

LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

THE MOON-WELL SYMBOL AND THE JOURNEY OF SELF-DESTRUCTION AND REBIRTH IN THE WORKS OF HARUKI MURAKAMI AND TRAN THUY MAI FROM A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: Semiotics is the science that examines the nature, functions, and operational mechanisms of sign systems, which serve as cultural and social constructs allowing humans to create, store, communicate, and transfer information. The emergence of semiotics in literature aids readers in comprehending and interpreting artistic language, dissecting text structures, and unraveling the intricate details and symbolic imagery within works. In this paper, the authors employ a quantitative research method, grounded in semiotics theory, to decode the symbols of the moon and the well's depths in the works of Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai. This symbolic system conceals the yearning for rebirth, self-discovery, and the quest for meaning in the lives of those who have grappled with prolonged spiritual crises in a post-modern society. The paper's findings will also offer a profound glimpse into Japanese-Vietnamese culture and the soul-healing power of literature in human life.

KEY WORDS: Self- destruction; rebirth; symbol; semiotics; Murakami; Tran Thuy Mai.

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1. Introduction

Semiology, also known as Semiotics, is a scientific discipline that delves into the analysis of signs and symbols, exploring their structures, functions, and their roles in conveying meaning within systems of communication and culture. As a unique sociological perspective, symbolism emerged from the American pragmatic philosophical tradition. It aimed to challenge the mechanistic worldview and dualistic assumptions of classical rationalism, which have dominated Western thought since the 17th century. Authors such as C.S. Peirce, W. James, and John Dewey are the ones who have provided guidance for the study of symbols within the realm of verbal art. Accordingly, a symbol holds a special significance within artistic language. Symbolism, characterized by multiple meanings and a lack of ambiguity, along with the ability to encapsulate cultural values within each symbol, establishes its own operating mechanism, function, and specific nature. The process of studying symbols begins with the internal relationship, taking as its starting point the relationship model of author-symbolic symbol-interpreter. In artistic language, symbols are primarily established as tools to convey the author's ideological message. Different combinations and relationships of symbols will create varying meanings, depending on the creative talent and personal life experiences of each individual. Therefore, the study of symbols in an individual's artistic creativity is based on a combination of interdisciplinary theories, including stylistics, semiotics, and psychological philosophy. Numerous authors have delved into this subject within the literature of artistic works and have drawn valuable conclusions. These findings underscore the significance of studying symbols in literary and artistic works, thus establishing a research trend that captures the attention of contemporary scholars.

Postmodern literature serves as a reflection of the sentiments of intellectuals, writers, and artists in response to the evolving realities of society. As literature is inherently rooted in life, the societal landscape significantly influences the lives and spiritual outlook of individuals within that milieu. The theory of trauma in literature emerged in response to catastrophic events worldwide, with notable examples including the atomic bombings of the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki during

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World War II. In literature, trauma is depicted not as a physical ailment but as enduring mental wounds. Literature thoroughly explores and describes chaotic society, delving deep into the inner world of human consciousness. Every person or every character built by writers must face guilt, loneliness, doubt, despair, trauma, and fall into a state of self-destruction. Post-traumatic syndrome, or traumatic experience, is the belated experience of trauma, causing it to resurface repeatedly, tearing at the subject's heart and soul in their present life. The manifestations of trauma within literary works are portrayed through characters' journeys to find their true selves, allowing readers to directly detect them through the system of signs and symbols embedded within the language used by the writer.

Haruki Murakami is a highly influential Japanese writer whose works possess a unique appeal, evading from peculiar melancholy. The language employed by Murakami is often simple yet invaluable in conveying information in the most comprehensive manner to readers. According to him, language constitutes the most fundamental material of composition. Typically, Murakami's works depict worlds rife with traps, where individuals confront the spirals and hardships of life. He utilizes symbols as a means to convey messages and develop characters. These symbols become spiritual anchors, guiding characters through darkness towards illumination, enabling them to overcome life's challenges. The symbols in Murakami's works transcend cultural meanings, as they are tailored to each situation in which characters navigate events, particularly when they find themselves alone in communion with nature. Confronting the void, these symbols serve dual purposes: they hold cultural significance while also embodying the role of a companion—a character within the narrative.

Tran Thuy Mai, a female writer currently residing in Hue, Vietnam, bears the essence of the dreamy Hue region in her veins, reflecting a gentle and unhurried personality that also permeates her compositions. Her short stories intertwine modern social psychology with the rich tapestry of Hue's identity and broader Vietnamese culture. Through her narratives, Mai achieves a harmonious connection with her readers, evoking empathy for the aspirations woven into each human destiny. Delving into the intricacies of family life and societal dynamics, her stories serve as a lens through which she conveys profound human themes.

In Tran Thuy Mai's captivating short stories, readers are transported through layers of language teeming with vivid imagery, profound depth, and sensual allure. Through her narratives, Mai delves into the intricacies of humanity, exploring themes of love, beauty, life, and death across diverse landscapes, from the idyllic settings of Hue to the enigmatic realms of nothingness. With meticulous care, she selects symbols deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of Hue, weaving them intricately into her stories to construct a mosaic of rich imagery. Much like Murakami, Mai employs these symbols not only to navigate through traumatic experiences but also as pathways to spiritual rejuvenation and healing, offering readers solace and enlightenment along their journey.

In this article, the authors focus on two distinct symbols—the moon and the well—as depicted in the renowned works *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami and the *Moon at the Bottom of the Well* by Tran Thuy Mai. Through these symbols, we delve into the profound messages they convey about psychological trauma, human experiences, and spiritual renewal, highlighting their significance as artistic reflections of the human condition.

2. Some theoretical issues and a brief introduction to *Norwegian Wood* and *Moon at the Bottom of the Well*

2.1. The concept of symbol in Semiotics

The term "symbol" originates from ancient European languages (Roman: *symbolus*, Greek: *σύμβολον*)¹. Symbols are formed through various processes: association, convention, practical experience, and the use of provisional logical metaphors. Essentially, symbols represent entities beyond their own existence. In the realm of psychology, symbols are understood as specific images, particularly visual symbols. They transcend mere sensations, serving as forms of perception. These

symbols provide us with enduring mental images that persist even after the sensory impact of the object has dissipated. The next level of visual symbols involves the realm of imagination, where artistic symbolism emerges as a transformation and reinvention of cognitive symbols within the realm of psychological life, extending into the domain of art. From a psychological standpoint, scholars such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung posit that artistic symbols represent a synthesis and penetration of diverse, individual expressions aimed at uncovering the essence and necessity inherent within the object. In the realm of cultural studies, symbols serve as fundamental objects of research, as understanding the characteristics of a culture and the interplay between different cultures necessitates an examination of the symbol systems that underpin these cultures. The ability to symbolize enables individuals to consciously and purposefully create and utilize various symbols. In the domain of literary research, the concept of symbol, broadly understood, closely aligns with the notion of convention in literature and art.

In a narrow sense, a symbol is viewed as a "method of code-switching of speech," alongside metaphor and metonymy. Symbols are consistently recognized as a formative and expressive element imbued with multiple meanings, often recurring throughout works and possessing significant expressive value. In H. Blumer's perspective, the meaning of a symbol is a variable derived from each individual's real-life experiences. Subsequently, the process of interaction with other social factors occurs, leading to the creation of differences and adjustments in meanings. Applying H. Blumer's theory, these premises can be considered crucial for understanding variations in the meaning of symbols at the individual level: the transformation of symbolic systems into works of art. A specific work of art, particularly a literary work, embodies a process of interaction between individuals and communities, as well as between the artist's creative acts in reshaping symbols and the codes that convey them. This interaction is influenced by the cultural and literary zeitgeist of a society, shaping new meaningful variations of symbols within the evolving artistic language of the work. Such a process is first and foremost manifested through the linear and non-linear relationships among words in the work, representing a unique discourse of the individual within a cultural context, reflecting literature's relationship with the social context it portrays, anticipates, or imagines.

2.2. About Norwegian Wood and Moon at the Bottom of the Well

Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* is a novel that vividly portrays Japanese social reality during the 1960s and 1970s. It holds a remarkable significance, with one out of every seven Japanese individuals reported to have read it. Through its raw and unfiltered imagery, the characters grapple with the stark realities they face, undergoing profound transformations. This transformation is particularly evident in the adult characters, such as Watanabe and Naoko. Both characters frequently find themselves caught between expressing their innermost thoughts and confronting the harsh realities of life. Throughout their dialogues, two recurring symbols emerge: the "moon" and the "well". The moon symbolizes a glimmer of light that offers solace and warmth amidst loneliness, while the well symbolizes an obsession with death.

Moon at the Bottom of the Well by Tran Thuy Mai is a poignant short story that depicts the unwavering love of a dignified Hue woman for her husband. The character, Hanh, wholeheartedly worships her husband, but their love tragically unravels due to their inability to conceive. Hanh's inability to bear children leads her husband, Phuong, to seek solace with another woman. Initially, Hanh blames herself for their plight and forgives Phuong repeatedly. However, Phuong proves to be unfaithful, contrasting with Hanh's unwavering devotion. The success of *Moon at the Bottom of the Well* lies in Mai's adept portrayal of character, plot, imagery, and evocative language. The story poignantly captures a woman's deep yearning for love and acceptance. Adapted into a film, the story received the Silver Kite Award in 2008. Its success is attributed to its compelling plot, unique details, and exploration of conflicts within the characters' psyches. As a result, Tran Thuy Mai's works continue to garner increasing acclaim from readers.

3. Methodology

The paper is based on the use of a system of specific research methods including description, analysis, classification, and systemization. It involves analyzing and describing each specific language case to discover the significant meanings of the symbols 'Moon' and 'Well' in the typical works *Norwegian Wood* (Murakami) and *Moon at the Bottom of the Well* (Tran Thi Thuy Mai).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. From the Moon-Well symbols

According to the *Dictionary of World Cultural Symbols* (2016) by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, the moon is described as "a symbol of biological rhythms... carrying a tragic fate as well as human destiny... It measures the universe and symbolizes the fertility of women, animals, trees, and human destiny after death" (pp.936-941). The moon also symbolizes fullness and completeness.

According to the *Dictionary of World Cultural Symbols* (2016) by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, wells hold a sacred nature across cultural traditions, serving as a synthesis of three cosmic levels. The well is perceived as a microcosm or a composite universe, symbolizing depth, mystery, and the unconscious. Interestingly, in ancient Hebrew, the word for well also connotes woman or wife (pp.361-362). While wells evoke feelings of inspiration and a desire for exploration, they are often associated with fear in symbolic representations.

The symbols of the moon and well, as portrayed in the aforementioned works, undergo a shift in cultural symbolic meaning. However, this transformation adds value to the imagery and enhances the reception of the work by the reader. Thus, in the works of Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai, the moon and the well serve as:

Boundaries: They delineate the divide between real life and the inner world of the characters. The moon symbolizes two worlds-the perfect, full world representing human light in the dark night, and the world of harsh reality where characters struggle to recognize their own truths. For instance, Mrs. Hanh chooses to cast the hexagram on the night of the full moon, indicating that she has only obtained a partial truth amidst the reality's light. Tran Thuy Mai's placement of the moon's image at the bottom of the well mirrors the choices she presents to her characters.

The theme of obsession with death: this topic is vividly depicted through Naoko's dialogue: "A deep well, but no one knows where it is. We could fall into it and that would be the end of our lives." The motif of the well frequently recurs in conversations between Watanabe and Naoko, emphasizing their constant proximity to mortality and their tendency to withdraw from social interaction out of fear. Naoko is particularly haunted by Kizuki's death, and this obsession continues to torment her even in the presence of Watanabe. Death permeates not only their thoughts but also serves as a relentless source of anguish for Naoko's character throughout the narrative.

Symbol of rebirth: The moon and the well serve as symbols of rebirth as the characters confront reality. Mrs. Hanh faces the choice of uncovering the truth about her husband, while Watanabe and Naoko must grapple with the pains of maturation. Kafka seeks solace in the forest to discover his true self. In the darkness of night, the moon's radiance illuminates the characters' path, enabling them to grasp their current circumstances, perceive themselves and their surroundings, clarify their thoughts, and rediscover their purpose in life. Particularly significant is the moon's frequent appearance in conversations among Watanabe, Naoko, and Reiko. They rely on its shimmering light to find their bearings, establish connections with one another, and, when alone, to alleviate Watanabe's anguish of loving Naoko by dispelling the darkness and offering solace.

4.2.... to meeting points in the soul

Trauma and self-destruction

In *Norwegian Wood*, the characters grapple with the complexities and challenges of modern youth, often described as "distorted" and "strange." Naoko, in particular, clings to her painful past, enveloped in internal turmoil to the point of suffocation. Her chosen sanctuary, a mental hospital

where patients double as doctors, underscores the depth of her struggle. Despite knowing Naoko's enduring attachment to Kizuki, Watanabe consciously chooses to love her, embracing the role of a surrogate. He accepts the inevitable pain that accompanies this choice. Even in their reunions, their conversations are laden with stories of anguish—be it the death of Naoko's sister or Kizuki. Death and the accompanying pain haunt them all, compelling them to seek escape. On moonlit nights, when the darkness threatens to consume them, they search desperately for a means to break free, as if teetering on the edge of a deep well.

Originating from anxiety disorders, the silent suffering of self-harm lurks in the shadows of life, condemning and damaging the ego of each individual. As individuals grapple with rising levels of anxiety, they often lose themselves and resort to self-destructive behaviors. Authors Van der Kolk, Perry, and Herman, in their 1991 discussion on the *Childhood Origins of Self-Destructive Behavior*, concluded that psychological trauma experienced in childhood significantly contributes to the onset of self-destructive tendencies. However, lacking a secure attachment in childhood often leaves individuals vulnerable to chronic self-harm or self-mutilation. Those who repeatedly engage in self-harm or suicidal behavior are particularly susceptible to current stressors, which may trigger a resurgence of trauma-related reactions such as feelings of abandonment or apathy, echoing the experiences of their childhood. Experiences associated with personal safety, anger, and emotional needs can promote dissociative episodes and self-destructive behavior (Van der Kolk, Perry, & Herman, 1991, p.1671).

In *Norwegian Wood*, the theme of self-destruction emerges through the symbolism of the well, serving as a focal point for people's obsessions. The well is depicted as a microcosm, a composite universe connecting with the realm of the deceased. Its depths evoke a sense of mystery, with echoes reverberating from below and disturbed water surfaces offering fleeting reflections that add to its enigmatic nature. Moreover, the well symbolizes secrecy and concealment, particularly the concealment of truth that cannot be easily obscured. Naoko's revelation about the well to Toru leaves a lasting impression, haunting him with vivid recollections even after eighteen years. Described as a wall-less structure, eroded by time and stained with an eerie white hue, the well exudes an aura of profound depth. Toru's perception of the well as "immeasurably deep" and filled with darkness reflects a symbolic merging of all the darkness in the world, compressed into its dense core. Naoko's belief in the existence of the well, filled with water and uncovered, symbolizes honesty, straightforwardness, and the pursuit of happiness. However, the well may also serve as a metaphor for the depths of Naoko's soul—an abyss of unresolved grief and emotional turmoil. Perhaps it exists only within her mind, an invisible repository of life's dark patches. Despite her efforts to come to terms with it, Naoko remains unable to fully accept Kizuki's death, grappling with the idea that death is not an external force but a constant presence within her being. The narrative raises questions about the strength of individual egos and their susceptibility to the wounds inflicted by life's adversities. Are Naoko and Toru's egos inherently weak, leading them towards self-destructive tendencies? Or is it the strength of their egos, coupled with the pain of loss, that drives them towards a gradual acceptance and even embrace of self-destruction? These questions underscore the intricate interplay between resilience, vulnerability, and the human psyche in the face of profound loss and existential angst.

In *Moon at the Bottom of the Well* by Tran Thuy Mai, the moon symbolizes the cyclical nature of life and death. Every lunar month, as the moon appears to die for three nights before gradually brightening, it signifies the transition from life to death and back to life. This symbolism is in contrast to *Norwegian Wood*, where the moon represents themes of self-destruction and emotional turmoil.

Moreover, the title of Mai's story suggests a significant connection between the moon and the well. The appearance of both symbols coincides with a pivotal moment in the narrative when Mrs. Thoi seeks assistance from Mrs. Hanh using a hexagram. The hexagram's message, "On a moonlit

night at the bottom of a well, you can see the shadow but not the image," hints at the elusive nature of truth and reality. It suggests that what appears real may, in fact, be deceptive, blurring the lines between authenticity and falsehood. This enigmatic message underscores the unpredictable and mysterious elements of human existence, adding depth to the thematic exploration of the story.

In the midst of the ironic love story between Mrs. Hanh and Mr. Phuong, sacrifice emerges as a central theme. Mrs. Hanh chooses to push away the person she loves in order to protect their love, demonstrating a willingness to trade and sacrifice in the name of love. This act of selflessness, however, ultimately leads to the destruction of her own love. The ambiguity between reality and true feelings mirrors the metaphor of the moon at the bottom of a well. Just as the moon's presence in the well raises questions about its authenticity, Mrs. Hanh's sacrifice blurs the lines between genuine emotion and misconception borne out of lost identity within love.

Unlike traditional notions of sacrifice involving the surrender of the ego, Mrs. Hanh's sacrifice stems from a different source—a sense of emotional ambiguity and complexity. Rather than losing herself entirely, her ego remains strong yet veiled in vague emotions. The symbolism of the moon, typically associated with receiving light from the Sun to glow, takes on a different meaning when juxtaposed with appearances versus reality. Placing this symbol at the "bottom of the well" serves to deepen the sense of confusion between reality and Mrs. Hanh's consciousness, highlighting the intricate interplay between love, sacrifice, and self-awareness in the narrative.

It's evident that self-destruction serves as a pervasive motif, with literary characters often reflecting real-life individuals silently grappling with inner turmoil. Toru, Naoko, and Mrs. Hanh embody the struggle of quietly destroying themselves, resorting to physical and psychological pain as a means to numb past traumas. This self-destructive tendency originates deep within the soul, gradually infiltrating every aspect of their existence.

In literature, self-destruction appears to be incompatible with enduring suffering, leading characters to choose destruction as a means to escape the relentless agony. This often entails a journey from the tangible realm into metaphysical spaces, characterized by surreal dreams and the merging of memory with present reality. Whether it's erasing one's past identity, adopting a new name, or relocating to a foreign land, these drastic measures signify the characters' descent into the depths of guilt, loneliness, and existential deadlock. Through the experiences of these characters, readers are confronted with the harrowing consequences of self-destructive behavior, shedding light on the complexities of human suffering and the desperate search for solace in literature and life alike.

4.3. *Rebirth - healing*

The term "healing" encompasses the soothing and transformative process of addressing negative emotions, thoughts, insecurities, and emotional wounds, ultimately leading to a restored state of peace and contentment. This concept finds application across various scientific disciplines, including medicine, biology, and psychology. In the medical realm, healing involves the restoration and regeneration of bodily tissues following injury, illness, or surgical procedures. Mental healing, equally crucial, pertains to the restoration of psychological well-being. Within psychology, healing refers to the process of recovery and restoration following psychological trauma or spiritual crises. Psychologists study various methods and processes aimed at facilitating psychological healing and offer supportive interventions to help individuals regain stability and foster mental health. The theme of soul regeneration and healing serves as a compelling subject for writers and readers alike. Many writers are drawn to explore this theme in their works, capturing the attention and interest of readers. Through literature, the complexities of emotional healing and the journey toward inner peace are examined, offering insights into the human experience and the quest for wholeness. In literature, the element of healing appears in many works, which proves that writers truly care about the inner world and human destiny.

In Haruki Murakami's works, healing is portrayed through a fresh and imaginative exploration of the human world, particularly by delving deeply into the inner psychology of his characters. Throughout his novels, we encounter individuals yearning for freedom. What sets Murakami's work apart is its gentle and generous approach, guiding readers on adventures within a world of familiar words yet filled with countless new and mysterious elements hidden behind the door of truth. The characters' inner worlds serve as fertile ground for writers to explore and incorporate into their works, where wild dreams and chaotic streams of consciousness are expressed as inherent aspects of the human journey toward self-discovery.

In *Norwegian Wood*, healing is depicted through the characters' quest to understand the true essence of love. As readers delve into the novel, they are invited to contemplate the profound philosophies of love that the author wishes to impart. One such question posed is, "What happens when people open their hearts?" The answer, "They will be better off," encapsulates a simple yet profound truth: that love has the power to enrich and uplift individuals. Through this guidance and faith in the journey towards finding true love, the novel emphasizes that love extends beyond mere affection or reciprocity. It embodies altruism, tolerance, and the willingness to set aside one's selfish desires to love wholeheartedly. Furthermore, the willingness to receive, listen, and understand the other person, coupled with the passion inherent in love, contributes to the beauty and depth of genuine relationships.

In *Norwegian Wood*, the concept of rebirth is explored through a philosophical lens, where death is seen as an intrinsic part of life. In Japanese culture, death is not feared but rather revered as a symbol of absolute beauty and heroic character. Against the backdrop of a society grappling with spiritual stagnation, loneliness, and a sense of helplessness, the suicides of characters like Kizuki, Naoko, and Hatsumi underscore the intense conflict between individual and communal values. However, death in the novel is not merely an escape from despair; it is portrayed as a continuation of life—a way of affirming one's existence amidst harsh realities. Literary scholar Nhat Chieu suggests that the characters in *Norwegian Wood* choose to live as if they are already dead, reflecting a profound acceptance of mortality. Similarly, author Haruki Murakami himself asserts that death is not the opposite of life but an integral part of it. Through the novel, Murakami skillfully recreates the struggles of individuals in the post-modern era, who seek death as a means of affirming their existence and confronting reality with frankness and courage.

In *Moon at the Bottom of the Well*, the character's journey of rebirth and healing is powerfully expressed through the psychological development of Ms. Hanh. Enduring a series of life tragedies, including the betrayal of her husband, societal prejudice leading to their breakup, and the abandonment of her child and even her dog, Mrs. Hanh finds herself devoid of spiritual support, trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of despair. The loneliness and sense of abandonment she experiences threaten to extinguish the gentle and capable woman she once was, compelling her to confront the harsh truths of her existence.

Despite societal expectations dictating a woman's noble calling as a mother, Ms. Hanh is unable to bear children and is repeatedly forsaken by her husband and offspring. This relentless cycle of rejection and abandonment plunges her into a profound identity crisis, as she grapples with feelings of inadequacy and betrayal from those she held dear. Through Ms. Hanh's plight, the novel explores the depths of human suffering and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, ultimately portraying a journey of self-discovery and inner healing.

Tran Thuy Mai's work, *Moon at the Bottom of the Well*, presents a starkly realistic depiction of traditional women grappling with societal expectations and prejudices. Through the protagonist's experiences, the novel boldly confronts issues of feminism and gender equality, shedding light on the immense burdens placed upon women by society.

The protagonist, despite enduring numerous hardships and societal pressures, refuses to succumb to despair or relinquish control over her fate. The novel poignantly illustrates the challenges faced by women who may find themselves alone and unsupported during their darkest moments, yet resiliently persevere in the face of adversity.

Through the protagonist's journey, the novel underscores the transformative power of reflection and self-awareness. Despite moments of hopelessness and despair, the protagonist ultimately finds the strength to reassess her circumstances and chart a new course for her spiritual life, breaking free from societal constraints and embracing a newfound sense of agency.

Moon at the Bottom of the Well thus serves as a poignant testament to the resilience and tenacity of women, offering a compelling narrative that challenges traditional gender roles and advocates for greater equality and empowerment.

At the beginning of the short story, Hanh's life revolves around fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother, as depicted by the routine task of buying noodles for her husband every morning. Her existence is defined by servitude to her family. However, as the narrative progresses, Hanh undergoes a profound shift in her perspective and priorities. By the end of the story, Hanh's daily chores have evolved to encompass activities connected to nature, such as tending to the land and working in the garden. These tasks no longer serve the sole purpose of fulfilling familial obligations but instead become a means for Hanh to reconnect with herself and her inner world. With her newfound independence and freedom, Hanh is able to introspect and contemplate her life with a sense of tranquility and liberation. The language and imagery employed in the concluding passages of the short story paint a vivid picture of Hanh's transformation. Her life is portrayed as brighter, more liberal, and freer, symbolizing the release from the constraints that had previously bound her soul. Ultimately, the narrative suggests that Hanh's journey towards self-discovery is marked by a profound sense of empowerment and renewal.

The intense struggle with both physical and mental injuries often leads individuals to the realization that self-discovery and the creation of one's own world are inevitable. For Mrs. Hanh, her spiritual support comes in the form of fortune-tellers and mediums like Thoi, as she seeks to connect with the spiritual realm. Despite facing numerous challenges, Hanh's resilience shines through, particularly after discovering her husband's betrayal and enduring two fatal illnesses as a result of sacrificing herself for love. Hanh experiences a powerful rebirth when she encounters Thoi, particularly during the full moon nights when she performs worship ceremonies. This act of nurturing her own spiritual world and defying societal prejudices and the constraints imposed by her ex-husband demonstrates Hanh's newfound strength and determination to live life on her own terms.

Tran Thuy Mai's reflection on her own life and writing process underscores the transformative power of storytelling. Through the character of Hanh, she explores themes of self-love and empowerment, transcending narrow limitations and embracing a renewed sense of love for herself and all women. Hanh's journey serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and inner strength found within individuals, inspiring readers to embark on their own paths of self-discovery and self-love.

In the works of Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai, the central characters embark on profound journeys of self-discovery, which serve as manifestations of healing trauma and refining the ego—a hallmark of the new age, often referred to as "selfism." These characters are characterized by their proactive pursuit of their true selves, courageously seeking the deeper meaning of life.

Throughout these journeys, symbols such as the moon and the well accompany the characters, serving as representations of their ego and conscience, alleviating specific psychological pressures and serving as mirrors for self-reflection. By objectifying the self and engaging in internal dialogue, characters are able to achieve true self-awareness, engaging in a continuous debate between their conscious and unconscious selves.

This process of rebirth and healing elevates the value of Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai's works, offering profound insights into the human condition and supporting the growth of the human soul. Each work of art aims to nourish and uplift individuals, providing solace and guidance on the journey of life.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, through the topic *Dark corner in the shadow of the moon: self-destruction and rebirth in Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai works*, it becomes evident that symbols hold profound value, serving as conduits for character development and thematic exploration. Whether it be the moon or the well, these symbols not only convey cultural or ideological significance but also serve as beacons of hope in the characters' darkest moments. Despite their differing writing styles, Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai converge in their belief in literature as a tool for healing the human soul. They guide readers through the labyrinth of life, illuminating the path towards self-awareness and appreciation for life's inherent values.

In essence, Murakami and Tran Thuy Mai stand as healers, utilizing their craft to offer solace and guidance to readers on their own journeys of self-discovery. Their works affirm the enduring value of literature and showcase the diverse and enriching applications of symbols in conveying profound messages to audiences.

Note:

The term "symbol" originates from the Greek word "σύμβολον" (sýmbolon), derived from the roots "συν-" (syn), meaning "together," and "βολή" (bolē), meaning "to compress." Therefore, the term signifies the act of gathering or bringing together. In Chinese, the term denotes display or presentation, indicating that a symbol is an image or shape used to express abstract meanings. Originally, symbols were used as signs for identification, illustrated by the practice of cutting an object in half and giving each person one part. When the two pieces are reunited later, they serve as a reminder of their previous connection. By extension, a symbol is understood as a convention, sign, or signal. The author of the *Dictionary of World Cultural Symbols* noted that "Every symbol contains a sign of a break; The meaning of the symbol manifests itself in both the breakage and the connection of its broken parts." (Chevalier, J & Gheerbrant, A. p. XXIII).

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**Biểu tượng trăng-giếng và hành trình tự hủy, tái sinh
trong sáng tác của Haruki Murakami và Trần Thuỳ Mai từ góc nhìn kí hiệu học**

Tóm tắt: Kí hiệu học là ngành khoa học nghiên cứu bản chất, chức năng và cơ chế hoạt động của hệ thống kí hiệu, cũng như cách chúng được sử dụng để truyền đạt ý nghĩa và tương tác trong các hệ thống giao tiếp và văn hóa. Vận dụng lí thuyết kí hiệu học trong nghiên cứu văn học giúp người đọc hiểu và diễn giải ngôn ngữ nghệ thuật, phân tích cấu trúc văn bản để làm sáng tỏ các chi tiết phức tạp và những hình ảnh mang tính biểu tượng trong tác phẩm. Trong bài viết này, các tác giả sử dụng sự kết hợp giữa phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính và định lượng dựa trên lí thuyết kí hiệu học để giải mã biểu tượng trăng và giếng trong tác phẩm của Murakami và Trần Thuỳ Mai, những biểu tượng che giấu sự khao khát tái sinh, khám phá bản thân và tìm kiếm ý nghĩa trong cuộc sống của những con người phải vật lộn với các cơn khủng hoảng tinh thần kéo dài trong một xã hội hậu hiện đại. Phát hiện của bài viết cũng sẽ cung cấp một cái nhìn sâu hơn về văn hóa Nhật-Việt và sức mạnh chữa lành tâm hồn của văn chương trong đời sống con người.

Từ khóa: tự hủy; tái sinh; biểu tượng; ký hiệu học; Murakami; Trần Thuỳ Mai.