

THE PLOT AND ARTISTIC LANGUAGE OF VIETNAMESE SHORT STORIES IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY TRANSITIONS TOWARDS MODERNITY

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From the late 19th century, Vietnamese literature started to change and transform from the medieval to the modern. In the early 20th century, especially from the 1920s onwards, Vietnamese literature gradually entered the trajectory of modern literature quickly and comprehensively with the appearance of many talented writers with remarkable artistic innovations. This is clearly shown in the short story, the “short narrative” genre, which is dynamic and can easily catch up with the changes of society in general and of literature in particular. The process of modernization of short stories in this period was revealed in many aspects, especially in terms of plot, and artistic language, which will be elucidated in this article.

Keywords: Vietnamese short stories; in the early 20th century; plot; structure; linguistic text.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the new national literature - the early twentieth century (1900-1932), there have been short story writers expressing their sense of innovation and creativity in plot-building and the use of literary language. Regarding the plot, in the short stories of the early twentieth century, events, intense conflicts, dramatic situations... are no longer the only attractive factors. Besides the familiar plot style in medieval short stories such as treatise plot, storylines with highly dramatic events, there have appeared a number of short stories that started with commonly encountered situations, going into the depths of the human soul. It is the developments of the inner life, emotions, mood... that have become the driving factor of the plot. From the traditional point of view, these stories are considered to be stories without plot, appearing more and more in later literary periods. In terms of language, many contemporary short story writers have noticed that long, rhyming, parallel sentence style, which is full of legends, historical references, hackneyed writing, etc. is becoming detached from reality. Therefore, writers have paid attention to the creation of language, find new ways of expressing that one of the important directions is to “make a story out of common people’s words” as Nguyen Trong Quan stated right in the beginning of the story “The History of Lazaro

Phiền - Truyện thầy Lazaro Phiền”. Sentences are increasingly simple, concise, new syntax, especially evident in many short stories born from 1925 onwards.

2. Research content

2.1. Modern changes in the art of plot building

Examining three typical plot types of short stories of the early twentieth century, including treatise plot, plot with highly dramatic events and psychological plots, it has been found that the plot of the short story of this period still carried some characteristics of medieval stories on the one hand, and on the other hand had initially revealed remarkable and new signs of modernity.

2.1.1. Treatise plot

Through the survey of treatise short stories in the early twentieth century such as “*The true General - Chân tướng quân*”, “*The hero Cao Thang - Tráng sĩ Cao Thắng*” by Phan Boi Chau; “*A scientist - Một nhà bác học*”, “*Family stories - Câu chuyện gia tình*” by Nguyen Ba Hoc; “*God does not deal badly with good and virtuous people - Hoàng thiên bất phụ hảo tâm nhơn*” by Nguyen Chanh Sat; “*A sinking petal - Một cánh hoa chìm*” by Nguyen Van Co; “*Mr. Addiction - Bác nghiện*” by Vu Mien Nam; “*Above mistake below fault - Trên lầm dưới lỗi*” by Tran Quang Nghiep, and many other stories, it is found that the above stories seem to focus only on describing events towards a treatise generalization. Authors tend to speak for characters, resulting in characters being overshadowed, dry, or almost completely devoid of personality. For example, in “*Family stories - Câu chuyện gia tình*” by Nguyen Ba Hoc, the actions and words used to describe the old woman do not match the character's background. As a sincere mother in the countryside, the old woman can utter the words of learned confucians. The old woman's character is briefly described and turned into a speaker for the author's traditional moral concepts and theories. The other characters in the story also only meant to demonstrate the ideological and social conflicts in the time of old and new fighting. This is a phenomenon of poetic influence of medieval short stories that still exists in short stories, especially in short stories of Confucian authors at that time.

However, besides that, in some works there are also treatise plots such as “*Tước Thái Zen Master - Tước Thái thiền sư*” by Phan Boi Chau; “*Dư sinh lịch hiểm ký*” by Nguyen Ba Hoc, etc. had initially revealed signs of modernity, in which the character's personality has had a clear movement and development after the challenges and events of the character's life. This is something that has not been put into the center of attention in medieval short stories. The treatise plots in medieval literature are often installed with many thrilling details, which are the products of divinization and legendization, while the treatise plot of the shorty stories of the early twentieth century does not go in that direction. With the direction towards the authenticity of details, logical and dialectical arguments, the treatise short stories of the early twentieth century had a certain persuasion and impression on readers. Of course, because of the transition period, the modern signs of this type of plot in the early twentieth century short stories are not very clear. The treatise plot of the short stories in the period 1900-1932 has not reached the level of sophistication, imprinted in the reader's memory with profound philosophies as in the later works of Nam Cao, Nguyen Khai, Nguyen Minh Chau, etc. In addition, in the

treatise short stories of the early twentieth century, there are no characters that are portrayed sharply with experienced lives, thorny fates, “blemishes” like Dien and Ho in Nam Cao's stories or Ms. Dao and Ms. Tam in Nguyen Khai's stories. The character of the short story of the early twentieth century often appears only as a certain aspect of personality. Even so, its modern signs are also worth noting for the early modernization of Vietnamese narrative prose, including short stories.

2.1.2. Plot with highly dramatic events

Traditionally, stories had to have twists and turns, dramatic events, and unexpected endings to surprise the reader. That is the premise for the stories with highly dramatic events. However, in the process of development, this type of plot also changes. Medieval narrative prose often only focused on actions and events, with the essential contents without lengthy development as well as redundant elements like in modern novels and short stories. There is a feeling that the author is only interested in the event and pays little attention to the character's psychological state description. In addition, the traditional plot type often has a clear beginning and end with many events, becoming the dominant frame of the character's personality. The attractiveness of the story depends closely on the development of the plot. Typically, this traditional plot is presented in a sequence of five parts, including presentation; knotted part; development; climax part; and knot opening part. Many early twentieth century writers still construct plots in this five-part sequence. The development of the plot is paid attention to through the system of events, thereby depicting the character's fate and personality.

The story “*Who kills? - Ai giết người?*” by Man Chau can be taken as an illustration of this type of plot. The story consists of five parts associated with five events, recreating the dramatic events of a murder case, specifically:

- Presentation: Introducing a murder case in Yen Vi village and two suspects arrested.
- The knotted part: The judge examines two people suspected of being the killer. They are brothers from the same father but different mothers. When unable to prove their innocence, the two brothers competed to plead guilty.
- Development: The mother was called in to guess who the murderer was and had claimed her biological son was the murderer and begged forgiveness for the eldest.
- The climax: The judge did not know who the murderer was and was surprised that the people suspected of being the murderer had very respectable qualities. Therefore, he sought to solve the case to save the two suspected brothers.
- Knot opening part (end): The real killer came forward to confess and exonerate the two brothers and state the reason for the murder, which is to kill his friend's adulterous wife to avenge his friend.

It can be seen that this is a dramatic story with unexpected events continuously taking place, making the story interesting, stimulating the reader's attention. The character's personality also evolves with the development of the plot. Of course, these are moral characters: The two brothers, the mother and the murderer both worship the principles of Kindness, Decorum, Uprightness, Wisdom, Faithfulness.

The same plot type with this five-part sequence are the stories: “*Monk's story - Câu chuyện nhà sư*” by Nguyen Ba Hoc, “*The story of reincarnation - Tái sinh linh*”,

“Trước Thái Zen Master - Trước Thái thiên sư” by Phan Boi Chau, etc. In *“The story of reincarnation - Tái sinh linh”*, the life of revolutionary character Le Mai Tu who was imprisoned in a dungeon was told. There is a cholera epidemic raging in prison, taking the lives of many people everyday. On this occasion, Le Mai Tu and his student conspired to fake death to escape from prison. Their prison escape journey is full of drama, created in readers emotions from suspense, worry to relief, excitement when Le Mai Tu and his student were released to the sky of freedom, returning to a turbulent, thorny but noble life of revolutionary activities. Or the story of *“Trước Thái Zen Master - Trước Thái thiên sư”* is also a story with an adventure plot, in which the character is challenged through many situations, the personality is active and developed. Monk Tran Thien Quang wandered alone for seven years, traveling through many regions and countries, finally reaching India to see that even in Buddha's country, the people are also being persecuted by the domination of the British Empire for many years, from which the monk realized *“Buddhas are the heroes who save the country”* (Hoang Thi Thu Giang, 2014). In addition to the works mentioned above, there are still many works with this kind of plot but sketchy, unattractive and theoretically heavy. They are *“The hero Cao Thang - Tráng sĩ Cao Thắng”* by Phan Boi Chau, *“A sinking petal - Một cánh hoa chìm”* by Nguyen Van Co; *“Mr. Addiction - Bác nghiện”* by Vu Mien Nam, etc. Due to the lack of portrayal of vivid personalities, the characters seem to be built to illustrate the ideological treatise of the story, leading to unattractiveness, where the characters are just faint or rigid silhouettes.

In about the last ten years of the period 1900-1932, there were many short stories whose events did not coincide with the order of progression as in the traditional plot. These stories often start with a climactic situation, from which to focus on reflecting certain images, corresponding to it is a type of structure that breaks the linearity of time such as *“The tortoise - Con rùa”* by Nguyen Ai Quoc, *“Who cares if you live or die - Sống chết mặc bay”* by Pham Duy Ton, and some other stories by Nguyen Cong Hoan such as *“The capitalist's dog teeth - Răng con chó nhà tư bản”*, *“Two bastards - Hai thằng khốn nạn”*, *“Human horses and horse humans - Ngựa người và người ngựa”*, etc. Stories of this kind have created new artistic impressions for both contemporary and later readers.

Nguyen Ai Quoc's *“The tortoise - Con rùa”* has a tense, dramatic plot with a tragic ending. Mr. Commune chief has a summoning order from the ambassador. Knowing that the Ambassador was a violent person, if he did not bring anything to *“punch the Ambassador's mouth”*, the life of he and his wife may be at risk. He devised a plan to rent a silver tray from the maidservant of the Ambassador and put the turtle on it as a gift. But surprisingly, when he just opened his mouth to present to the Ambassador, when did he discover that the turtle had disappeared. He was in a very dangerous situation, a very tough situation. But the story ended in an unexpected way. The Ambassador shouted: *“Oh, the tray is so pretty! I have to send it to the Governor General! Today is the birthday of the Governor General's wife, she must really like it!”*, *“The Governor General will remember to level up for me - the Ambassador thought in his heart”* (Le Huy Bac, 2004).

In *“Who cares if you live or die - Sống chết mặc bay”*, the opening was a scene of climactic opposition: Thousands of living beings are in turmoil at the risk of the dam

breaking - an event that threatens the survival of many people, and the parent officer is still “*majestically and imposingly sitting*”, still calmly playing cards and smoking (original: “*ừ thông tôm, chi chi này, điếu này!*”). The drama is continuously pushed up, so that at the end of the story, the readers are really outraged at the lack of conscience, irresponsibility of the parent officer for the lives of many poor people.

Likewise, in “*The capitalist's dog teeth - Răng con chó nhà tư bản*” by Nguyen Cong Hoan, the dramatic situation of the story is placed at the end of the work, after the beggar broke two of its teeth for taking the dog's food plate. The rich man “*grinds his teeth, jumps into the car, starts the engine, turns on the headlights*”, with the determination that *I'll make you die, and I'll pay for it. It costs thirty dong at most*. It doesn't need much comment, the action itself indicates that the capitalist is a completely evil, inhuman beast.

With the innovation in the art of plot-building as above, it can be seen that Vietnamese short stories in the early twentieth century have had remarkable changes. From the traditional dramatic plots, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were dramatic plots of Western literature - which was new to Vietnamese literature at that time.

2.1.3. Psychological plot

In the short stories of the early twentieth century, there was a type of plot that was almost never seen in medieval literature, which was stories without a plot - also known as psychological plots like “*Tossing and turning in the spring night - Trằn trọc đêm xuân*” by Man Chau, “*The dream - Giấc mộng*” by Cong Binh, “*Red chamber tears - Giọt lệ hồng lâu*” by Hoang Ngoc Phach, “*Tuyet Nga*” by Tung Toan, etc.

Tung Toan's short story “*Tuyet Nga*” is an example, in which the conflict in the story is not the social contradiction but the inner contradiction of Thanh Ha's character. It is the contradiction between this guy's desire to marry Tuyet Nga - a model of a beautiful, polite, virtuous and educated girl, with the desire to keep the brotherhood with Bang Ho - whom Tuyet Nga loves. It is also a contradiction between his desire to master Tuyet Nga's beauty and his desire to maintain the essence of a gentleman. The focus of Tuyet Nga's story has shifted from events to character psychology, from what is seen to what is felt, are the inner conflicts in Thanh Ha's heart before he comes to the decision to choose the most satisfactory solution in his love.

If in medieval short stories, events always play a major role, then in the early 20th century there were stories where events became blurred, the meaning of stories sometimes no longer lies in the plot, but in the way of telling and using story details to describe the inner and the world of people's feelings about life. As in Hoang Ngoc Phach's story “*Red chamber tears - Giọt lệ hồng lâu*”, there are almost no significant events, only the mood of brothel girl with so many sorrows spread in the work.

It can be affirmed that, with the appearance of this type of story without plot, the emotions and inner feelings of people - joys and sorrows, anger, jealousy, sadness, happiness, etc. have been expressed and spread out. If there were only the traditional type of story, which is heavily on social events, surely those inner feelings do not have the opportunity to express themselves like that. However, in the early days of its birth, the early twentieth century plotless type of story was still just experiments. In general, the

plotless short stories of this period still create a rambling feeling with sentences that have not yet reached the level of sophistication and the character's inner self is also very rampant. Therefore, it is not possible to convey to readers the “new shivers” by thoughtful and profound thinking about love and human life as in the works of Thach Lam and Thanh Tinh in the later period.

2.2. Innovations in the use of literary language

Short stories in the early twentieth century had a relatively equal presence of authors in both the South and the North. If the short stories of the early Northern writers (from 1900 to about before 1920) tended to refine sentences, Southern writers in this period tended to popularize the language, bringing the language of life into the work, making the sentences simple and easy to understand, showing the prose tendency of everyday stories. This shows both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the sentence will be less heavy like the tone of old literature. However, the quality of the work depends largely on the level of the writer, the creative effort as well as the refinement and choice of words of the author.

In Southern literature in the early period, although there were hundreds of short stories published in newspapers, most of them did not resonate. It was only in the later period (about 1920 onwards) that writers of both regions could overcome the limitations in using their own words, thereby creating works with vivid and attractive language.

2.2.1. Words

The first sign of modernity in the art of words of the short stories of this period was the limit use of Sino-Vietnamese words. In “*Who cares if you live or die - Sống chết mặc bay*” by Pham Duy Ton, there are only 16 Sino-Vietnamese words out of 1040 words in the work. Thus, on average, there is only 1 Sino-Vietnamese word for every 64 words. This ratio is remarkably small compared to works of Nguyen Ba Hoc, Man Chau, Phan Boi Chau, etc. Of course, Pham Duy Ton also has a number of works that use many Sino-Vietnamese words such as “*Unfaithful lover - Con người sở Khanh*”, “*Life is full of emotions - Nước đời lắm nỗi*”, and there are also works where the words are very flexible and lively with words imbued with everyday life.

Through surveying short stories in the early twentieth century, it was found that in most of the works from 1920, especially after 1925, the number of Sino-Vietnamese words is decreasing. This is due to the increasingly vigorous process of literary modernization, the development of the language of modern life, the increasingly obvious influence of Western literature, the increasing number of authors in Western studies, the gradual decline of authors from Sinology, etc.

Along with the gradual reduction in the use of Sino-Vietnamese words, which are heavily scholarly and somewhat separate from the people's everyday speech, many writers of this period paid attention to creating words with high visual and expressive value, thereby creating a strong artistic impression in the hearts of readers. As in “*Debt meal - Bữa cỗ nợ miệng*” by Le Duc Nhung, the eating scene of the dignitaries in the village is vividly described: “*Uncle Truong Cuu sat at the second table, having a playful personality, seeing the rare piece of meat keep bouncing, picked up a piece with chopsticks to see... Then he stuffed that piece of meat into his mouth, chewed and swallowed with one*

mouthful and said... ”. With just a few words, the author has captured the spirit and essence of Uncle Truong Cuu - one of the people who had an important role in rural society at that time. That is the living language of life. It is clear that the words in the short stories of the early twentieth century, besides the traces of the traditional language, there has been a rapid and valuable transformation towards modernity.

2.2.2. Language of literary works

The language of Vietnamese short stories from 1920 onwards has become modern: flexible short and long; Sentences are transformed dynamically. In many works of Man Chau, Vu Mien Nam, Nguyen Van Co, Nguyen Ai Quoc, Nguyen Cong Hoan, Tung Toan, Nguyen Khac Can, Le Duc Nhung, Vu Dinh Chi, Nhat Linh, The Lu, etc., language according to song, recitation, rhyme, poetry gradually disappear, replaced by the presence of more and more and more refined spoken language. This innovation is evident in both the narrative as well as the character's words.

a. Narratives of the narrators

The narration in many short stories of this period was closer to the language of daily life. Even in the work considered to be the first modern short story of Vietnam - *“The History of Lazaro Phiên - Truyện thầy Lazaro Phiên”*, Nguyen Trong Quan has used quite flexible words, not picky and beautiful, but evocative, re-establishing the shape of contemporary life. In the prologue, the scene that sets the scene for the encounter with the protagonist has been narrated to a point of clarity: *“The government clock has just struck eight o'clock in the evening, I have already taken the goods off the train to Ba Ria. The Jean Dupuis was supposed to run at ten o'clock, so what's the use of two hours left? I wanted to go ashore to walk around Saigon, but I was feeling a bit tired, so I didn't go up, I decided to go to the train yard to see if there was a chair to rest and watch the moon”*.

In the direction of bringing the language of daily life into literature, the writer of the South - Thai Binh Duong in the story *“Laughing to tears - Cười ra nước mắt”* also had very clear and simple narratives with high expressive value: *“Along the embankment of Thai Binh province, about fifteen kilometers from the railway, there is a small river, about three or four meters across. If you want to cross the river, you have to go on a bridge made of two bamboo trees, even the bearer must also walk on the bamboo bridge, walking for a long time, familiar with the foot, not afraid of danger. From the bamboo bridge to cross a field, the rice has just been planted, some places are still deserted, go a little further, there are five or six thatched huts, if you get it carefully, you will know that the village has been flooded and lost its crop last year”*.

In the narrative structure of the narrator, along with the narrative, there are descriptions of things, phenomena or actions, characters, character psychology, etc. Many short stories in the early 20th century had accurate descriptions, had visual, evocative and impressive value, contributing to the artistic value of the work. As in the story *“Who cares if you live or die - Sống chết mặc bay”*, prose language creates a lot of interest with precision in naming, defining, things and phenomena. Compared with literature and art decades later with excellent writers such as Ngo Tat To, Vu Trong Phung, Nam Cao, etc., the language of this work of Pham Duy Ton proved not to be inferior: *“On the new wooden pedestal placed in the middle, there was a parent officer*

sitting majestically. His left-hand rests on the folded pillow, the right leg is stretched out for a maid to kneel on the ground to scratch". Through that descriptive language, it feels like the object of the description is pulled close to let the writer describe each point of portrait and appearance, thereby portraying the character's personality. That is also the way that excellent writers of the next generation such as Nguyen Cong Hoan, Ngo Tat To, Vu Trong Phung, Nam Cao use when describing Huyen Hinh, Nghi Que, Nghi Hach, Ba Kien, etc. The narrative language of many works of this period has been enhanced, with more speed and information than that of medieval narrative prose. During a period of great social change, in the face of the requirement of modern literature, prose sentences, including those of short stories in the early twentieth century, need to be renewed and in fact there have been remarkable innovations.

Surveying the short stories in the first 30 years of the twentieth century in chronological order, it can be seen from the second half of the second decade of this period that there began to be a drastic change in prose syntax. The sentences are expressed in the direction of freedom, towards shortening the gap between art and the flow of life, creating vivid and new narratives and descriptions. Character psychology has also been captured quite accurately and described in a subtle way, as in the story *"Human horses and horse humans - Ngựa người và người ngựa"*: *"Weird, I don't understand what day it is, since afternoon until now he has only got two dimes! In the afternoon, the guests in brocade and velvet robes, walking around on the street, invited to tired mouth but no one hired, but now it's worse. The most frustrating thing is that sometimes the firecrackers explode, making him feel hot to the core. Thinking of the rich New Year scene makes him salivate ..."*.

It can be seen that in many short stories at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially at the end of this period, there were bright and modern narratives. Along with the innovation in the creation of character language, it has contributed to the modernity of the language of short stories in the early twentieth century.

b. Character language

First of all, it should be noted that the character language in many works at the end of the early twentieth century has a modern linguistic style, expressed in both monologue and dialogue language. It should be known that, if the dialogue language is used skillfully, it will make an important contribution to portraying the character's personality. Many short stories in the early 20th century had very lively dialogues, logically reducing the instructions of the narrator, leaving only the characters to respond to each other, giving the prose a much faster movement speed than medieval prose sentences. Many dialogues, in addition to providing information, also help the reader discover the intense conflict in the character's mood. This can be seen clearly when reading *"Who cares if you live or die - Sống chết mặc bay"* by Pham Duy Ton or *"Human horses and horse humans - Ngựa người và người ngựa"* by Nguyen Cong Hoan.

In many short stories, there are dialogues that use oral or everyday language to make sentences like ordinary speech, as in the belowing opening paragraph of the story *"The story of Pho Xe - Chuyện ông phó Xe"* by Nguyen Khac Can:

"- Why didn't you come back until today! Why are you limping like that?"

- Only you make me suffer. I told you to sell cheap rice, give him a few cents so he wouldn't hit me, but you wouldn't do it. My whole body swelled up here. I was so

humiliated when I was under the dike earlier, many people don't have money for them, it's really not as good as a dog”.

The short dialogue with a large amount of information above is used to start the story in a very natural way. Through that dialogue, the words of the villagers were raised in a genuine way. It is also an illustration of the democratization of language in literature which was promoted by the short story in the early twentieth century.

In addition to creating lively characters' responses, a number of short stories in this period have successfully built up the characters' inner monologues. As in Tran Quang Nghiep's story *“Meeting with a beautiful girl - Gặp người gái đẹp”*, there are quite impressive internal monologues: *“Master Muoi Truong silenced his thoughts. Bui The Nguon is a famous newspaper writer, what is this blue-green thing asking for? (girl in blue shirt) Or admire his journalistic talent? Or is it an old love that can't be clearly remembered today? People mistook me for Bui The Nguon, should I try to get it indiscriminately, maybe I can enjoy a little bit of feminine fragrance. Thinking so, he smiled and invited her to sit down...”*. Through that monologue, especially through the questions posed by the characters themselves, readers can see the thoughtful thinking of Master Muoi Truong, which partly shows the opportunistic personality of this man.

Thus, if the language of dialogue, when skillfully and flexibly constructed, helps to reveal the sharp character of the character, the inner monologue language, if it is freed from the old pattern, will also have the power to express strongly and truthfully the character's spiritual face. The passage above has successfully described the inner person of the character Muoi Truong. However, such internal monologues are quite rare in early twentieth century literature.

3. Conclusions

It can be seen that, at the beginning of the modern Vietnamese short story, there have appeared many works with important changes in the aspects of plot construction and use of words, expressing the sense of creativity and the spirit of bringing literature close to life. One of the main reasons for this innovation is that this period has begun to develop a sense of artistic creativity, including a sense of plot building and the use of words towards modernization. An even more direct influence is that in the early years of the twentieth century, more and more literature and books from the West were introduced in Vietnam. Western literary influence both in terms of theory and composition, including the theory of plot building and the use of words and phrases to Vietnamese literature is inevitable. Of course, the process of renewing oneself at this initial step inevitably still has traces of traditional art, clearly showing the transitional nature between the two periods of medieval and modern literature. In general, the art of plot-building and using the language of short stories in the early twentieth century (1900-1932) had encouraging successes besides unavoidable limitations. As a product of the beginning of the modernization process of Vietnamese literature, the short story of the early twentieth century has inherited both traditional elements while learning from Western literature to create modern signs. Those successes are one of the important prerequisites for Vietnamese prose, including short stories in the later stages towards perfection and modernity.

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TÓM TẮT

CÓT TRUYỆN VÀ NGÔN TỪ NGHỆ THUẬT TRUYỆN NGẮN VIỆT NAM ĐẦU THẾ KỶ XX NHỮNG BIẾN ĐỔI THEO HƯỚNG HIỆN ĐẠI

Hoàng Thị Thu Giang

Trường Đại học Hạ Long, Quảng Ninh, Việt Nam
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Từ cuối thế kỷ XIX, văn học Việt Nam bắt đầu có dấu hiệu đổi thay, chuyển biến từ phạm trù trung đại sang phạm trù hiện đại. Sang đến đầu thế kỷ XX, đặc biệt từ những năm 1920 trở đi, văn học Việt Nam dần bước vào quỹ đạo của văn học hiện đại một cách nhanh chóng và toàn diện với sự xuất hiện của nhiều cây bút sung sức với những cách tân nghệ thuật đáng chú ý. Ở truyện ngắn, thể loại “tự sự cỡ ngắn” vốn năng động và có điều kiện dễ bắt nhịp với sự chuyển biến của xã hội nói chung, của văn học nói riêng, điều này được thể hiện một cách rõ nét. Tiến trình hiện đại hoá của truyện ngắn giai đoạn này được bộc lộ trên nhiều phương diện, đặc biệt rõ ở phương diện cốt truyện và ngôn từ nghệ thuật. Bài viết này tập trung làm sáng những vấn đề này.

Từ khóa: Truyện ngắn Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XX; cốt truyện; từ ngữ; lời văn; văn bản ngôn từ.