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THE IMPRINTS OF POSTMORDERNISM IN NOVEL *3.3.3.9 [FRAGMENTS OF NAKED SOULS]* BY WRITER DANG THAN

Dấu ấn hiện đại trong tiểu thuyết 3.3.3.9 [Những mảnh hồn trần] của Đặng Thân

Hồ Thanh Liêm
Học viên cao học Trường Đại học Sài Gòn

ABSTRACT

Dang Than is a writer who has devoted a lof of enthusiasm to creating content and writing techniques. With postmodern imprints he can express a personal ego that is both modern and somewhat monstrous. The novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of the naked soul]* is the artification of his postmodern vision and thinking. With a postmodern sense, the writer has built a special visual world of chaotic, multi-faceted, multi-valued, blurred reality and people with broken beliefs. With bold postmodern imprints, the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]* is Dang Than's unique contribution to the development of Vietnam's postmodern literature.

Keywords: *Dang Than, postmodern imprints, Fragments of the naked soul, novels*

TÓM TẮT

Đặng Thân là nhà văn đã dành nhiều tâm huyết cho việc sáng tạo ra nội dung và kĩ thuật viết mang dấu ấn hậu hiện đại, thể hiện cái tôi cá nhân vừa hiện đại vừa có phần quái dị. Tiểu thuyết *3.3.3.9 [những mảnh hồn trần]* là sự nghệ thuật hóa nhãn quan và tư duy hậu hiện đại của ông. Với cảm thức hậu hiện đại, nhà văn đã xây dựng một thế giới hình tượng đặc biệt về hiện thực hỗn độn, đa diện, đa trị, mờ nhòe và con người với niềm tin đổ vỡ. Với những dấu ấn hậu hiện đại đậm nét, tiểu thuyết *3.3.3.9 [những mảnh hồn trần]* là một đóng góp độc đáo của Đặng Thân cho sự phát triển của văn học hậu hiện đại Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: *Đặng Thân, dấu ấn hậu hiện đại, những mảnh hồn trần, tiểu thuyết*

1. Introduction

Dang Than is one of the famous bilingual poets and writers, representing the generation of Vietnamese writers composing in the post-modern direction. He showed his own style of composition in the post-renewal prose realm. Dang Than did not recreate the war or exploit the topics too deeply after the war, but he followed the trend of "serious jokes", that is using the art of satire and redicule to give an assessment of social reality and war. With his wisdom and sensitive heart, emotion along with rich living experience and the ability to reflect life in his own way, Dang Than has created works with

Corresponding author: hothanhliemdhdt@gmail.com

bold modern imprints and received warm welcome from readers and literary critics. It can be said that Dang Than's literature is like an ore mine with many floors and deep seams to be exploited, especially *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]* is a novel with many unique innovations in thought and art.

2. Contents

2.1. Postmodern theory - the basis of Dang Than's innovation and artistic creativity.

The term "postmodern" was first used in England in 1870 with a proposal by the painter John Watkins Chapman in recognition of the new style of painting. Later, this term was commonly used in many fields, including literature. Postmodernism is a way of seeing the world and people, the inevitable result of the era of science and technology that are developing like a storm. Postmodernism denies logical thinking and aims to develop the volume of inaccurate, uncertain, and sometimes chaotic knowledge. Many writers who follow in postmodern direction will believe in randomness, believe in their own subjective consciousness, and self-awareness.

While in the world, postmodern literature has achieved many achievements, Vietnamese literature in the late 20th century was still struggling to find new development directions. However, later, writers innovated themselves by changing their artistic conceptions and approaching new ideas and theories from the West. Many writers have boldly received and created postmodern theories, innovated the concept of the world and people, innovated the way of writing style and exploited many new technical elements. The compositions of Nguyen Huy Thiep, Nguyen Binh Phuong, Ho Anh Thai, Nguyen Viet Ha, Dang Than... all have many innovations in the postmodern direction.

With a strong sense of artistic innovation, writer Dang Than had many concerns in his journey to find his own path, approach postmodernism and shape an erudite but creative and condensed writing style, expressing a unique ego and a new view of the world and people. His works are imbued with postmodern imprints when creating a multifaceted, chaotic world with many unrealistic and absurd realistic episoded of fantasy and absurd reality, promoting narratives, randomly using tricks of fragmentation, assembling, mockery, language creation... These are distinctive artistic features of postmodern poetry that Dang Than used in his literature.

2.2. Postmodern imprints in the novel 3.3.3.9 [Fragments of the naked souls] from the perspective of the world and people

2.2.1. Multifaceted, chaotic, decentralized world concept

Dang Than's novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of the naked souls]* has shown a rather bold postmodern imprint, the most obvious manifestation is the concept of the world. It is the visualization of a chaotic, multi-faceted world with many lines from the big story revolving around history, culture, tradition, humanity to the integration of small stories related to music, literature, travel, language, news... There, human life with monstrous characters, exaggerated emotions and actions. The writer has evoked a multi-dimensional, complex life with many intertwined ladders and multi-

linear writing throughout five character lines: 1. Grandparents A Bong, 2. Schditt, 3. Author, 4 Mong Huong, 5. Netizens. Each of these character lines evokes a huge amount of information, forcing readers to understand the strange world that Dang Than has just created.

The work *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of the naked souls]* is a multi-valued world, synthesizing a series of issues, trends, and ideas, both accepting and upholding the spirit of criticism. Events and events related to many life issues raise many urgent questions about people's values and beliefs for life. In the love story between Mong Huong and Schditt, the author has built the collision of two different worlds. Both characters are contradictory in language, culture, thinking, personality. Mong Huong approaches Schditt just for money, fame and sex, while Schditt is looking for pure love. It is the love story that run through this work that raises the issue of love without borders, showing the impact of cultures and human thinking. However, it does not stop at telling love stories or discussing about culture, Dang Than also expands this world's border to the chaotic stories of daily life. There are the story of monks leaving the temple to get married, the story of reincarnation the UK in the press, the story of restaurant attendants serving customers poorly. Everything piled up, intertwined with all kind of light and dark colors about the reality of life, forcing readers to illuminate and separate each event from the original love story.

The author has erased all geographical, spatial boundaries, aspects from history, culture, society... which are intertwined in the work. Dang Than tries to combine the fragments of life into the same world so that all the colors of life, both negative and positive are clearly visible and integrated into the world of the *Fragments of Naked Souls*. The writer told the story of Mong Huong and Schditt who met at Wind restaurant, then suddenly interjected in the story of the article about reincarnation cases in the UK and discussed about politicians, folklore and Vietnamese wisdom: *"I told Schditt stories like this article was full of Vietnamese fairy tales... I myself have never dared to disregard the intelligence of Vietnamese people...' Those who have that power... are all good politicians. They are too good, not kidding... In recent times, I have only briefly seen Vietnamese idioms that I have seen great, very, very great words..."* (Dang Than, 2011, page 47). And the stories go on actively, one event after another, making it impossible for readers to guess which event will be mentioned next. The author can mention from very macro issues such as natural disasters, terrorism, wars to trivial things, daily life, outdated habits... with a unique, sometimes very unexpected and interesting perspective *"the flip side of that "German quality" was the cause of the terrible defeat in World War I and World War II..." "Mr./A Bong arrived at the Wind restarurant 55 minutes late. It can be said that this is a great representative of "rubber civilization"* (Dang Than, 2011, page 26). Dang Than also expanded the decentralized, diverse world by breaking down on hegemonic ambitions, wanting to change the world order according to the unique ideal. The character of Hitler was built as an ambitious dictator in World War II. And finally, he became a sinner of

human history as an end that proves that the desire to be hegemony is an unattainable ambition. The world in the novel has been opened, embracing many events, many values, showing a multifaceted, multi-dimensional realistic view. With a slightly "chaotic" presentation, from one story "jumping" to another, sometimes just down the stream, Dang Than has created a decentralized world, no country, no territory, no nation is the center.

In the context of blurry space, all stories are scattered, sometimes stories are not linked together but reproduced through the writer's imagination and each character represents a journey of thought. The author plays the role of narrator and constantly creates events and topics according to the novel circuit, from Vietnam to Europe, from history, politics to daily life... This makes the literary world seem confusing but helps readers to expand their perspective and to approach all events with a deep critical thinking. That world is chaotic but not completely messy, but linked in its underground circuit. Dang Than's thoughts and messages are revealed through each story and although they do not have intersections, he also tries to connect and build a unified picture of philosophy, religion, geography, history... With a deep human perspective and rich knowledge, the writer has created a work with religious colors and contains many problems, deeply reflecting the multifaceted and complex reality of postmodern society. From there, the writer expresses the value of life by portraying how each character solves their own problems, loves and removes conflicts. It takes insight and reflection with great love for people and life for Dang Than to be able to pose problems and resolve them so neatly and understandingly.

2.2.2. The concept of people being skeptical, lonely, corrupted

Dang Than has many creations about how to see and discover people in the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]*. His characters are all people who exist in the midst of a multifaceted world and wear a monstrous mask in real life. The main character of the novel is Schiditt - a German intellectual businessman with a family and complex pedigree. He represents people who discover personal identity based on the concept of origin. "Schdit" plays the role to find his roots when he returned to Vietnam to live and work as his mother and himself wished. However, the deep purpose inside the character is to find a love to fill a lonely and lost heart. Schditt wears this mask because he always wants to show the world strong aspects, tries to cover his weak corner. Dang Than always creates a source with deadlocked events, force the character to leave his comfort zone to explore the world around him, thereby he can discover his own personal identity. In his journey to find his roots, Schditt wants to learn Vietnamese to understand more about the people and country of Vietnam. However, behind that effort, Schditt felt vague, doubtful about life, about his roots, he seemed to be depressed because of the great loss that haunted. It is a twisted love for a beautiful Muslim girl that makes him extremely miserable but still unrelentingly obsessed with the beauty, attraction and fragility of love. This is a characteristic sensory expression of people, they possess fragile, fragile egos. When the journey to

find themselves being falls into a stalemate, they are extremely worried and afraid, despite of their efforts to search, their being will still sink, sometimes disappear without a trace.

Mong Huong's character represents a young girl of young generation, who is a provincial student but want to wear a stylish urban girl mask, entangled in challenging fun and bumpy fun on the verge of corruption. 'Starting from the love story with Tran Huy Bop: *"Bop is crazy about Huong is like someone reveres pagodas" Everywhere he goes, people funk him, but standing in front of Huong, he likes a young rabbit"* (Dang Than, 2011, page 69). 'But a fierce playboy like Bop: *"Thieft, robbery, stabbing people, vandalism of schools, smoking marijuana, drugs, drunken, raping girls, running away from home for a month, skipping school often..."* (Dang Than, 2011, page 169) it is difficult to get Huong's love when she is looking forward to changing her life. After an early love affair with Bang, Mong Huong fell into a series of erotic adventures with Mr. Son, with a theater school student, then a ward officer, flashy and bland love affairs. The climax of the corruption, nausea, and deflection of Mong Huong's character was when she became a "sugar baby" called girl specializing in hunting rich men. Huong has lost herself, can't find the purpose or meaning of real life. Through this character, Dang Than clearly shows readers a human situation in contemporary society, they have great wishes but don't have enough internal strength, bravery and certain personality maturity to achieve, while it is not uncommon for weakness and fall. The writer's insight is consociative of a common social phenomenon.

The postmodern consciousness that appears in Dang Than's work is also about building a world of skepticism and broken beliefs. The writer allows the central characters to appear in the context that space or time is blurred, there is only one thing left, the skeptical mind. Schditt's grandfather character after the battle, he returned disoriented, lost hope, no longer motivated to strive for anything when the past war had eroded his youth and was also his purpose of survival for a long time.

In the chaotic world of the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]*, Dang Than also made a postmodern mark when he exploites the image of a lonely person ontologically. Typically, it's the character of grandfather Schditt. Once a soldier in battle, he lost himself, no longer motivated to live in search of anything. People like Grandpa Schditt suffer from deep mental crises. This is a common situation in postmodern discourse, showing human impasse, insecurity and panic in the face of the chaos and dizzying variability of life. This situation also leads to the ability to delude oneself or put yourself at the center. The writer used the method of personification to put people "on the scaffold 'mocked, became a joke, fragmented into fragments in the midst of an illusory or personal world.'

Dang Than has twisted inside his novel a naked real world in which people have to live in the middle of the line of pain, humiliation, struggle or corruption. Nausea characters in works such as Mong Huong or Bop have all kinds of bad habits, from passion for lust, to fraud and corruption. However, the meaning of the narrative in the novel lies in the fact that

the author creates a person who seems to be living temporarily in human guise. The writer still wants Huong to be reborn, must understand the finiteness of human life, to break his own awareness since she knew Schditt. Mong Huong is a person who rebels because of the breakdown of world-septical values. She still wears a cover mask at first, but gradually because of the chaos of the world, she must clearly show the dark part of herself. Like the character of Bop - who is also corrupted because of life fluctuating, because of psychological trauma, personal memories and social impact, Huong is a representative of loneliness, longing for love but deviating to immersion in sensuality and money. No matter how corrupted, their sins come from hearts that yearn for love and closeness. It can be seen that Dang Than pointed out the causes of human corruption and also proposed a redemption path for them.

The message that Dang Than wants to convey in *Fragments of naked souls* is the fate and the finiteness of human life. Fates lack the same attention as the lives of many people in postmodern society. From skepticism, loneliness, corruption, people wear masks on the stage of life, turn themselves into others, live in a guise that they themselves cannot recognize.

2.3. Postmodern imprints in the novel 3.3.3.9 [fragment of naked souls] from artistic tricks

In the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragment of naked souls]*, Dang Than used some clear postmodern literary art tricks. Here the author has applied the method of fragmentation and assembly to create a world separated from many axes. The chaotic, multifaceted, non-centered world developed by the author is in the love story between Mong Huong and Schditt. The writer expands the field of space and time for many other characters to participate around the main plot. In the flow around the main character, the writer also assembles the love adventure of Mong Huong's past, the life story of Bop, of Schditt's grandfather, Hitler's grandfather, making the story open to many branches, many intertwined lines, it will be difficult for readers to recognize what is the main character or event. Dang Than has created a chaotic world, regardless of class, character or storyteller, real or virtual, but generalizing all to create the multifaceted color of reality.

Texture is also a distinctive aspect that clearly shows the postmodern imprints in the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]*. Artistic structure - is a form of organization of work, which implies the link between content architecture and specific art in order to create the integrity of the work as an aesthetic phenomenon. In the novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]*, the author uses intertextual textures through quotes, collages of other texts such as poems, articles, short stories, letters, research articles... For example, excerpts of articles on reincarnation in England, excerpts from Schditt's letters to lovers, English poetry, historical stories related to Buddhism, Christianity, Pope... create a diversity of intertextual materials, merging non-novelrical genres inside the great novel.

The author also uses random textures with events that take place non-selectively, with neither a journey nor an end. The author only raises the issue of ‘life’ and lets readers answer the meaning of the story for themselves. The ending in the

novel is also the beginning of the characters meeting at Wind Restaurant and Mong Huong breaks up with Schditt. Schditt has high expectations for love, family and national pride, but he wants to give up, to end his love affair with Mong Huong with a separation, a disappearance, leaving without goodbye. Schditt was bewildered in his chosen paths to seek being, asserting his self-worth. Mong Huong is the character line with the most thrilling fate, telling about the journey from a provincial girl to a village girl with a quick fall to escape the shadow of the poor countryside. At the last minute, readers do not know how her end will be, whether to pay for a loose lifestyle or still find a happy shore. It can be seen that the author creates a postmodern world that is random, does not arrange and promote natural life as it is, but also full of coldness and indifference.

The second artistic trick is a diverse and flexible change of narrative points of view. In addition to the perspective of Schditt and Mong Huong, the author also gave a narrative point of view to Mr./A Bong - acting as an evaluator, commenting *"Hai Phong is a unique place of Vietnam" "It's both urban and rural; having the asmosphere of the Northern Delta and it is a "Defense Place" and Hai Phong is place with many industries with an international trading port; both cultural and vulgar; both passionate and fierce* (Dang Than, 2011, p. 344). At the end of each chapter, Dang Than transfers the narrative view to Netizen's [key] Commentary such as ben t, Khanh Lam, loinho, Tran X, nhan, Post-archaeological, phamngoctien, nguyen lieu, Quasimodo... with language from adolescence, hybrids and the East-West cultural blended that makes the story suggest many new dimensions.

3. Conclusion

Novel *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of the naked souls]* has sharply and vividly revealed the reception and creation of postmodern theory in Dang Than's literary composition. 'The writer has succeeded in creating his own style, an "own brand" that is rich in experience and reflection where he is able to describe the prosperous, chaotic world and the fate of people wearing masks, loneliness and lost in the middle of the times. The tricks and techniques used in *3.3.3.9 [Fragments of naked souls]* are also quite typical of postmodern literature, which are multilinear and unstructured art with fragmentation, plot assembly, intertextual methods, random textures... The deep message ideas that the novel conveys from the text underground circuit and sharp postmodern writing have proven Dang Than's talent and his contribution to the development of Vietnamese postmodern literature.

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