I regret that money... ... Forget... Forget it! Where are people who are so bad!..." [8; p.140]. The word came back, he stopped his wife from having dinner. His wife had to lower her voice, asking herself what he was eating. He is grumpy. Don't ask for trouble!" [8; p 143]. He was very anxious. So he poured out all the frustrations on the wife, hard work, even thinking, or worrying and his little child, his illness that he was gloating with that. His dignity is falling. Fortunately, there is a "catalyst", Huong makes Dien become awake.

It was thanks to the young girl who knew how to cry: "... the young Huong ran out to head to the front (...) and sprayed very long out there. Is it stuffy nose or does it cry? Try to listen. He heard the sobbing sounds of Huong. He suddenly shrugged. His heart flung" [8; p.143], but Dien, although "suffering like a dog", was still awake and changed into anger. The tears of a poor child do not make his father run out of poverty, but can make the poverty a little more pleasant... and also the cry of the sick child dragging his sunken father in gloating because of finding a place to vent and return to the province with conscience and responsibility of father and husband.

The awakened psychological state of the character is the result of drama in the short story Nam Cao. Nam Cao is very skilled in the art of depicting the psychology of characters by means of pressing characters so that they can go to the limit and awaken their conscience. In the art of depicting the psychology of the characters, with the awakening mentality, Nam Cao brought his character from the place where the life was drawn along a reed to the province to overcome, escaping the whirlpool of life. Nam Cao's prototypes as a basis for building should not only be built as human beings with trivial destiny, but also people who do not commit to being equal to fate, pleasing to be carried away by in society's wake.

## **2.4. Action of the character**

Through the actions of the reader character to see the nature of the character, see the author's intentions when building the character. Therefore, while building characters, writers always make a special effort to portray actions. The character built from Nam Cao's prototype sometimes acts simply according to the logic of ordinary life but sometimes acts after a very intense internal struggle process.

### **2.4.1. Characters acting according to the logic of life**

At the beginning of the short stories written before the August Revolution, Nam Cao's character built from the prototype mostly acts according to the normal life logic. These actions show a much more experienced story character than the original models and archetypes.

The models of Thi No, Chi Pheo, Ba Kien, Lao Hac, Di Hao, Ho, Dien ... in real life are people with independent lives and destiny, but when entering the pages of Nam Cao, those same people blended with the story, turning into new lives, new fates.

The real Chi Pheo did not kill Ba Binh; Mr. Tran Duc San, on which Lao Hac was based, did not commit suicide with poison, Thi No in real life did not have any relationship with Chi Pheo, so she did not affect Chi Pheo as in the story ... Regarding the actions of these typical characters, majority of the actions of the characters are fictional, created by writers. In the process of building action, writers always put characters in new relations very different from real life, such as as binding Chi Pheo - Thi No; Thi No - her aunt; Lao Hac – his son; Lao Hac - the teacher... in those constraints, the character has the opportunity to act to reveal his true personality, nature and people.

From an archetype, many characters have appeared on the page with so many lifetimes, many circumstances with different behaviors. Such as Tri in the *Unplayable face* who always tries to please the people around: "I am polite, I am courteous, or intimate ... I please people based on their opinion" [8; p 9]. Such as Ho in *Excess Life* with the noble gesture of saving the life of Tu, passionately reading and sharing the excitement of reading with Tu, even a series of actions when drunk "He hissed like an animal. Then he pursed his lips, his fierce eyes looking into Tu's... Leered and glared for a moment then turned, stumbled to take off his pants, took off his shirt, then threw them on the bed. Then he took off his shoes, tossed them one by one ... he tossed all the things he saw on the table, and then scolded Tu for not knowing how to clean the house" [8; p. 83 - 84].

The character was built from Nam Cao's archetype, sometimes identical, but sometimes completely different actions from original model. Nam Cao in real life has absolutely no action at all when drunk like the characters of Ho, and never struggling to please everyone around him like the character Tri. These are the actions that story characters have experienced in story situations. The writer has created, another aspect of social human life for the character to act and reveal the so-called typical social personality.

#### **2.4.2. Characters acted after the inner thought process**

In the short story before the August Revolution, characters who acted after a lot of mental arguments were few but particularly focused on by Nam Cao. This action of the character is closely associated with the process of inner struggle and the above-mentioned state of psychological awakening.

The actions after the internal struggle are largely fictional writers, which can be partially fictional if the character is built from the model of the subject, but sometimes, must be completely fictional because writers can hardly witness the action directly after this psychological state in the object.

In the characters built from the prototypes of the object, each time the writer describes the actions after the inner struggle. Lao Hac, after a process of preparing the property for his son, after the torment of cheating a dog, after confiding in the teacher, he came to the last action in his life that was to eat dog poison to commit suicide. In the character of Chi Pheo, the writer must also prepare very carefully for the final action of

Chi that is to kill Ba Kien and end his whole life. Nam Cao borrowed “typical society” to push Chi into a dead end, leaving Chi like a dog to act. His actions were fierce but pathetic. “He took out his knife and broke in. Ba Kien got up, Chi Pheo had already swung his knife. Ba Kien can only make a sound. Chi Pheo slashed wildly and shouted loudly. Whenever he shouted, they never rushed. So when people came, he is already thrashing in fresh blood. His eyes rolled back. His mouth yawned, wanting to speak but not making a sound” [10; p 125].

Actions like Chi's, Lao Hac's, may or may not happen with the model. However, actions of the model (if any) is merely a brief statement while the action of the character in the story is described by the writer as an inevitable act of struggle in the inner world. This character's action is also described by the writer as an inevitable result of the social situation. Social life has pushed people to the last line after the process of inner struggle and action is the fierce accusation of the writer on social situation at the time.

The character built from the subject of the subject as the Ho in *Excess Life* and Dien in *Tears* also acts as a result of the inner struggle process, but the social aggressiveness is not as high as those of the action of Chi Pheo and Lao Hac. Nam Cao brought the two characters of Ho and Dien back to the small space which is a family space with a miserable circumstance of material things to act after a process of psychological struggle and awakening.

After the drunkenness, he was awake, not only awake physically but also awake in his awareness: “He woke up on his bed. He found his body hurt, head heavy, mouth dry and bitter. The throat was burning. He reached out to his kettle on the table to drink. The kettle was full and the water was still warm. That is the thoughtfulness of Tu. Ho understood that and became sad. Because he dimly remembered that: it seemed like he was drunk last night, went around town and went back, causing trouble with Tu; seems like he hit Tu, chased Tu away, then closed the door and went to sleep ... He was suddenly frightened, got up, his eyes frantically looking for Tu. But no! Tu is still home... Probably in the process of being too drunk, he tried to lock the door but could not, so when she saw that he was tired, Tu carried the child home again. Now Tu is asleep in a hammock, a small child lying beside he. She's used to getting up early. This morning, it must be because Tu is tired, has just fallen off, so she sleep till noon like that. Her head slumped to one side. One hand went over the edge of the hammock, hanging down, fingers slightly spread out loose. The sleeping position is hard and painful. He was sad. Alas! Tu looked very pathetic! No wonder why Tu had a lifetime of suffering! Even her sleeping position shows that she has a rough fate. Horemembers that, sometimes, if you look closely, Tu's face is not comely. Suddenly, Tu came up with a desire to come closer to Tu, look carefully at the face. He crept in, barefooted. He squated right down on the ground, next to the hammock and tried to breathe quietly. He looked at her face for a long time. Tu's face is pale; even her lips are pale; eyelids are slightly purple and the eyes are a little swelled, the cheeks are slightly pulled back, so the face has a slight edge. The family sighed slightly and shook her head in confusion. He gently took down Tu's falling hand. The hand is thin and bony! On the back of the hand, the blue veins are shiny, the skin is thin and green, almost translucent. The wrist is fragile. All revealed something soft, something limp, needing him to protect and

defend... a miserable destiny, and struggling, needing him to comfort... But what did he do to make her life less miserable? What did he do to make Tu stop suffering? His tears burst out like a lemon squeezed. And he cried ... Oh my! He cried! He sobbed, crying as if he did not cry. He held Tu's small hand into his chest and cried [8; p 92 - 93].

Ho awoke, then Ho acted. Nam Cao described a series of actions expressing this awakening of Ho: "He lifted his hand to a kettle of water on the table to drink"; "... get up, eyes look dirty", "He crept, barefooted. He squatted right down on the ground, next to the hammock and tries to breathe quietly. He looked at her face for a long time"; "Tu sighed slightly and shook his head in confusion. He gently grasped Tu's hanging hand; "His tears burst out like a lemon squeezed. And he cried... Oh my! He cried! He sobbed, crying as if he never cried. He held Tu's small hand into his chest and cried" [8; p 93].

It is the action of the husband who suddenly awoke after realizing the misery that his wife and children must bear. This action shows the sharing, the love, the attachment to the wife in the plight and burdens.

Studying the actions of protagonists from the Nam Cao short stories before the August Revolution, one can see that, like other realist writers, Nam Cao values action but not ordinary actions. No, it must be actions of high artistic value. Actions that follow the logic of normal life described by the writer with a clear artistic intent are aimed at emphasizing the value of action after the inner struggle.

### **3. Conclusions**

Within the scope of the article, we focused on a small part of the character style in the Nam Cao story before the Revolution. We aim to compare real people (prototypes/models) with story characters to see Nam Cao's realist style.

With four methods to build characters from the prototype: Tell the background and character appearance of the character; Language of the character; Psychology of the character; The actions of the characters, the writer turned real life prototypes to the characters naturally and accurately, let the character's personality become a typical social personality but still close to the life of the farmers. It is the hint of the prototypes in the story character that has contributed more power to reflect reality in the story and has bridged the gap between literary and real life, increasing the authenticity of the story, increasing social urgency of the story and increase the persuasion of the ideological issues that the writer sends in the story.

The above methods of character building show that between Nam Cao and critical realist writers there are many similarities in the art of building short story characters. The main difference, however, is that the writer has used the method of character building from using the prototype turned into the character naturally, authentically and to the personality of the person, which become a typical social personality. It can be said, "Nam Cao's work is a sharp blade thrust into the rotting body of the old society, exposing the ugly reality of a society that is about to collapse" [15; 189].

With these contributions, Nam Cao reformed modern Vietnamese literature in the period 1930-1945. He sharpened his pen through the re-enactment of the lives, the destitute of the poor and the bourgeois intellectual. More specifically, it is the people who come out from real life, bearing the real life mark - the mark of people in the

oppressive and stagnant colonial society. Nam Cao has once again demonstrated to us that nothing belongs to human lies outside the scope of the writer's reflection. Writers must be people of the time, speak the language of the time and write so that people understand people better and bring people closer to people.

## REFERENCES

- [1] To Hoai, 1956. Nam Cao's people and works. *Art Newspaper*, No. 145.
- [2] Chu Van, 1991. Only once met Nam Cao. *Ha Nam Art*, No. 4.
- [3] Pham Le Van, 1987. Some memories of Mr. Tri. *Art Newspaper*, No. 29.
- [4] Van Van, 1993. The guilty burden in Nam Cao's life and writing. *Nha Trang Magazine*, No. 18, May 6.
- [5] Nguyen Dang Manh, 2011, *Memoirs*. <http://tulieunet.blogspot.com/2011/09/hoi-ky-nguyen-ang-manh-15.html> on June 29, 2019 3h13pm
- [6] Phuong Ngan (selection and compilation), 2000. *Nam Cao is an outstanding reality writer*. Cultural and Information Publisher.
- [7] Bui Viet Thang, 2000. *Short stories about the problems of theory and practice of the genre*. Hanoi National University Publishing House.
- [8] *Nam Cao full of episodes*, volume 2, 1999. Literature Publishing House.
- [9] Bich Thu (selection and introduction), 2000. *Nam Cao on author and work*. Education Publishing House.
- [10] *Nam Cao full of episodes*, volume 1, 1999. Literature Publishing House
- [11] Tran Dang Tuyen, 2008. *Nam Cao Realism*, Social Science Publisher.
- [12] G.N. Pospelov (Editor), 1985. *Literature research*, Episode II. Education Publishing House.
- [13] Dinh Ngoc Hoa, 2001. *The main aspects of Nam Cao prose prose poetry before the August Revolution*. The Ph.D. thesis, Hanoi National University of Education.
- [14] Phan Cu De - Tran Dinh H alcohol - Nguyen Trac - Nguyen Hoanh Frame - Le Chi Dung - Ha Van Duc, 2001. *Vietnamese Literature (1900-1945)*. Education Publishing House.
- [15] Ha Minh Duc, 1998. *Nam Cao written and works*. Literature Publishing House.