
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Archetypes and the Process of Innovation in Modern Vietnamese Women's Poetry

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| ABSTRACT

Archetypes, understood as universal psychic structures embedded in the collective unconscious of humanity, have undergone significant transformations when entering the realm of modern literature—particularly in the landscape of contemporary Vietnamese poetry. This paper explores the interrelation between archetypal motifs and feminine sensibility in the works of Vietnamese female poets from the late twentieth to early twenty-first century. Grounded in Carl Jung's archetypal theory, Hans Robert Jauss's reception aesthetics, and critical methodologies including archetypal criticism, myth criticism, and the psychology of artistic creation, this study aims to elucidate the evolving significance of archetypes in modern poetic discourse. Focusing on a selection of recurring motifs—namely Water, Darkness, Dream, Mirror, and Mask—found in the poetry of several prominent female voices, this article argues that archetypes are not static structures but dynamic sources of transformative energy. In the hands of female poets, archetypes become instruments for reconfiguring traditional poetics, subverting gender stereotypes, and constructing nonlinear, polysemous narratives. These functions contribute to the shaping of feminist discourse and the redefinition of feminine identity in modern society through the poetic interplay of language, cultural perception, and symbolic imagination.

| KEYWORDS

Archetype, poetic innovation, female poets, contemporary Vietnamese poetry, feminist discourse.

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1. Introduction

The term *archetype* denotes a dynamic and highly evocative concept in the domain of artistic creation. According to Carl Jung, archetypes are primordial images and symbols embedded in the collective unconscious of humankind. These archetypal patterns manifest in diverse forms across the myths, religions, and literature of various cultures.

Archetypal studies and criticism constitute a globally recognized theoretical orientation within the humanities—particularly in literature, artistic psychology, and cultural philosophy. This orientation underscores the profound interconnection between culture and literature, between art and belief systems, and between psychology and ethnology. As such, archetypal criticism has significant interdisciplinary appeal and is particularly well-suited for research within the social sciences and humanities.

Beyond its academic allure, the study of archetypes also holds interpretive power, enabling the decoding of multilayered discourses ranging from myth to allegory, from condensed intellectual insight to emotional and spiritual expressions. In Vietnam, archetype studies remain an emerging field with promising potential. Researchers are called upon to engage in deep reading and cultural deconstruction, uncovering latent symbolic meanings and collective memory embedded in poetic imagery.

The archetypal model, although rooted in Western psychological theory, reveals mythic dimensions within Eastern philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities. Archetypal criticism thus opens interpretive possibilities grounded in Vietnamese literary material—across all periods—revealing enduring cultural sediment and intergenerational dialogues.

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Contemporary Vietnamese women's poetry, especially over the past fifty years, embodies a rich array of stylistic innovations and expressive depth. Among these innovations is the reinterpretation and symbolic recreation of archetypes. We may hypothesize that the reappearance of archetypes—infused with feminine consciousness—functions as a call from the depths of collective memory. Such memory is not merely personal or nostalgic, but shared across generations, spaces, and epochs.

The poetic embodiment of archetypes revives dormant dimensions of the collective unconscious, distilling them through aesthetic distance and reflective reading. Through poetic language, archetypes are reanimated—not as static templates, but as evolving structures that inspire new meanings. This article focuses on the "meaning-making" of archetypes within the artistic language and aesthetic vision of modern Vietnamese female poets.

Three core concepts underlie this inquiry: archetype, innovation, and women's poetry. These converge to suggest that archetypes, as rendered in the poetry of Vietnamese women, are not immutable forms but rather latent energetic fields for transformation. They enable content to be reconfigured through new perspectives, challenge conventional gender ideologies, and serve as poetic tools for nonlinear, ambiguous, and multilayered expressions. Moreover, archetypes play a critical role in feminist discourse, facilitating the redefinition of feminine identity in modern society through language, cultural resonance, and symbolic insight—thereby opening discursive pathways into the spiritual values of women.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Archetypal Research in General Literary Studies

One of the earliest and most foundational works relevant to archetypal criticism is *The Golden Bough* by James G. Frazer, a vast anthropological study of rituals, myths, and archetypes across world cultures. This work, first published by Macmillan and Co. in the United Kingdom in 1890, investigates magical-religious rites, sacrificial kingship, and the cycle of life-death-rebirth, laying the groundwork for archetypal analysis in both anthropology and literature.

Of particular significance to this study is Carl Gustav Jung's essay *On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry* (1922), later included in the collection *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* (1950), published by Princeton University Press. In this foundational text, Jung distinguishes between two models of poetic creativity: one conscious (psychological poetry), in which the poet exerts rational control over meaning through personal experiences and reasoning; the other visionary, in which poetry emerges from the deep layers of the psyche, beyond the poet's conscious control. Jung identifies this latter source as the *collective unconscious*—a psychic reservoir containing *archetypes*, or universal symbols and images embedded in human psychology. For Jung, these archetypes are not only psychic residues but also poetic languages, with recurring motifs such as the Mother, the Hero, Darkness, and Death-Rebirth forming the symbolic vocabulary of deep literary creation. Crucially, he argues that true poetry activates the unconscious of its readers, evoking not only intellectual engagement but psychological resonance. He suggests that literary criticism, particularly psychoanalytic approaches, should listen to what the artwork reveals through archetypal symbols rather than reduce it to explanatory frameworks.

In the twentieth century, Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (1934), published by Oxford University Press, applied Jungian theory to literary analysis, exploring how archetypal forms shape human imagination and poetic meaning. G. Wilson Knight, in his influential article "The Literary Archetype: Some Reconsiderations" (*The Hudson Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1948, pp. 327–342), revisits literary archetypes and their structural impact on narrative form. Joseph Campbell's classic *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949, Princeton University Press) profoundly influenced archetypal criticism through the "monomyth" model—the hero's journey—which became a key analytic tool in literature, cinema, and comparative mythology.

Northrop Frye's groundbreaking essay *The Archetypes of Literature*, published in *The Kenyon Review* (Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 1951), and later reprinted in *Fables of Identity* (1963), argues that recurring mythic structures and archetypes form the foundation of all literary expression. His theory laid the basis for structuralist and myth-critical approaches to literature.

In a more recent context, Ronald J. Faber and John Mayer's article "Resonance to Archetypes in Media: There's Some Accounting for Taste" (*Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 43, No. 3, June 2009, pp. 307–322) explores how modern mass media engages archetypal figures. The authors propose that emotional resonance with archetypes can reflect individual personality and life narratives. They introduce the Rich Culture Archetype Scale (RCAS), which maps archetypes across music, film, and classical art, offering a psychological framework for audience analysis.

In the Vietnamese context, Le Huy Bac's essay "Archetypes as Literary Intersemiotics" (*Journal of Literary Studies*, No. 12, 2015) offers a compelling view of archetypes as intersignifying structures. Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogism" and Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, Bac extends the concept of archetype beyond mythic modes to include modern symbolic configurations that later generations may consciously or unconsciously imitate. According to Bac, literature possesses transformative potential as a medium for generating new archetypes and cultural meanings. He emphasizes the archetype's role as a semiotic catalyst—an interface between aesthetic representation and cultural consciousness.

Collectively, these works reflect a diverse range of perspectives on how archetypes shape literary narratives and influence cross-cultural storytelling. They provide a valuable foundation for interpreting the presence and transformation of archetypes in both classical and contemporary poetic traditions.

2.2 Archetypal Research in Modern Vietnamese Poetry

In Vietnam, archetypal criticism is emerging as a fertile field of inquiry within the humanities, offering an opportunity to formulate innovative scholarly hypotheses rooted in cultural and literary analysis. One of the earliest and most notable contributions is Nguyen Thi Thanh Xuan's essay *In Search of Archetypes in Vietnamese Literature* (*Journal of Literary Studies*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 105–130), which explores the manifestations of archetypes across Vietnamese literary traditions. She emphasizes that while archetypes originate from the collective unconscious, they also carry an inherent autonomy: "each archetype arises from a unique origin and possesses a distinct energy." Her analytical readings of Vietnamese poetry serve as foundational examples for archetypal interpretation in a national context.

In 2009, Nguyen Thi Thanh Xuan expanded on this subject with *Archetypal Criticism and the Water Archetype in Vietnamese Literature*, published in the anthology *Vietnamese Literary Studies: Possibilities and Challenges* (World Publishers). This work identifies the water archetype as a symbolic site of multiplicity—representing both vitality and destruction—thus highlighting the archetype's semantic duality.

Other scholars have continued this exploration. A group of authors—Hoang Thi Hue, Nguyen Thi Tan, Le Nam Linh, and Nguyen Thi Hai Linh—published *The Archetypes of Light–Darkness, Reality and Fantasy in Vietnamese Poetry after 1986* (*Journal of Science, University of Education – Hue University*, Vol. 1(53), 2020, pp. 32–39). This study examines the archetypal resonance of darkness as a metaphor for the spiritual unconscious and sacred ambiguity, and light as a symbol of rebirth and transcendence. Their insight that "the archetype of sunlight awakens a desire to begin new journeys of freedom and feminine pride" (p. 37) illustrates how archetypes catalyze poetic subjectivity.

In a related study, Hoang Thi Hue's *Reflections from the Ego Symbol in Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry* (*Journal of Science – Hue University*, 2015) discusses the ecology of ego-centered symbolism, emphasizing the personal signature of poets. Meanwhile, Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan investigates *The Infernal Archetype: From Folklore to Medieval Vietnamese Tales* (*Journal of Science – Hue University*, No. 63, 2018, pp. 21–29), proposing that the "Hell archetype" reveals the writer's desire for spiritual liberation.

Nguyen Thi Ai Thoa's essay *Mythical Thinking and the Archetypes of Water and Fire in Some Contemporary Vietnamese Novels* (*Journal of Science – Hue University*, No. 01(49), 2019, pp. 45–53) offers further development. She interprets water as a symbol of purification and rebirth (p. 47) and fire as a representation of destruction, shame, and passion (p. 50). Her conclusion affirms that "through mythic thinking, these archetypes shape imaginative landscapes and enrich narrative structure with symbolic vitality" (p. 52).

A psychoanalytical and myth-critical perspective is also evident in Pham Khanh Duy's article *Decoding Archetypes in Modern Vietnamese Short Stories* (*Journal of Science – Dong Thap University*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2021, pp. 77–87). He discusses transformations of the earth archetype—from original landscapes into symbolic representations such as graves, hills, and tombs (p. 81). He also analyzes archetypes of shadows, ghosts, and the maternal figure Au Co (pp. 84–85).

Bui Van Nien contributes *Archetypes of Deities and Demons in Mo Muong* (*Journal of Science – Hue University*, Vol. 133, No. 6D, 2024, pp. 5–19), exploring the mythic journey between the underworld (*Muong Ma*) and the heavens (*Muong Troi*) through conflicting archetypes of divine and demonic forces. He asserts that these figures belong to the collective archetypal memory of humanity (p. 17).

In a literary essay, Bui Manh Nhi analyzes the journey archetype in *Nguyen Binh: A Poet for All Times* (published online at [vanvn.vn]). He identifies the “departure–misstep” archetype as a metaphor for existential evasion, culminating in the insight that “the only journey of true value is the inward journey into the self” (p. 20).

Extending archetypal criticism to the theatrical genre, Bui Tran Quynh Ngoc’s article *An Archetypal Reading of Luu Quang Vu’s The Soul of Truong Ba, The Flesh of the Butcher* (*Journal of Science – Ho Chi Minh City University of Education*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2019, pp. 34–45) analyzes the soul–body archetype. She notes that the drama’s central tension stems from the metaphysical incompatibility of soul and flesh, representing a timeless existential dilemma (p. 42).

In another contribution, Huynh Thi Dieu Duyen’s essay *Hoang Cam’s Poetry from an Archetypal Perspective* (*Journal of Science – Phu Yen University*, No. 28, 2021, pp. 12–21) identifies the archetypes of Sacred Sound and the Self as central to Hoang Cam’s poetics. She observes: “Sacred Sound and the Self constitute the poet’s innermost emotional landscape... serving as conduits of personal intensity and cultural resonance” (p. 21).

The line of research continues in Chu Le Phuong’s *Archetypes in the Works of the Loạn Poetry School* (*Journal of Science and Education*, No. 02(46)/2018, pp. 53–61). She highlights the recurring motifs of Moon, Soul, and Blood, noting that Loạn poets wrote about the moon in both conscious and unconscious dimensions (p. 56) and rendered blood as an obsessive archetype of poetic intensity (p. 60).

Finally, in *Identifying Archetypes in the Poetry of Xuan Quynh* (*Journal of Science – Hong Bang International University*, No. 21, January 2023, pp. 99–108), Pham Khanh Duy identifies three archetypes—Water, Earth, and the Mother—as recurrent motifs. He concludes that decoding archetypes in Xuan Quynh’s poetry “offers a route to recover traces of myth in modern Vietnamese literature” (p. 107).

3. Methodology

3.1 Archetypal Theory

Archetypal theory originates from the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. One of his most important theoretical propositions is the concept of archetypes—universal images, motifs, and narrative structures embedded in the deepest layers of the human psyche. To account for this phenomenon, Jung proposed the notion of the *collective unconscious*, a transpersonal psychic domain that houses these archetypal forms. Within this framework, literature is seen not merely as a personal or aesthetic endeavor, but as an expression of collective symbolic structures. Consequently, literary works are not isolated creations but part of a broader cultural system that reflects the recurrent patterns of human experience.

Archetypes, according to Jung, do not operate as static templates, but as dynamic symbolic structures capable of adaptation and renewal. They provide a meaningful foundation for the symbolic imagination, manifesting through literary motifs, narrative forms, and poetic imagery. Archetypal theory thus enables an interdisciplinary approach that connects literature with mythology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. It also allows for the simultaneous investigation of both collective psychic portraits and individual creative identities within poetic works.

3.2 Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) was developed by the Constance School in Germany during the 1960s–1970s, with Hans Robert Jauss (1921–1997) as its founding figure. This theory marked a paradigmatic shift in literary studies—from viewing the literary work as a self-contained object to conceiving it as part of a dynamic interaction between text, reader, and cultural history. Jauss’s framework places the reader at the center of the meaning-making process, emphasizing that literary value and interpretation arise from the reader’s engagement with the work over time.

A key contribution of Jauss is the concept of the *horizon of expectations* (*Erwartungshorizont*)—the set of knowledge, aesthetic norms, and cultural experiences that shape a reader’s encounter with a text. According to Jauss, literary history is fundamentally a history of aesthetic effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), and the reception of a text varies across cultural and temporal contexts. Literature, therefore, participates in an ongoing dialogue with its audience. This model supports an inclusive, intercultural, and temporally open-ended view of literary interpretation. Jauss’s theory lays the groundwork for contemporary approaches that combine discourse theory, intercultural hermeneutics, and aesthetic philosophy.

3.3 Archetypal Criticism

Archetypal criticism, rooted in Jungian theory, offers a critical method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting archetypes within literary texts. This method involves naming and categorizing archetypal images, reflecting on their structural and

psychological functions, and examining the cultural discourses in which they are embedded. Archetypal criticism treats literary symbols not only as aesthetic devices but also as carriers of deep psychic meaning, often tied to myth, memory, and collective identity.

The approach encompasses multiple levels of textual analysis: image, motif, symbol, and archetype. By investigating how archetypes emerge, evolve, and interact within the poetic structure, this method enables scholars to uncover the underlying psychological and cultural mechanisms of both the author's creative process and the reader's interpretive response.

3.4 Psychology of Artistic Creation

This approach links literary theory with psychological inquiry, particularly through the lens of creativity. Drawing from the work of Lev Vygotsky and others, the psychology of artistic creation posits that artistic expression is a social-psychological phenomenon. Art, in this framework, is not merely an emotional outpouring but a culturally mediated, cognitively rich form of communication that reflects and shapes collective human experience.

According to Vygotsky, the aesthetic effect of a literary work is produced by the interaction between *emotional content* and *artistic form*. His proposed "emotional mechanism" offers a conceptual model for understanding how readers respond to art on both a cognitive and affective level. This methodology is particularly useful for analyzing poetry, especially in the context of female authorship, as it helps to decode how archetypes function in the emotional and symbolic registers of the text.

3.5 Creative Psychoanalysis

Creative psychoanalysis focuses on the relationship between the poet's inner world—dreams, unconscious impulses, and personal memory—and the poetic image. It offers a nuanced framework for studying the continuity and transformation of archetypes in literary texts. While respecting the traditional, symbolic dimensions of archetypes, this method also reveals how contemporary poets reimagine or reconstruct these motifs.

In the context of modern Vietnamese women's poetry, creative psychoanalysis enables a deeper understanding of how personal experience, social context, and symbolic tradition intersect in the act of poetic creation. It allows for a dual perspective—honoring the legacy of archetypal motifs while highlighting the innovative strategies through which female poets reappropriate them to assert voice, agency, and identity.

4. Discussion and Findings

Throughout the fascinating trajectory of poetic innovation, each historical inflection point witnesses poets anchoring their creative wings to new foundations. Vietnamese women's poetry, in particular, has developed a distinctive voice within this continuum of renewal. Female poets have generated profound aesthetic marks through their unique perspectives, emotional sensibilities, symbolic selections, and lyrical echoes. The process of poetic innovation in their work reveals several key tendencies:

- **The emergence of a multifaceted lyrical subject:** Women poets have asserted a diverse, layered, and sometimes fragmented poetic self—simultaneously vulnerable and defiant—engaged in the construction of linguistic authority and gendered identity. This subjectivity is not confined to conventional poetic models (e.g., the romantic dreamer or the spiritual pilgrim), but extends into realms that blur boundaries between tradition and modernity, individual and collective. The autobiographical dimension transforms the lyrical subject into an interior narrator.
- **An expanded affective interiority and multimedia poetic space:** These poets often traverse symbolic encoding and direct description, navigating taboo zones, ambiguous spaces, and emotional shadows. Their work explores the depths of feminine psychology within modern conditions, extending into visual poetry, performance poetry, and interdisciplinary installation art.
- **A hybrid modern-postmodern sensibility:** Their poems are imbued with existentialist traces, symbolic mutations, and surrealist motifs. The engagement with cultural archetypes is intertextual and pluralistic, particularly in the reinterpretation of the female body—shifting from objectification to empowerment. Their work both dismantles and confronts traditional constructs through poetic rupture and reinvention.
- **A redefinition of reception and discourse spaces:** With the rise of digital platforms, open-ended interactions have fostered a dynamic and mobile poetic culture. Trends such as "poetry as state of being," "poetry as diary," or "poetry as action" have emerged. These tendencies contribute to the shaping of feminist and ideological discourses through poetic practice. Experimentalism is evident in many aspects: the relationship with the reader, the performativity of the authorial figure, transcendental language, unexpected structures, and free-flowing verse untethered from classical metrics.

Among these innovations, **archetypes** serve as an especially powerful and resonant force in the creative journey of women poets. They engage with archetypes through intuitive depth and emotional intensity—manifesting the sensitivities, vulnerabilities, and inner strength of the feminine psyche.

Over the past five decades, contemporary Vietnamese poetry has undergone radical transformations—not merely in form but in philosophical orientation. Female poets, in particular, have played a vital role in shaping a new discourse on feminism, gender, and identity. By situating archetypes at the center of this inquiry, the present study aims to illuminate their significance in three interrelated dimensions:

4.1 Archetypes as Vehicles of Poetic Innovation (Re-defining Traditional Archetypes)

As outlined in the theoretical framework, archetypes are enduring structures within the symbolic memory of humanity. However, when reactivated in the poetic language of women, these structures become potent catalysts for renewal. Female poets do not merely repeat inherited forms—they transform archetypes into sites of poetic regeneration, producing new cultural landscapes, new thought structures, and new emotional terrains. Each reconfiguration of archetype redefines not only content but the poetics of perception and experience itself.

Archetypes thus offer a hidden infrastructure for poetic innovation. Through them, women poets challenge inherited myths, interrogate societal norms, and project new subjectivities. In many cases, this process emerges as a dialectic between memory and imagination, history and reinvention, trauma and healing. The poet's engagement with archetypes becomes an act of resistance and re-visioning—carving space for feminine consciousness to unfold and to speak.

4.2 Archetypes as Instruments of Anti-Poetics (Subverting Traditional Forms)

While archetypes serve as bridges to cultural memory, they also function as tools for deconstructing traditional poetics. In the hands of contemporary female poets, archetypes become aesthetic strategies for dismantling hierarchical structures of meaning and undoing linear, patriarchal narrative frames. This creative subversion is particularly evident in how the female body is represented—not as a silent vessel of symbolic projection, but as an empowered, autonomous site of meaning-making.

Such approaches disrupt established literary conventions. The poetic act becomes an insurgent gesture—a rewriting of form, identity, and voice from previously marginalized positions. Archetypes enable poets to perform this disruption not by abandoning tradition, but by re-entering it through irony, inversion, and symbolic ambiguity. The result is a new poetic language that is elliptical, performative, and embodied.

4.3 Archetypes as Foundations of Feminist Discourse and Contemporary Identity

From a feminist literary perspective, archetypes offer fertile symbolic terrain for constructing feminist discourse and articulating contemporary feminine identity. Rather than reproducing masculine-centered cultural codes, women poets reinterpret archetypes to foreground subjectivity, agency, and epistemological autonomy.

By re-signifying such motifs as darkness, masks, mirrors, dreams, and water, they reimagine femininity not as passivity or mystification, but as strength, desire, and intellectual vitality. Archetypes thus become *cultural-psychic foundations* for feminist discourse, enabling the emergence of a voice that is both critical and creative—both reflective and resistant.

The poetic reconstruction of archetypes is simultaneously a process of *self-definition*: not as essentialist or static identity, but as fluid, dialogic, and performative. In this way, archetypes serve not only as aesthetic material, but also as symbolic habitats where gendered identities can be rehearsed, negotiated, and reclaimed.

4.4 The Water Archetype: Regeneration, Love, and Feminine Depth

The archetype of *water* possesses a unique spiritual and symbolic history. As one of the most primal and universal images of human consciousness, it originates from humanity's earliest experience of the natural world: water as the first condition of life, the protective medium of the womb, the element of survival and rebirth. Many ancient civilizations deified water—from the goddess Tiamat in Babylonian myth to the primordial ocean *Nun* in Egyptian cosmogony, to the river and sea deities of Greek, Indian, and East Asian traditions. In mythological systems, water is not simply a physical element but a source of original energy, the *chaos* from which all creation emerges—a metaphor for the cosmic and psychic currents of life.

The symbolic significance of water is profoundly dualistic: it both creates and destroys, heals and overwhelms. It nourishes but also drowns; it purifies but also erases. Thus, water becomes a representation of the eternal cycle of birth–death–rebirth, of fluidity and transformation in both the universe and human consciousness. In Jungian archetypal psychology, water symbolizes

the *collective unconscious*—a reservoir of primordial desires, fears, and ancestral memory. Dreams of water are often interpreted as journeys into inner consciousness, reflecting the processes of purification, transition, and spiritual awakening.

In religion and spiritual cultures, water further serves as a symbol of redemption: baptismal water in Christianity, sacred rivers in Hinduism, the nectar of *amrita* in Mahayana Buddhism—all express the yearning to return to a spiritual origin. Consequently, water appears across literature, art, and ritual as both a familiar and metaphysical presence. Whether as a teardrop, a stream, a storm, or an ocean, water evokes life, memory, and a sense of transcendence beyond the rational.

In Vietnamese women's poetry, the water archetype appears in diverse and emotionally rich configurations. One of the most poignant manifestations is its transformation from a destructive force into a symbol of feminine resilience and spiritual rebirth. In Lam Thi My Da's wartime poem *Khoảng trời, hố bom* (The Sky, the Bomb Crater) water becomes an emblem of inner strength and quiet heroism:

I look down into the bomb crater
It has turned into a small pond
So clear
A purple water lily emerges.

In these lines, the bomb crater—once a mark of death and destruction—is transfigured into a “clear pond” that reflects both the heavens and the soul. The water lily blooming from the wound of war becomes a feminine symbol of renewal. Water here not only restores but transcends; it purifies memory and reasserts the luminous dignity of women warriors, blending gentleness and valor.

In Xuân Quỳnh's iconic love poem *Thuyền và biển* (The Boat and the Sea), the sea—a variation of the water archetype—signifies the pain of separation and the perseverance of love:

The days we don't meet
The sea whitens with longing
The days we don't meet
The boat's heart shatters in pain.

These lines, among the most celebrated in Vietnamese love poetry, portray the sea as an aging, enduring force. The metaphor of “white-haired waves” lends emotional gravitas to the suffering and steadfastness of love. Here, water embodies not just desire, but the quiet endurance and emotional strength often associated with the feminine.

In Vi Thuy Linh's *Mưa trong em* (Rain Within Me), water takes a more intimate and mystical turn:

Inside me, rain is falling
No one knows
I sit quietly
My tears merging with the rain.

The external rain fuses with the poet's inner sadness. Water here blurs the line between body and cosmos, between personal grief and atmospheric melancholy. It reflects an archetypal sorrow—timeless and deeply feminine—akin to the fluid emotional states found in many ancient elegies.

In *Song tử thơ* (2017), Nhu Quỳnh de Prelle uses water in a subtly violent and transformative image:

You divide my heart
Into droplets like the rain
Dividing sunlight.

Here, water becomes a symbolic weapon of pain—capable of severing light. The image of tears splitting sunlight suggests emotional rupture, internal division, and the fragile interplay between warmth and despair. The poem portrays feminine emotionality not as weakness, but as a force with elemental potency.

Across these poetic texts, the water archetype transcends mere metaphor. It becomes a living reservoir of meaning—evoking birth, love, memory, mourning, and transcendence. For Vietnamese women poets, water is not only a traditional symbol; it is a poetic bloodline flowing through the body of collective and individual femininity. Water pulses like a vein beneath the skin of the poem—simultaneously intimate and mythic, tangible and metaphysical.

4.5 The Mask Archetype: *Persona*, Identity, and Existential Division

The *mask* is a deeply resonant archetype that dates back to prehistoric rituals and continues to permeate art, religion, and psychological theory. Its origins lie in sacred rites, where the act of donning a mask allowed individuals to transcend their human identity and assume spiritual or divine forms. The mask represents both concealment and revelation, protection and transformation—it serves to hide the self while simultaneously opening a channel to something beyond the self. In many ancient cultures, masks were portals to the sacred: the warrior's mask for invoking power, the shaman's mask for communion with spirits, the funerary mask for bridging life and death.

In Jungian theory, the *persona*—literally Latin for “mask”—refers to the social face that individuals present to the world. It is the self that performs within societal expectations, often at the cost of suppressing the authentic self. The *shadow*, by contrast, is that part of the psyche which is denied, repressed, or hidden. The mask thus becomes both a necessity for social survival and a barrier to self-actualization. When overly identified with the mask, individuals risk losing contact with their inner truths. The conflict between *persona* and *true self* forms a key existential dilemma explored in modern poetry and literature.

In theatrical traditions, the mask has long symbolized this paradox of performance and authenticity. From Greek tragedy to Japanese Noh drama, from Shakespearean fools to modernist antiheroes, the mask serves as a metaphor for the fragmentation of identity and the duality of being. In modern literature, it often expresses the psychological dissonance between appearance and essence, between what is seen and what is endured.

In Vietnamese poetry, the archetype of the mask frequently embodies the existential condition of divided subjectivity—particularly for women negotiating the roles of self, society, memory, and resistance. Poet Che Lan Vien captures this symbolic tension in his poem *Mùa bệnh* (Illness Season):

I am the Bayon tower with four faces
Three hidden, one shown
The one face smiles and cries
Hurting the three hidden ones in the shadows.

The reference to the Bayon temple—famous for its carved stone faces—suggests the multiplicity of identity and the emotional violence of self-concealment. The visible “face” is the performative *persona*, while the hidden ones silently suffer. This stanza articulates the painful contradiction of being seen yet not known, of expressing yet suppressing—an internal schism amplified by social expectations and personal trauma.

Nguyen Thi Thuy Hanh offers a powerful feminist variation of this tension in her poem *Di chữ* (Letters in Displacement):

The mask I once accidentally wore
I can no longer remove
Words sharp as knives
Scrape across my heart.

Here, the mask is not a choice but a burden. The *persona*, once adopted—perhaps as a means of self-protection or social compliance—becomes inseparable from the self. The speaker's anguish arises from being trapped within a façade that inflicts continuous inner wounds. The poem thus captures the tragic inertia of performative identity: once constructed, the mask no longer shields but scars.

In Ly Hoang Ly's *Lo Lo* (2001), the mask archetype is reimagined through visual and performative experimentation. In *Hành xác và thử nghiệm* (Self-Mortification and Experimentation), she writes:

I lock myself in a black shroud
The world cannot see me
I seek the sensation of dying breath unnoticed.

In another piece, *Người trong tranh* (Figure in the Painting):

Women in black
Walk through the night
Hair thrown back
Across the surface of an unfinished canvas.

These poetic tableaux transform the mask into an aesthetic and psychological “shroud”—not merely a cover but a performative disappearance. The black-clad female figures become spectral presences—haunting, half-formed, hidden in a liminal space between image and erasure. The mask in this context is not a symbol of deceit, but a psychic sanctuary—where silence, concealment, and incompleteness become strategies of survival.

Collectively, these texts suggest that the mask archetype functions not only as a symbol of repression or disguise but as a mirror of inner conflict, poetic performance, and spiritual ambiguity. For female poets, the mask becomes a terrain of resistance and revelation. It reflects the existential bifurcation between the self that conforms and the self that rebels, the self that speaks and the self that bleeds in silence.

4.6 The Darkness Archetype: Shadow, Introspection, and Feminine Transformation

Darkness—or more specifically, *night*—is among the oldest and most profound archetypes in the human imagination. From early human history, when darkness represented the unknown and the unseen, it has evoked fear, reverence, and metaphysical contemplation. In mythological cosmogonies, darkness often precedes light: in *Theogony* by Hesiod, night (Nyx) is among the primordial deities. In Egyptian belief, the underworld *Duat* is a realm of darkness that the soul must traverse after death. In Judeo-Christian creation myths, divine light appears against the backdrop of primal darkness. Thus, darkness is not simply the absence of light—it is a condition for the emergence of light itself, and a metaphysical space for transition, gestation, and revelation.

In archetypal psychology, Carl Jung equates darkness with the *shadow*—the hidden, repressed, or forbidden aspects of the psyche. To encounter darkness is to confront the unacknowledged self. Jung writes that the process of individuation—the path to psychic wholeness—requires integration of the shadow. Symbolically, then, darkness is not only threatening; it is transformative. It is the womb of the self before rebirth, the cocoon in which metamorphosis begins.

In literature and art, night has long served as the setting for introspection, dreams, eroticism, solitude, and spiritual reflection. It is a liminal space where boundaries are dissolved and where conventional logic yields to intuition and ambiguity. For women writers, especially, night becomes a sacred territory—at once oppressive and liberating, chaotic and creative.

In Vietnamese contemporary women's poetry, the darkness archetype appears as a sustained poetic terrain where feminine emotion, desire, memory, and identity are explored. In Ly Hoang Ly's *Lo Lo* (2001), darkness takes on tactile and sensory qualities:

The night flows
Flows upward into the sky
Freezing my brain.
I keep opening—wanting to open endlessly
The sky of night within my chest.
Among countless tears
One drop of night spills
From a white breast.

These verses expand darkness from a mere visual condition to a flowing, corporeal entity—a *liquid space that ascends*, defying gravity and rationality. Darkness is inscribed into the female body: it is breast, blood, brain, emotion. It is also mourning and release—a source of internal flooding that resists containment. Here, the night does not merely obscure—it speaks, spills, and transforms.

In *Sóng đêm* (Night Waves), she writes:

The depths of the soul flow like a secret river
That can only run at night.

Night becomes the only channel for repressed emotions. Only under the veil of darkness can certain truths emerge. In this archetypal sense, night functions as a ritual space of purification and self-expression—a time of *unmasking*, paradoxically because one is unseen.

Elsewhere, in *Ngoặc đôn trong đêm* (Parentheses in the Night), Ly writes:

Night brings me into black
 Black brings me into night
 ...
 A scent arises in me
 The scent of night, the scent of night, the scent of night.

The poetic repetition and auditory layering give darkness a scent, a sensory persistence. Night becomes both setting and substance—a medium of feminine interiority, a force that envelops and permeates the self.

The darkness archetype in these texts does not symbolize evil, despair, or finality. Rather, it represents psychic depth, erotic intensity, and spiritual absorption. It enables the female voice to shed external gazes and explore inner multiplicity. In its ambiguity, darkness offers sanctuary: a place where the boundaries between the self and the world, the sacred and the profane, begin to blur.

This poetic reconfiguration aligns with feminist psychoanalysis, where night and darkness become metaphors for the feminine unconscious—fluid, cyclical, nonlinear, and generative. For contemporary Vietnamese women poets, darkness is not absence but *potentiality*—a source of symbolic rebirth and an emblem of feminine power unbound by clarity, rationalism, or conformity.

4.7 The Dream Archetype: Thresholds of the Unconscious and Feminine Revelation

Among the universal symbolic structures of human experience, the *dream* stands as one of the most enigmatic and fertile. It occupies the liminal space between consciousness and the unconscious, between empirical time and mythical time. From the earliest mythologies, dreams have been treated as sacred messages—prophetic visions, divine warnings, or symbolic enactments of inner truths. In Sumerian and Babylonian traditions, kings receive celestial guidance through dreams. In the Bible, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams as metaphysical codes of fate. In Greek mythology, Hypnos (sleep) is the twin brother of Thanatos (death), suggesting that the dream exists on the boundary between life and the beyond.

In Jungian psychology, dreams are not merely fragments of personal unconscious material but expressions of the *collective unconscious*—the vast symbolic reservoir of archetypes that operate across cultures and epochs. The dream thus becomes a language of transformation, where archetypes emerge, shift form, and speak through symbols. Within the dream state, time collapses, the ego dissolves, and the self engages with repressed fears, ancestral memories, and mythic narratives. The dream is not just an escape; it is an initiation.

In Vietnamese women's poetry, dreams are not ornamental; they are existential thresholds. They become poetic spaces where memory, grief, love, fear, and desire are restructured. Nguyen Thi Thuy Hanh writes:

I walk into a dream
 As I walk into an empty room.

The dream here becomes a spatial metaphor—a psychic architecture of absence, solitude, and introspection. The "empty room" suggests not sterility but openness: a space for the self to encounter the self, stripped of roles, distractions, and illusions.

In Vi Thuy Linh's poem *Linh*, the dreamworld is rendered with hallucinatory tenderness:

In a flickering dream, I saw you
 Just bathed in the pure waters of the Ganges
 You lifted me
 Carried me toward a jade-green river
 That shimmered toward the horizon
 Where Thuy Linh flowers bloomed.

This dream merges religious purity, erotic longing, and transcendence. The mythic Ganges, the act of being carried, and the distant field of blooming flowers together create a space of symbolic rebirth. The dream becomes a fusion of memory, desire, and sacred geography.

In contrast, Y Nhi's *My Dream* renders the dream with minimalist poignancy:

I dream
I become a blade of grass
Beneath the feet of the one I love.

This image carries both surrender and resilience. It expresses a deep yearning for closeness, even in diminishment—an archetypal gesture of devotion. The dream transforms pain into acceptance, submission into quiet agency. It invites us to rethink power and vulnerability from a feminine perspective.

For Phan Huyen Thu, dreams also mark linguistic genesis. In *Giấc mơ của lưỡi* (The Tongue's Dream), she writes:

I hear the resurrection thunder
Rumble across the earth
A phosphorescent rainstorm
A violet mushroom blooming from a grave
And the dream of the tongue
Begins to open the vowels.

Here, the dream is apocalyptic and mystical. It channels primordial forces—resurrection, storm, elemental sound. The tongue functions as both a physical organ and a symbolic oracle. The “opening of the vowels” signifies the birth of voice, meaning, language—an archetypal poetic moment where silence gives way to articulation.

In all these works, dreams function as transformative energies—spaces where feminine subjectivity is unbound from chronology, logic, and social prescriptions. The dream does not imitate waking life; it reveals the emotional and mythic dimensions beneath it. For Vietnamese women poets, dreams are not secondary realities. They are alternate epistemologies—ways of knowing, remembering, and becoming.

Through dreams, archetypes are re-encountered and redefined. The dream becomes a rite of passage, a portal of metamorphosis, and a poetic form in itself—fluid, nonlinear, and radiant with possibility.

4.8 The Mirror Archetype: Reflection, Doubling, and Ontological Dissonance

The *mirror* is a complex and paradoxical archetype—simultaneously a symbol of self-knowledge and illusion, revelation and distortion. Across mythologies and literary traditions, mirrors have been imbued with mystical functions: from oracular devices to portals between worlds, from tools of vanity to instruments of truth. In Greek mythology, Perseus uses a polished shield as a mirror to defeat Medusa, deflecting the lethal gaze through reflection. In Eastern traditions, especially in Chinese imperial culture, bronze mirrors were believed to reveal the soul and ward off evil—charged with spiritual and moral significance.

In symbolic terms, the mirror represents the *threshold of self-awareness*, a site where the self is both discovered and estranged. In psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage, as posited by Jacques Lacan, marks the moment when the child recognizes itself as a whole entity—initiating the alienation between the ideal self and the fragmented bodily experience. In Jungian terms, the mirror often reflects the *shadow*, the denied or unconscious parts of the psyche. Thus, to look into a mirror is not merely to affirm one's image but to confront the uncanny—the self as others.

In literature, the mirror frequently appears as a space of psychological introspection, identity crisis, and temporal layering. It destabilizes the boundaries between reality and illusion, self and reflection. In many cultures, the mirror also evokes motifs of enchantment, doubling, and existential threat—such as being trapped within the mirror, replaced by one's reflection, or encountering a spectral double.

In Vietnamese women's poetry, the mirror archetype becomes a poetic and philosophical tool for exploring selfhood, memory, transformation, and estrangement. Y Nhi writes in *Người đàn bà soi gương* (The Woman Looking into the Mirror):

The woman looks into the mirror
Sees a different face
Not her own
Someone—once so familiar...

The poem evokes a subtle, painful recognition of estrangement—not from others, but from the self. The mirror reveals the passage of time, the erosion of identity, the haunting of memory. The familiar has become foreign. The feminine self is no longer assured but fragmented, temporal, and haunted by what once was.

In Tran Le Son Y's *Gương lửa* (Mirror of Fire), the mirror becomes a space of ignition and psychic rupture:

Each time I look
The mirror flares with a small ring of fire
As if memory had combusted
The face in the mirror is no longer mine.

Here, the mirror does not passively reflect; it burns. The fire, symbolizing both destruction and purification, erupts from memory itself. The act of reflection becomes traumatic—destabilizing the boundaries between self and past, between identity and image. The mirror becomes an agent of transmutation.

In Xuan Quynh's classic line from *Tự hát* (Self-Song), 1984:

Have you ever looked into my eyes
As into a transparent mirror?

The mirror metaphor here expresses intimacy and vulnerability. The lover's gaze is invited to penetrate the eyes—not merely as organs of vision but as mirrors of the soul. The "transparent mirror" becomes an emblem of emotional authenticity, trust, and the yearning for mutual recognition.

Le Thi Kim's *Gương* (Mirror) takes a more minimalist, existential turn:

The mirror is cold
It holds nothing
But each time I look
I tremble.

The mirror is described as indifferent, sterile. Yet, its mere presence induces fear. The trembling response suggests that what is terrifying is not what the mirror reveals, but what it refuses to reveal. The poetic voice confronts not reflection but *void*, or perhaps a self that resists containment.

In another poetic variant, Lam Thi My Da's *The Woman by the Mirror* (1983) evokes the Gothic motif of the double:

I stepped into the mirror
Met a woman in white
Silent
Gazing at me
Without blinking.

The mirror here functions as a portal—one does not merely look into it but *enters* it. The woman encountered is not just a reflection but a double—perhaps a ghost, a lost memory, a future self, or an alternate identity. The white dress may connote death, purity, or erasure. The silence of the woman in the mirror is heavy, charged with unknowable meaning.

In Nguyen Thi Mai's *Gương đêm* (Mirror of Night), the archetype takes on its most spectral and disquieting form:

I look into the mirror at midnight
See no face
Only a shifting darkness
Like wings preparing to fly.

Here, the mirror effaces identity entirely. There is no image—only movement, shadow, transformation. The darkness is not static but dynamic, as if preparing to become something else. The mirror is no longer a tool of self-knowledge but a medium of disappearance, of symbolic flight. The feminine subject has dissolved into metaphor, into myth.

Across these poetic engagements, the mirror archetype is revealed as a powerful site of ontological questioning and poetic experimentation. It reflects not simply appearances but fractures in time, selfhood, and memory. It enables female poets to confront the instability of identity and the haunting presence of absence. For the contemporary Vietnamese woman poet, the mirror is not a surface but a threshold—a space of aesthetic and existential metamorphosis.

5. Conclusion

Today's readers—armed with a heightened awareness of gender equality, psychological complexity, and cultural plurality—are increasingly prepared to embrace poetic images such as a “furious river” or a “fallen mask,” which may have perplexed earlier generations. This shift affirms Hans Robert Jauss's central proposition that the aesthetic value of a literary work is measured by its ability to challenge and expand the *horizon of expectations*. The modern poetic language of Vietnamese women is rich in nuance, subtlety, and emotional depth. Their work represents not merely a stylistic evolution but a reconfiguration of meaning, one that taps into the timeless reservoirs of archetypal memory while generating fresh symbolic life.

By creatively and critically engaging with archetypes, these poets have developed multi-layered intertextualities that allow a single image to resonate across myth, history, and personal experience. In their hands, archetypes are neither inert symbols nor closed systems. They are revived, reinterpreted, and re-voiced within new linguistic, cultural, and existential contexts. Each poetic encounter with an archetype becomes a dynamic field of meaning—where myth converges with the feminine imagination, and memory yields to metamorphosis.

This study has demonstrated that contemporary Vietnamese women poets do not merely inherit the archetypal tradition; they re-invent it. Through the archetypes of *Water*, *Darkness*, *Mask*, *Dream*, and *Mirror*, they infuse new vitality into ancient symbols, transforming them into instruments of innovation and resistance. These transformations do not simply reflect a shift in poetic content—they also redefine form, discourse, and agency.

The reconfiguration of archetypes in women's poetry signals a dual evolution: first, in terms of *consciousness*—the feminist re-appropriation of mythic codes; and second, in terms of *aesthetics*—the emergence of poetic modes that break from linearity, certainty, and monologic structures. These poets employ fragmentation, ambiguity, irony, and intertextuality to challenge dominant narratives and express lived complexities.

The archetype, as shown throughout this study, is not fixed—it is generative. It offers symbolic energy for reimagining womanhood in ways that are historical, mythical, and intensely personal. For contemporary Vietnamese women poets, the archetype is not only a cultural inheritance but a literary strategy: a method for reclaiming voice, restructuring identity, and reshaping poetic discourse.

From the case studies presented, we can conclude that these archetypal figures are not static remnants of the past, but active, evolving forces within literary modernity. They allow women poets to speak with authority, to dream with courage, and to craft new mythologies in which the female subject is not a metaphor but a maker.

In doing so, Vietnamese women's poetry contributes significantly to the broader currents of global poetic innovation. It exemplifies how the deeply personal can intersect with the archetypal, how the feminine imagination can reinvent inherited forms, and how poetry can serve as a space for spiritual, cultural, and linguistic emancipation.

6. Study Limitations and Future Research

This article offers a proposal for conceptualizing and systematizing “archetypes” as a distinctive feature of innovation in contemporary Vietnamese women's poetry. Accordingly, our scope is limited to a number of female poets who have exerted clear influence on the Vietnamese literary scene from the late twentieth century to the present. The five archetypes selected for analysis are representative among hundreds that symbolically connect mythological structures with the contemporary concerns of the human spirit.

This paper may be read as a preliminary gesture toward a broader research agenda, raising critical questions such as:

- *Does innovation in Vietnamese women's poetry constitute a space of creative freedom, or is it increasingly challenged by new boundaries and limitations?*

- *Has the poetic experimentation with personal identity through archetypes in contemporary women's poetry contributed meaningfully to the history of modern Vietnamese literature?*
- *Do the redefined meanings of archetypes in contemporary Vietnamese women's poetry tend toward a balance between innovation and tradition, or are they drifting toward aesthetic extremities?*

We contend that poetic renewal and innovation in Vietnamese women's poetry—particularly in the 21st century—remain an open and evolving field. It involves the interweaving of myth with modern consciousness, the construction of feminist discourse through introspective dialogues, and the poetic articulation of archetypes via cognitive metaphor systems. These directions promise to make substantial contributions to the study of modern Vietnamese literature in both national and transnational contexts.

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