



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Archetypes of Natural Ecology in Works “Endless Fields” And “River” By Nguyen Ngoc Tu

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**ABSTRACT**

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In the context of industrialization taking place all over the world, people are gradually losing connection with nature, many writers have composed literary works to affirm the sustainable relationship between humans and nature. Nguyen Ngoc Tu is a typical writer of contemporary Vietnamese literature. This writer wrote many works of fictional prose, typical of which are short stories and novels, boldly expressed the life and people of the South of Vietnam. The collection of short stories "Endless fields", the novel "River" are two representative works of Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose. The results of a survey of typical works such as the collection of short stories "Endless fields", the novel "River" show that this author represents archetypes such as water, earth, trees, wind, clouds, sky, fields, fire, smoke, boats, dock, woman, dream... The most typical natural ecological archetypes in these works are water archetypes, soil archetypes and tree archetypes. These archetypes bring different meanings. The common point of these archetypes is that they have existed for a long time, demonstrated the long-standing bond between humans and nature, created sympathy in the hearts of readers. This article presents the forms and meanings of natural ecological archetypes in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose. From there, the article contributes to presenting and explaining ecological issues in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose and her contributions to contemporary Vietnamese literature.

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### INTRODUCTION

Mythology is the scientific study of myth. In particular, myth is understood as mythical concepts about the world scattered throughout the cultures of ethnic groups, from stories, religion, art... Mythology has its roots in the study of ethnology. It studies legendary documents of peoples around the world. Through a process of persistent development, mythology has made great contributions to human understanding of myth. One of the main theories of myth is psychoanalysis with two typical representatives: Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) established the concept of “Archetype” in 1912. The term “Archetype” is also known as ancient traces, primitive images, super-images, original models... According to Jung, these are “psychological factors that cannot be explained by an event that occurs in an individual’s life, they seem to be innate, from the beginning, they are a part of the spiritual inheritance of humanity” [1,96]. The archetype is the concrete existence of human spiritual experience. It has strong vitality in human creative activities, especially literature. Understanding archetypes in literary works will reveal the original form and function of archetypes in legendary thinking and its transformation in literary works. Thereby, the value of the work is not only discovered in terms of content and art but also in the depth of human culture.

Writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu is a typical writer of contemporary Vietnamese literature. This writer wrote many works of fictional prose, typical of which are short stories and novels, boldly expressing the life and people

of the South. This article examines the collection of short stories "Endless fields", the novel "River". They are two representative works of Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose. The writer has shown natural ecological archetypes such as water, earth, trees, wind, clouds, sky, fields, fire, smoke, boats, dock,... These archetypes have different meanings. The common point of these archetypes is that they have existed for a long time, demonstrate the long-standing bond between humans and nature, create sympathy in the hearts of readers. This article presents the forms and meanings of typical natural ecological archetypes in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose. From there, the article contributes to presenting and explaining ecological issues in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose.

## **2. OBJECTS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Research objects**

The research objects were identified as typical ecological archetypes in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose. This article examines Nguyen Ngoc Tu's typical fictional prose works, including the collection of short stories "Endless Fields" (including 14 short stories), the novel "River".

### **2.2 Research methods**

The primary research methods in this article are ecocriticism and archetypal criticism. At the simplest level, ecocriticism studies how the relationship between humans and nature is expressed in literature. At a higher level, ecocriticism studies society as an ecological environment: the relationship of social factors in literary works such as feminism, the impact of industrialization on the environment, the role of rural and urban areas,... Archetypal criticism studies the form and meaning of archetypes existing in literary works. The author of this article has conducted a survey of the work and identified archetypes of nature. The article presents the form, original meaning of archetypes in myths and the form, meaning of archetypes in works. The writer has been able to update the archetypes with new meanings, bring the breath of modern life.

## **3. The natural ecological archetypes in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose**

This article examines some of Nguyen Ngoc Tu's typical works, including the collection of short stories "Endless fields" (including 14 short stories), the novel "River" by writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu. This article shows that this author represents archetypes such as water, earth, trees, wind, clouds, sky, fields, fire, smoke, boats, dock, woman, dream... These archetypes both represent the life and people of the Southwest region as well as spiritual memories of humanity. Among them, the most typical natural ecological archetypes of these works are water archetype, soil archetype, and tree archetype.

### **3.1. Water archetype**

Water archetype is often divided into many distinct forms such as seas, rivers, streams, lagoons, canals, wells, rain, clouds... According to "Dictionary of world cultural symbols: myths, dreams, customs, gestures, forms, shapes, colors, numbers", the water archetype has many meanings "the symbolic meanings of water can be reduced to three dominant themes: source of life, means of purification, center of regeneration. These three themes are common in the most ancient legends and form the most diverse and coherent image combinations" [4,709]. Indeed, water can bring life and fertility. Water flowing from the source, the water of life, is considered a symbol of the origin of the universe. Furthermore, water with its pure nature can purify all things and has the power to save lives.

The geographical conditions of the Southern region include both fresh water sources with interlaced rivers and canals, as well as salt water sources from the sea. This land is crisscrossed with rivers and canals. In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose, the water archetype is the archetype that appears most often. This archetype appears mainly in the forms of seas, rivers, canals, and rain. People often row boats and take ships to catch shrimp and fish; to sell goods; to move from house to house, from region to region... Some short stories with the archetype of water in their titles include "Remembering the River", "Stream of Memories" ("Endless field"). The novel "River" is about an unreal river - the Di river. However, the Di river has all the characteristics of the most real rivers in the world.

Specifically, the water archetype in the fictional works of Nguyen Ngoc Tu is the source of life for people and creatures in the South. Rivers, canals raise creatures in their hearts. At the same time, rivers and canals also nurture people. People catch fish, shrimp... to maintain life. Floating markets on the river are bustling with buyers and sellers, such as the Ca Mau floating market in the story "The vast sea of people", the 379 floating market in the story "The river of memory"... The lives of many characters are closely linked to the river. In the story "Remembering the river", Mr. Chin's family lives on a boat on the Cai Lon river. Giang got married and returned to the mainland. However, Giang often rowed his boat to the river because she couldn't forget the river. In the story "Remembering stream", my character said "My father is a man of the river" [6,131]. There are even many floating villages "when the water rises, the village rises, when the water falls, the village falls" [9,223]. The archetypal water in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose also carries the meaning of purification and regeneration for humans. The Bag area of the Di river is associated with an ancient story: people suspected of crimes were taken to the Bag area. Anyone who can swim back to land will automatically be believed to be innocent. For many characters in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose, when people are sad, they return to water to find purification and comfort for their souls. Even in the novel "River", the characters return to water as a form of liberation. An and two friends, Boi and Xu, went on a trip to explore the Di River. Each person brings their own feelings. An carries the pain of being betrayed in love. Boi carries sadness when he is always lost in the family. Xu was originally an orphan and wants to understand his identity. Finally, these characters reached the Bag area - the widest place of the Di river, and then disappeared. No one knows where these characters went.

The water archetype in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose represents ecological issues, especially natural ecology. Water nourishes and protects, but is also ready to flow and sweep away all things. Water contains many dangers and threaten human life. In the novel "River", people see Di river as a creature with personality and emotions "The people of Nine intersection call the river "grandmother". Patient and gentle, tactful and seemingly harmless, but full of rancor and danger" [9,33]. The Di river pulled the Tam Suong restaurant into the water, and the Bag area of Di river swallowed many lives. Lack of water or salty water has affected humans and creatures. In "Endless Fields", Nuong's family passed through a vilage that lacked water. Lack of water causes the rice plants to die, the ducks to starve, and the people to become devastated. Thus, water represents nature's own power. The relationship between people and water is an inseparable relationship. In general, the water archetype in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose still retains its original meaning but expresses the life and emotions of modern people.

### 3.2. Soil archetype

Soil is where people and things travel, live and exist. The soil gives birth and nourishes all things. That's why the earth archetype is one of the oldest natural archetypes: "Earth is identical with the mother, soil is a symbol of fertility and regeneration. The soil gives birth to all living things, nurtures all species and then receives from them the germ full of fertility." [4,288]. According to researcher Nguyen Thi Thanh Xuan in "Myths and Literature", soil archetype are extremely important "documents on philosophy and culture in Vietnam, when referring to the Vietnamese cosmology in particular (and the East in general) often cite the first pair of opposing categories as earth and sky, corresponding to mother and father, yin and yang" [3,285]. The Muong epic "Give birth to land and water" with the character Da Dan mentioned very early about the ancient couple of land and water.

In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose, characters can live on both water and soil. The soil gives birth and nourishes all species. People are attached to the roof, the fields, the gardens... In the story "Loving knossgrass", the land here is a poor island but life is still filled with emotions. The character loves the island very much. In the story "Remembering the river", Mr. Chin, even though he lives on a river, still believes that his wife has "become water, become soil, become grass, become trees..." [13,127].

In the collection of short stories "Endless fields", the fields become urban areas, the sea encroaches on the land, the fields dry up, the soil is exploited to exhaustion. In the novel "River", the Di river once washed away plots of land and houses. Also in this work, the white poinciana tree and row of stilt houses disappear to

make room for a commercial center. A mountain is in danger of cracking because it has been carved out by humans to extract lime-burning rock. When the land is damaged, people's lives become difficult, many people have to leave to live elsewhere. The relationship between people and land is a closely interdependent relationship.

### 3.3. Tree archetype

The archetypal tree is meant to represent life and circulation. Besides, trees can also have connection with high levels of the universe. Researcher E.M.Melentinsky said that there are plants "capable of maintaining the connection between humans and gods, between heaven and earth to fulfill the task of intermediary" [2,284]. The cosmic tree is said to be of two types. The first is "Humanoid gods often blend with the cosmic tree" [2,282]. Second, the connection between earth and sky can be "a path following a tree trunk growing straight up, following a column, a mountain, following the links of interconnected terminals, following a rainbow, following a ray of light, following a ladder..." [2,286]. Researcher Trinh Ba Dinh determined about the cosmic tree: "In the mythology of Vietnamese ethnic minorities, the symbol of the cosmic tree, also known as the world tree, is The naming of some types of trees is described as massive, majestic, and giant. These trees are called cosmic/world trees because their roots are hidden in the ground and their branches reach up to the sky. The tree is everywhere seen as a symbol of the established relationships between earth and sky" [15,196].

In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose, the ancient tree represents life. Trees feed people. People's lives are closely linked to rice fields. Besides, trees also have lives like humans. In the novel "River", the character Xu loves taking pictures and cherishing wild plants. He found similarities between himself and the plants. He was also once an orphan. Growing up, he was still anxiously searching for his roots. In the short story "I love knossgrass", the character compares himself to a tree: "My life is a water hyacinth, it can flow anywhere" [13,20]. In the short story "Different Fates", the old scallop tree is Xuyen's soulmate. It witnessed Xuyen leaving her child for someone else to raise. Every night, when Xuyen misses her child, she goes to the old scallop tree to find comfort. In Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose, sacred trees also appear. These trees connect earth and sky. They contain supernatural powers. In the novel "River", the nine-top "bia ia" tree was struck by lightning eight times and still did not die. This tree protects a temple. Many ghost stories are told about this tree. This tree makes everyone in awe.

When industrialization takes place, the life of trees is threatened, and human life also becomes miserable. The story collection "Endless fields" and the novel "River" describe rice plants dying due to lack of water, fields having to give way to urban areas. In that situation, people are also deprived and devastated; many people had to leave elsewhere to find life. Thus, the lives of plants and humans have many similarities. This demonstrates the close relationship between humans and nature.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The collection of short stories "Endless field" and the novel "River" are typical works of writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu, of Southern Vietnamese literature. The work shows the rich culture, life, and people of the South. The most typical archetypes in these works are the water archetype, the soil archetype, and the tree archetype. Each archetype has a different form and function. Water is not only a source of life but also a place where people are born and raised. Water can make people purified and reborn. Soil archetype is the source of life, the place where people are attached. Tree archetype is not only a source of life but also carries life like humans themselves. These archetypes all demonstrate the close relationship between nature and humans, expressing humans desire to live in harmony with nature.

Based on the archetypes, Nguyen Ngoc Tu's fictional prose has a sense of human myth about life and world. Those are the concepts that all things are spiritual, the loneliness in front of the vast universe while humans are small, human life is finite... Those concepts still exist today, when science seems to have enlightened all. Writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu has great love for her homeland. The writer has immersed the characters and readers in the archetypal natural ecological world of the Southern region; expressed the desire to live in

harmony with nature in a context where the living environment is threatened. With these works of fictional prose, writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu has carefully selected and transformed what has come out of tradition. She gives the archetypes new meanings that breathe realism and express progress in art reflecting life.

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