

## **METHOD OF MYTHIZATION AND THE DISCOVERY OF REALITY IN VIETNAMESE NOVELS FROM 1986 TO PRESENT**

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**Abstract:** From 1986 to present, Vietnamese novels have had many changes, artists have faced many opportunities and challenges. They have kept searching and innovating to keep pace with the times and meet the needs of the readers. Following the writer's creative journey, the novels have proved not only the unity and inheritance but also their own unique features. That diversity is partly due to the fact that the writers have constantly searched for new ways of generalizing reality. Among them, the method of mythization has created a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional view of the world. So how does the method of mythization contribute to discovering the realistic essence of Vietnamese novels from 1986 to the present? That's the question this article addresses.

**Keywords:** Method of mythization; reality; novel.

### **1. Introduction**

From the perspective of creative methods, the method of mythologization is the technique of composing and organizing the text, giving the literary work a fanciful, strange color, attracting and engaging the readers into the work. Mythization, sometimes considered as a means of metaphorical depiction of the world, gives readers feelings or concepts about the writer's real world. To be more specific, mythization helps the writer express his feelings about the reality of life happening in modern society. Writers create literary myths on archetypal myths associated with contemporary issues. The interweaving and mixing virtual - real in the literary work will contribute to the strangeness and charm of the image, and that is the attraction of the literary works with legendary elements.

The method of mythologization, on the surface, is an element that belongs to the writing techniques of the modern novels (broadly of modern prose). However, the choice of the method of mythologization is related to a series of problems related to artistic thinking, creative conception, and the innovation, unleashing genre potential. Literary compositions using the method of mythization always create a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional view of the world, not only with the reality of life but also with the realities beyond the cognitive capacities of the human, help writers explore life in the unconscious dimension, uncovering the deepest thoughts inside each person.

## 2. Research content

### 2.1. *The method of mythologization - an indicator of the breaking out of the classical reflective pattern*

With a postmodern sense, Vietnamese writers realize that their time is the “age of the novel” and they are having a great opportunity to compose modern novels in the true sense. The literary mission with the former political pragmatism is no longer relevant in contemporary literature. The classical, formulaic style of writing, which did not fully reflect the realities of life, no longer appealed to writers' interest. They began to have new discoveries and experiments. The compositions contain elements of myth and fantasy that have brought new aesthetic tastes. At the very least, it creates the magic of the work, making the readers fascinated and captivated.

The use of the method of mythization in composition shows the writer's maturity in internalizing the cultural and literary treasures of mankind. It shows that the writer has understood the essence of literature, that is, often chooses his own path to explore and enlarge the margin of human imagination. More importantly, it is an indicator of a new approach to realism. The method of mythologization may not necessarily be the optimal choice, just an indicator, but it has the meaning of breaking up a routine, a composing inertia, breaking out of the classical reflection model to open up the way for more plentiful and more diverse discoveries. With the capacity for imagination, realistic materials are kneaded and infused with the breath of life to become specific, vivid, and attractive images that carry messages to the readers. However, writers are not completely dependent on reality but must reflect reality as it is. They are free to add, subtract to build unique and interesting characters and stories. Although the elements of myth, fantasy, and exaggeration are products of the imagination, they are also a means to reflect reality, reflecting the real through the unreal. Things that have never existed can be imagined and put in the works, infusing wings to people's imaginations, encouraging aspirations to actualize their dreams. The writer's imagination is mainly not the ability to create mythical situations, which are completely unreal, but the ability to create “defamiliarization”, to present common things in an unfamiliar or strange way. Thanks to that, the artistic world always appears shimmering, colorful, making an unforgettable impression on human emotions.

The motif of reincarnation can be considered a familiar motif in the literature. In fairy tales, the motif of reincarnation is more or less influenced by the extremely popular stories of former lives of the Buddha (Jataka). However, due to being secularized, those stories convey more than the customs and social conceptions of the ancient working masses. After 1986, Vietnamese writers still used this motif, but have applied “defamiliarization” to make the work more attractive, in which Nguyen Binh Phuong was a conspicuous face who have exploited the motif of reincarnation in various forms. It is a very abnormal transformation of the characters. The old man Hang in *The young die old* was incarnated in the life of the tree when he died: “He is dead. After taking him out, his chest was found to have an incision as wide as a hand span, which, if pressed against the tree-trunk, is the same spot where the bark is made a similar incision. A thick, dark red sap oozes from the tree trunk at the incision. When the old man was placed on the ground, it was discovered that he kept turning green and green like old leaves... His

hands were covered with conch leaves. The old man's hair is green (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2013, p. 54). In fact, the death of the old man Hang is intimately linked with his hobby, which was trees - his passion, so perhaps he was satisfied. Another example is the bizarre death of the old man Bien: "The dead old man is full of hair, no one can recognize his face anymore because it is covered with hair. His hand clutched a crumpled bundle of hell money. Owl marks appeared all over his back..." (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2013, p. 113). That is, when they die, they are resurrected in a different form.

In the literary work *A land full of people and ghosts*, we encounter a ghostly, mythical atmosphere. That's where "Satan was cut out of the household registration by the mortal" so he flooded into Gieng Chua hamlet. There "can't see anyone, all ghosts!" (Nguyen Khac Truong, 1999, p. 14). The existence of an intermixed ghost-human world which seems so absurd was indifferently incorporated into literary works. The reason is that the writer does not care about the clearly distinguishing between reality and fiction and because life is a complex structure, full of surprises, full of mystery. The nosy reality that is strived by prose in the renovation period along with a range of issues: cultural and custom issues, conflict with depraved customs and prefidice behind those bamboo stronghold village. Referring to this, Nguyen Khac Truong's novel proved to be quite excellent. He pointed out problems such as encroachment on public property, individualism, arbitrary way of doing business and above all, the problem of fierce conflicts between the clans that the revolution could not easily change. Due to dogma, childishness, ignorance, so many tragedies and dramas have taken place in that rural area. A suffocating atmosphere of Vu Dai village has returned to cover the small village of Gieng Chua, as something inevitable, when many-ears-incompetent people have many ears like Branch secretary Xuan Tuoi, like Thu, like Suu, etc. keeping authority in their hands. Moral corruptions such as "grave digging" for personal vendetta, denouncing his biological father in the Land Reform, etc. are living testaments to an era of "turbulence, black and white confusion, toads jumping up to be human! If one wants to get a foothold, he must choose the right. Even if the legs are shrug, it's still scornful in thought. Shrugging with the bad guys to get a big long-term. If not, then what to do." (Nguyen Khac Truong, 1999, p. 24). The autocracy and authoritarianism of the authorities have changed the concept of "revolution" in the opinion of the mass of the people. The revolution may have become a nightmare, an obsession for them.

Thus, through their literary works, the writers in renovation period have shown their maturity in their penmanship. They know how to free themselves from the simple, unchanging conception of reality, to express a particular conception of reality through imagination. Familiar subject matters and topics have been observed and reflected from various standpoints, creating a novelty, somewhat fanciful of things and occurrences, contributing to attractiveness and attraction to readers.

## ***2.2. The method of mythologization - an opportunity to evaluate the reality on a universal range***

The reality of life is the object of reflection of literature and is always a fertile ground for exploration. The writer's conception of reality will be expressed through their works. The realistic conception is directly related to the perception of the essence and the functionality of artwork. However, each writer has a unique conception of reality. Before

1986, writers often evaluated reality according to a certain political-ideological standpoint. There the writer must be “the faithful secretary of the times”, literature must reflect reality as it really is. Meanwhile, life is more abundant, and history is always something that can be reviewed and acknowledged in different reception and evaluation at each specific time. To avoid the narrowness and one-sidedness in the recognition and evaluation of reality, writers unhesitatingly used the method of mythologization. There is no imposition here, but only an evocation for readers to have a multidimensional view of reality, about the occurrences, characters, the incident happened, etc. because the world is immense, not everything can be explained by human beings. Moreover, the writer's interpretation using the method of mythologization should not be considered a fixed answer, it is only a suggestion. In other words, with the method of mythologization, the writers want to suggest other criteria to assess the reality. From there, readers will have a broader overview of reality, elevated to profound and universal philosophies. Therefore, this can be seen as an opportunity for writers to explore new layers of the reality of life full of these insecurities.

Describing the cause-and-effect philosophy, the literary work of Ho Anh Thai, *The apocalypse bell tolls in the human world*, has shown the depths of human beings by magical tricks. The three mysterious deaths of Coc, Bop, Phu are the punishment and the karma for the crimes they have committed. Coc died suddenly on the beach while having a dirty action with Mai Trung. Bop intended to kill Mai Trung by hanging, but he hanged himself: “Bop is swinging like a dummy in the middle of a rather large bathroom. A rope was tied around his neck, hanging from a hook in the ceiling. His face is bruised with blood, his eyes are wide open, his tongue stuck out” (Ho Anh Thai, 2009, p. 54). And Phu intends to kill Mai Trung by a car crash, he himself beared a catastrophic death like what he intended to do for others. The source of supernatural and invisible power in Mai Trung is also the punishment and karma for those who are lustful and have groped her. The punishment from her is unconscious, but whoever harmed her must pay for their own actions. That is Quoc Dai, the director of the company where she works: “Without saying a word, he hugged Mai Cheng and the two fell on the bed. Suddenly he felt cold there, as if his tool had turned into a block of ice. In just a moment of numbness, the lust flew away from him” (Ho Anh Thai, 2009, p. 144). Thus, in Ho Anh Thai's opinion, “the wrongdoers are destroyed by the bad things they intend to cause dignified people, a kind of self-punishment” (Ho Anh Thai, 2009, p. 347). In other words, when you want to deprive someone else's life, you must pay dearly for this, with your own life.

Not only that, *The apocalypse bell tolls in the human world* is also an attempt to neutralize evil. The character Dong is complicit in evil, participates in many entertainment affairs with his grandkids and commits to kill Mai Trung with poison, but thanks to Mien's story, Dong has awakened and is determined to shake off the evil to save his life and soul. Dong's journey to find Mai Trung is also a journey of repentance and honesty. Evil will be neutralized if people become disenchanting and repented. The victory of the goodness comes to a climax when he and Mai Trung climbed the pass, waded the stream, overcame the hardships to find and bring back her parents' remains. Dong has sown a good cause, so it will definitely reap a sweet fruit. That is the law of cause and effect. But, in this region of the world, how many wise people realize their

own sins, early awakening, repentance and benevolent direction to be like Dong? That burning question kept echoing, tormenting forever. It seems that with each work, Ho Anh Thai raises one more hope for soul purification: “The wrongdoers still can be enlightened, to be accepted back to the human habitation, not always getting punished” (Ho Anh Thai, 2009, p. 335). Forgiveness and strong faith in people are the tools to neutralize and eradicate evil, that is the message the writer wants to deliver.

*Me and them* of Nguyen Binh Phuong has raised another thorny issue of the realistic life, which refers a lot to cataclysmic occurrences of the war between Vietnam and China. It was the brave fight of the catch-python-couple when the wife alone beheaded fourteen enemys and dumped them in a mountain cave. Or the story that Thuan and his comrades were captured by the enemy but were not killed, being given enough food for organ harvesting, which is very scary. The image of nine girls being buried alive but their mouths still full of leaflets and the mysteries behind the name “grievance valley”. Especially the people's obsessions when falling into post-war tragedy. Returning home after the war, Thuan was so mad that he smashed all things related to the Chinese, becoming a half-dreaming, half-asleep madman. At mealtimes, Thuan still used his chopsticks to scrape his palm even though the rice bowl has fallen from his hand. His eyes are sometimes bright red, sometimes white, sometimes gray... The descriptions of the occurrences are interwoven between reality and fiction, making the work appear spooky, creepy, and even absurd. Obviously, coming out of any war, when returning to peacetime, it is impossible to live like an ordinary person. Hieu always lived in a vague mental state with trauma from memories gathered in his brother's diary and his own experiences. Standing between the inner - outer boundary, between dream - reality, Hieu always inquired about the existence and the mysteries in the being of each person, each phenomenon. The memories of the war, although they take up a small amount of space, are refracted through the narratives of bystanders, but full of intensity and obsession, have shown more clearly the other side of war, from a different perspective. It is the perception of war from the present time with the necessary backwardness for interpretation and contemplation. *Me and them* has broken through the type of war reality reflection, to penetrate deeper into the cultural, historical, and human psychology. War is acknowledged from personal destinies, therefore, interrogation of war in a comprehensive way with universal and humanity issues: War is not only about death and annihilation, where people become hostile, antagonistic, uncivilized, and return to wild instincts. Looking back on it is to face the past, must always be self-aware and not to oversleep in the present. It is a way of recreating life from the ruins, devastation, and destruction of the past and it gets human to think about the issues not only of an ethnic, a nation but also of all mankind. Thus, the reality reflected in *Me and them* is just a cover, Nguyen Binh Phuong has taken advantage of it to express other philosophies of life.

It can be seen that, the writers in renovation period always observe the realistic life from different standpoints. With their sharp pen, the curtain of lack human affection which has been known for a long time but avoidance, has been lifted. All exposed stripped bare, honesty and painful. Since then, the writers have sent messages of humanity, spread the faith in life to the readers.

### **2.3. The method of mythologization - necessary condition for discovering the multifacetedness of the reality**

Post-1986 prose keeps rising to try to feel what is in *the depths of reality*, which to grasp it does not rely only on the common senses or logical method. To do this, perhaps most young writers are quite aware of the myth principle and use it as an effective method to create depth and charm of the work. The *depth* to which the writers aim for is to discover the reality not only at the conscious level but also at the unconscious and subconscious level. Because they could not find attractiveness in the familiar reality, they tried to find the strange and the extraordinary. Using the method of mythologization is to create defamiliarization and virtualization of the reflected reality. It seems that writers want to accompany readers to look deeper, look further, see the invisible things that govern the life of humanity. And it is no coincidence that the concept of fate has always haunted people's thoughts. F.M. Dostoyevsky, a famous Russian writer, once commented that: "I have a totally different conception of reality and realism than our novelists and critics. My idealism-is more real than their realism". The illusory here performs the function of defamiliarization, the familiar life is now observed in a new form with new standpoints which is more objective.

Dreams are the realization of the character's spiritual life. Discovering this "hidden corner", the writer Thuan has made a big step forward in expressing the insecurities, aspirations and inner contradictions hidden in the character's unconscious. It is the hidden desires, dreams with secret conflicts, insecurities, and obsessions, etc. that have become the reasoning and the originator of all occurrences. Thanks to that, the problems related to human essence in the present day have been explored. The character "I" in *Chinatown* considers dreams as an indispensable part of his life: "For the past twelve years, my dreams, sad or funny, have always been Vinh, me, and Thuy. I didn't know dreaming was harmful to me as commented by Ms. Feng Xiao. I also don't know if it has become a part of my daily life for a long time. Without it, if I hadn't lost my glasses, I'd have forgotten the key. I like dreams that last from night until seven in the morning. I also like dreams that connect day to night, night to day, during the two summer months... Short dreams often come suddenly when I'm alone in the teacher's lounge..." (Thuan, 2005, p. 123). The wishes of "I" as mentioned above are somewhat contradictory to the words "I" once shared: "Each of my dreams is a tragedy" (Thuan, 2005, p. 40). Dreams like tragedies weighed heavily on the tired sleep of a woman in her forties. But she longs to dream, longs to have dreams that are interminable over the years. The character seems to want to deny reality to live with endless delirium. The state of "delirium" for the character is as permanent (night dreaming, day dreaming, dream while sleeping, dream while awake, dream in winter, dream in summer, etc.). What does the character get in those "tragedies"? Is that the greatest "tragedy" in the character's life? Surely reality for the character is a big nightmare like "I" himself shared: "The biggest nightmare of my life is not to see Thuy again". Anyway, "tragedy" is easier to accept than "nightmare" because in "tragedies" I can also meet Thuy and live a life with Thuy by her side. And reality is the worst nightmare - twenty-three years have passed, I have never seen Thuy again, I don't know if Thuy is alive or dead. However, in every little moment of my life, I still do not stop thinking about Thuy. His departure is a sharp scratch that penetrates the heart, leaving in "I" an excruciating pain with a wound that

will linger for the rest of her life. Write about character's haunting dreams, in fact, Thuan wants to describe the occurrences, the pain ingrained in the consciousness of the human, which are indelible through the years, are incessant obsessions tearing the heart, are spiritual wounds that cannot be healed...

Dreams are the essence of the unconscious. Unlike other symbols that work independently, the dream symbol is an extremely complex symbol. It's not just because dreams are associated with the elusive subconscious, unconscious region of people, but also because that to explain and decryption dreams, it is necessary to go through other symbols, which appears in the dream itself. In Nguyen Binh Phuong's compositions, dreams appear in the lifetimes of most of the characters. The character is always struggling between the real and the virtual, between the real and the dream, hidden memories deposited in a dream or a wish to run away to escape from the reality of life that is weighing heavily, or to satisfy unfulfilled desires, or express some restless dream, etc. Through the dream, the author can mention many things, the inner world, personality, character's soul, and social life are mapped through that interiority. Taking a phrase of the character in the work, according to the author, what comes in a dream is the most "real", "in the dream people can't steer themselves. Dreaming is indulging and entrusting...". Thus, it can be said that Nguyen Binh Phuong has used the dream motif to approach and recreate the real world that is chaotic, complex, multidimensional, unsystematic, non-principle, disordered, unable to be attributed and ordered according to the subjective wishes of people. Dreams become a basic element participating in the structure and organization of the plotlines in Nguyen Binh Phuong's novels. In *The original*, the author intentionally statistics the dream in the annotate: Tinh (7 times), Hien (4 times), Mrs. Lien, crazy lady, Hung (1 time). In *The absent* (20 times): The character Hoan (4 times), Mr. Dieu (2 times), old man Dieu, Thang, Son, Ki, Mr. Khanh, Cuong, Nam ... (1 time). In *The young die old* (12 times): Ong (4 times), Mr. Truong (2 times), Ong's father, Chi, Ms. Cai, Hai, Loan (1 time). In *Declining memory* (4 times): Em (3 times), Hoai (1 time). In *Sitting* (25 times): Khan (15 times), Thuy, selling potatoes woman (2 times), Minh, Xuan, Nhung, soldier, Quan's parents (1 time).

Nguyen Binh Phuong is always sparing his word when describing dreams, without commenting or interpreting, completely respecting the dream's own language: it's usually the images and sounds that are assembled in an irrational way. Let's try to explore the dreams of the character Tinh: In the dream, the image of Tinh appears disfigurement and contorted, distorted, chaotic and crazy fool. "Dreaming" comes to Tinh anywhere, anytime, at night and during the day, while standing and while sitting: "Tinh sits down and collects ants (...) Closing his eyes, in the wobbly darkness, an ear riding on the back of an old horse appeared". Dreams are overlapping: "In Tinh's dream, Hien was dreaming that two mantises were biting each other" (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2014, p. 40-51). Tinh lives a very secluded life in the dim world of dreams, and he always confuses dreams with reality:

*"Night of 2<sup>nd</sup> day*

The path is deep smoking hun. There are a few fallen dry branches. A knife used to poke a pig's blood was floating in the sky. The knife gave off a strong fragrance. Tinh raises his hand towards it but couldn't reach it. The knife is always fragrant, sometimes it wobbles and circles around.

Hung appeared, laughing, then suddenly squealed, turning into a pig's face.

The knife turned opaque white.

Mr. Khoa came, the knife stuck out and licked the cross on his neck. There was a very loud scream. Wake up.” (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2014, p. 143).

The storyline of *The original* is guided by dreams, from Tinh's dreams to Hien's dreams. It is a dream that reveals the mind of a girl who accidentally got married with a non-normal husband. Hien yearns for a happiness, even instinctive desires, Hien can't get it. The realistic world appeared through those chaotic dreams: a Thung Nham in the past with the image of Yen The insurgent army and A Thung Nham of the present which is not too gloomy but also not very brilliant, where people are immersed in their own plans, considerations, needs, desires, suffering and incapacitation.

The storyline of *Declining memory* is also guided by the dreams of the character calling “Em”, Vu, and Hoai. “Em” has confessed that, “The eyelids kept closing, the petals of the flowers were also closed at night. Sleep with flowers even though the time is different. Walking in the sleep, gently and light touching”. “Em” just like that, naturally fall into a dream like “walking next to thin mists, gentle colors” (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2006, p. 15). So does Vu, always live with gentle, smooth dreams, like being lost in a shimmering, fanciful world. Vu's dreams are as timid as he is: “In sleep, there are dreams, just like in the sea there are small, timid and discreet snails” (Nguyen Binh Phuong, 2006, p. 51).

The old man Truong in *The young die old* dreams of dreams like the instructions of fate and always do what was told by the dreams. The whole family lives and works, worries, and desires, lives the dreams of their head of the family. In the novel *Sitting*, the storyline is also directed by the dreams of the character Khan, which also comes regardless of time and place. Through dreams, the past and even the present are re-enacted. Thus, the “dream” plays an important role, if not the main factor in creating and connecting the storyline in Nguyen Binh Phuong's novels. Dreams create mysterious worlds, stimulating the reader's curiosity.

The dream also became an obsession in the work *The angel's repentance* of Ta Duy Anh. A girl whose husband works at a tax office suffers a tragedy even though she herself has not committed any fault. Before the temptation of money, her husband committed murder. He himself had to pay the price with a torment of conscience, “live in the feeling of interminable running away” (Ta Duy Anh, 2000, p. 29). However, more miserable is his wife through three pregnancies, three times unable to keep her own little creatures. Every night, horrible dreams returned to her, like a harassment, a torment, like a spiritual epiphany.

Dreams have been used to exploit and explore the inner world of people. In addition to the mysterious spiritual life, dreams also contribute to deciphering the desires, worries, contemplations, and torments of people between the vicissitudes of human existence. Dreams are also the root of myths because they are associated with human spiritual life. The reader's attention is directed to a strange world, which goes beyond the norm, the inherent experience but still has something familiar. To a certain extent, writers are continuing to write fairy tales for the present - shimmering, fanciful but still very ordinary.

### **3. Conclusions**

From the above analysis, we can see the significant role of the method of mythization in expanding the reflected reality. The reality found at the present is the reality that is perceived and felt at the unconscious, subconscious level. Based on such a new thought about reality, contemporary Vietnamese fiction is very concerned with people in its integrity. Writers can not now be satisfied with describing social people, instinctive people, but also pay special attention to spiritual people. The spiritual man has convinced the fastidious readers in his ability to prophesy, spiritual epiphany, living with multiple time dimensions, even in an interminable delusional state of mind. And especially the writer explores the life in the unconscious dimension of people to help uncover the deepest thoughts inside each person. The diverse human world reflected in the novels is an image of the painful reality of life with issues of moral corruption, domestic violence, insensitivity between people, etc. Is it because of that, the legendary world is also another version of life?

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## TÓM TẮT

### PHƯƠNG THỨC HUYỀN THOẠI HÓA VỚI VIỆC KHÁM PHÁ HIỆN THỰC CỦA TIỂU THUYẾT VIỆT NAM TỪ 1986 ĐẾN NAY

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Tiểu thuyết Việt Nam từ 1986 đến nay đã có nhiều chuyển biến, các nghệ sĩ đứng trước nhiều cơ hội và thử thách. Họ phải tìm tòi sáng tạo không ngừng để bắt nhịp với thời đại và đáp ứng đòi hỏi của bạn đọc. Có thể thấy ở hành trình tiểu thuyết, một mặt là tính kế thừa, thống nhất, một mặt là sự đa dạng, cá biệt vốn là những chỉ dấu của sáng tạo cá nhân. Sự đa dạng, phong phú đó một phần có được nhờ vào việc các nhà văn không ngừng tìm kiếm những phương thức khái quát hiện thực mới mẻ. Thuộc số những tìm tòi ấy, phương thức huyền thoại hoá đã tạo ra cái nhìn đa diện, nhiều chiều về thế giới. Vậy phương thức huyền thoại hoá góp phần khám phá bản chất hiện thực của tiểu thuyết Việt Nam từ 1986 đến nay như thế nào? Đó là điều mà bài viết này muốn đề cập.

**Từ khoá:** Phương thức huyền thoại hoá; hiện thực; tiểu thuyết.