

Crisis-Structures of the Lyrical Self: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese *Thơ Mới* and Western Modernist Poetry

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Abstract—This study investigates the emergence and fragmentation of the modern lyrical self across two structurally analogous poetic traditions: Vietnamese *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry, 1932–1945) and Western modernist poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on existentialist philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and cultural semiotics, it develops the theoretical model of “crisis-structure” to conceptualize the lyrical subject as a fractured, ontologically destabilized construct shaped by global disruptions to symbolic order. Through close readings of seminal works by Xuân Diệu, Hàn Mặc Tử, Baudelaire, and T. S. Eliot, the analysis demonstrates that the lyrical self in both traditions ceases to function as a coherent center of meaning. Instead, it emerges as a site of rupture—where symbolic disintegration, linguistic instability, and metaphysical absence intersect. While *Thơ Mới* preserves a residual yearning for transcendence through love, religion, or aesthetic idealism, Western modernist poetry—particularly Eliot’s—pursues a more radical dismantling of redemptive frameworks, employing irony and intertextual fragmentation as existential strategies. Rather than framing the crisis of subjectivity in *Thơ Mới* as derivative of Western modernism, the study contends that both traditions constitute structurally convergent responses to globalized ontological upheaval. Within this framework, poetry functions not as ornament but as a philosophical medium that interrogates the very conditions of selfhood in modernity.

Index Terms—lyrical self, crisis-structure, *Thơ Mới*, modernist poetry, symbolic fragmentation, comparative literature

I. INTRODUCTION

A. From Anonymity to Subjectivity: The Ontological Shift of the Lyrical Self

The emergence of the lyrical self marks a decisive ontological shift in modern poetry. Classical East Asian verse—rooted in Confucian and Buddhist cosmologies—typically valorized an egoless, impersonal self that dissolved into the collective moral-cosmic order. The poet functioned less as an individual voice than as a conduit for universal harmony and timeless truths. By contrast, the twentieth century—shaped by colonial upheaval, epistemic dislocation, and rapid modernization—witnessed the rise of a self that is individualized, self-conscious, and existentially fractured (Marr, 1981; Nguyen, 2008). This transformation was not merely aesthetic but also reflected deeper cultural and psychological crises. In poems such as Xuân Diệu’s *Tôi là ai giữa cuộc đời này?* (*Who am I in this life?*), the poetic subject no longer seeks dissolution but fragile affirmation amid disintegration.

B. Vietnamese *Thơ Mới*: Crisis and Introspection

In Vietnam, the *Thơ Mới* movement (1932–1945) crystallized this turn toward lyrical subjectivity. Rejecting the rigid forms, moral didacticism, and rhetorical ornamentation of classical *Đường luật* poetry, *Thơ Mới* embraced emotional introspection and metaphysical inquiry. Poets such as Xuân Diệu and Hàn Mặc Tử constructed complex, often contradictory subjectivities—ranging from erotic urgency and temporal dread to spiritual anguish and ecstatic mysticism. Their poetic language fractured inherited conventions, crafting instead a lyrical identity marked by alienation, longing, and metaphysical uncertainty (Nguyen, 1991; Nguyen, 2018). The *Thơ Mới* self emerges not as a stable agent but as a site of internal contradiction shaped by historical rupture and ontological yearning.

C. Western Modernism: Fragmentation and the Collapse of Coherence

In parallel—though shaped by distinct sociocultural trajectories—Western modernist poetry redefined the poetic subject through fragmentation, irony, and existential doubt. From Charles Baudelaire’s melancholic *flâneur* and Rimbaud’s dissociated dictum “je est un autre” to T. S. Eliot’s decentered, intertextual voices in *The Waste Land*, modernism dismantled the coherence of Enlightenment subjectivity. The poetic self no longer functions as a locus of rational unity but as a dispersed constellation of memory, desire, and cultural debris (Childs, 2008; Habib, 2005;

Rimbaud, 1871, 2005; Eliot, 1922, 2001). The trauma of World War I, the rise of psychoanalysis, and the dissolution of theological worldviews catalyzed a profound reorientation in poetics—one that foregrounds the self not as a source of meaning but as a structure of instability.

D. *Problematizing Selfhood: A Comparative Inquiry*

Despite divergent genealogies, both *Thơ Mới* and Western modernism converge in portraying the lyrical self as fractured, unstable, and interrogative. In the Vietnamese context, the poetic subject negotiates tensions between inherited Confucian collectivism, colonial modernity, and personal desire. In the Western tradition, the self contends with the breakdown of grand narratives, the trauma of war, and the collapse of metaphysical foundations. This simultaneity—of emergence and crisis—renders the two traditions fertile ground for comparative inquiry, particularly in how they aesthetically negotiate identity through poetic form.

This study therefore poses three central research questions:

- 1) How is the lyrical self manifested as a poetic subject in *Thơ Mới* and Western modernist poetry?
- 2) What specific forms of identity crisis—cultural, emotional, metaphysical—are articulated within the poetics of each tradition?
- 3) In what ways do modes of expression, imagery, and linguistic structure reconfigure the representation of selfhood across these two literary movements?

E. *Theoretical Orientation and Research Design*

To address these questions, the paper adopts an intercultural and interdisciplinary framework synthesizing existentialist philosophy (Heidegger, 1927, 1962; Sartre, 1943, 1956), psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1923, 1957; Lacan, 1966, 2006), and poststructuralist critique (Derrida, 1967, 1976; Foucault, 1969, 1977). This triadic framework enables a nuanced reading of the lyrical self as a culturally embedded construct, a psychologically fractured subject, and a discursively produced effect. Sartre's conception of selfhood as a project, Lacan's theory of the divided subject, and Foucault's critique of the author-function provide critical insights into how identity is mediated through poetic form and language.

Through close textual analysis of four seminal figures—Xuân Diệu and Hàn Mặc Tử in the Vietnamese canon, Baudelaire and Eliot in Western modernism—this study illuminates not only thematic convergences such as alienation, fragmentation, and temporality, but also divergences in symbolic structure, syntactic rhythm, and metaphysical orientation. Ultimately, the study positions the modern lyrical self as a structure of crisis: a nexus where history, language, and interiority collide.

The argument unfolds across six sections: a literature review and theoretical framework, methodological clarification, detailed textual analyses, and a comparative synthesis. By tracing trajectories of poetic selfhood across cultural and aesthetic frontiers, the research contributes to broader discourses on global modernisms, identity formation, and the symbolic economies of crisis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Review of Related Scholarship*

Scholarship on modern lyrical subjectivity has been extensive but uneven across cultural traditions. In the Vietnamese context, foundational studies by Nguyễn Đăng Mạnh and Đặng Anh Đào underscore the *Thơ Mới* movement's rupture with traditional poetics and its embrace of personal emotional autonomy. Nguyen (2008) argues that *Thơ Mới* restructured Vietnamese lyrical expression by internalizing Western romantic individualism while still negotiating Confucian residues of collective moralism. Trần (2012) further contends that the *Thơ Mới* subject is not merely expressive but structurally constituted by existential crisis—haunted by the dissonance between historical temporality and inward experience.

However, much of Vietnamese literary criticism foregrounds *Thơ Mới* either as a linguistic modernization or as a nationalist aesthetic revolution. Few studies probe deeply into the movement's metaphysical or psychoanalytic dimensions. For instance, while Lê (2015) gestures toward thematic affinities between Xuân Diệu and Baudelaire, his analysis stops short of theorizing structural or ontological parallels in the construction of the poetic self. This study addresses that lacuna by reframing the *Thơ Mới* subject not as a voice of personal confession or national sentiment but as a fragile, culturally inflected formation embedded in symbolic crisis.

By contrast, the Western tradition has developed a more systematic theoretical vocabulary for understanding the modern poetic self. Habib (2005) situates the modernist subject within the philosophical disintegration of the Cartesian cogito, while Childs (2008) links poetic fragmentation to psychoanalytic discourse, trauma theory, and posthumanist perspectives. Eliot's use of disjointed voices and Baudelaire's melancholic persona have often been interpreted as symptomatic of modernity's ontological uncertainty. Nonetheless, these readings remain largely Eurocentric, rarely extending their frameworks to non-Western traditions.

Recent developments in world literature and comparative modernisms have attempted to redress this imbalance. Damrosch (2013) advocates for a polycentric understanding of literary modernity, emphasizing the importance of examining how local modernisms develop under conditions of cultural asymmetry. Walkowitz (2015) likewise critiques

the uncritical application of Western aesthetic norms across global contexts, calling instead for more situated approaches. Despite these interventions, Southeast Asian poetic modernities—particularly *Thơ Mới*—remain under-theorized in global modernist discourse.

By placing Vietnamese and Western texts in critical dialogue, this study does not aim to assert equivalence but to interrogate the shared condition of modern subjectivity under divergent cultural regimes. What remains insufficiently explored in both corpora is the lyrical self as a structure of crisis: a site where historical rupture, symbolic economy, and psychic fragmentation converge. This study contributes to the field by integrating a transdisciplinary framework that enables a comparative reading of how poetic form mediates identity in moments of ontological destabilization.

B. Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon three interlocking paradigms—existentialist ontology, psychoanalytic theory, and poststructuralist discourse analysis—to interrogate the representation of the lyrical self across Vietnamese and Western poetic modernities.

(a). Existentialism and Ontological Anxiety

Existentialist philosophy provides the first axis of analysis. Sartre (1943, 2007) conceives of the self not as a fixed entity but as a project of becoming—defined through negation, freedom, and anxiety. Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927, 2010) conceptualizes *Dasein* as “being-toward-death,” exposing the foundational instability of subjectivity under the shadow of finitude. These formulations resonate with the temporal dread in Xuân Diệu's poetry and the ontological malaise in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, both of which articulate selfhood as a response to metaphysical groundlessness.

(b). Psychoanalytic Topographies of the Self

Freud's model of repression and the divided psyche, together with Lacan's theory of the symbolic order, enables a reading of the lyrical self as fractured between desire, loss, and language. Lacan (1966, 2006) argues that the subject is constituted in lack and perpetually deferred within the symbolic chain. This dynamic is evident in Hàn Mặc Tử's ecstatic yet disintegrating voice and in Baudelaire's compulsive melancholia—both of which embody unconscious tensions mediated through poetic imagery. The poetic self thus emerges as a topography of repression, haunted by unattainable objects and linguistic misalignment.

(c). Poststructuralism and the Death of the Subject

Poststructuralist theory further destabilizes the notion of a unified poetic voice. Foucault (1969, 1984) critiques the author-function as a discursive construct rather than a source of intentional meaning, while Derrida (1967, 1997) deconstructs metaphysical presence through the concept of *différance*. Within this framework, the lyrical self is not a sovereign presence but an effect of language and cultural citation. Eliot's palimpsestic style—layered with fragmentation, pastiche, and allusion—enacts this deconstruction of selfhood. Similarly, the temporal ruptures in *Thơ Mới*, where the lyrical present is haunted by mythic pasts, align with Derridean slippages of signification.

(d). Synthesis

Together, these paradigms reconceptualize the lyrical self as a multidimensional **crisis structure**: ontologically unstable (existentialism), psychically fragmented (psychoanalysis), and discursively constructed (poststructuralism). This triadic framework informs the comparative methodology and underpins the close readings developed in subsequent sections.

III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DATA

A. Comparative Hermeneutics and Intercultural Criticism

This study adopts a comparative hermeneutic methodology within the framework of intercultural literary criticism. Comparative hermeneutics involves not only interpreting individual texts but also excavating the symbolic, philosophical, and cultural matrices in which they are embedded (Gadamer, 2004). Given the divergent genealogies of Vietnamese *Thơ Mới* and Western modernist poetry, this approach enables readings that resist reductive equivalence while foregrounding shared aesthetic and conceptual crises—particularly the fragmentation of the lyrical self in modernity.

The intercultural dimension constitutes the study's comparative core. Rather than imposing Eurocentric theoretical paradigms onto Vietnamese texts or reducing *Thơ Mới* to a derivative imitation of Western modernism, this study frames both traditions as parallel responses to distinct historical ruptures: colonial subjugation, metaphysical dislocation, and linguistic experimentation. The analysis is relational rather than contrastive, emphasizing how distinct cultural ecologies generate analogous poetics of selfhood through form, metaphor, and symbolic syntax (Damrosch, 2003; Said, 1983).

B. Corpus Selection and Criteria

The research corpus comprises four poets—Xuân Diệu and Hàn Mặc Tử from the *Thơ Mới* tradition, and Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot from the Western modernist canon—selected on the basis of four intersecting criteria:

- 1) **Thematic centrality** – Each poet explores the self as fragmented, unstable, and in existential tension with temporality and society.
- 2) **Canonical stature** – Each represents a paradigmatic figure in their respective modernist tradition.
- 3) **Textual accessibility** – All works are available in original editions as well as in bilingual or scholarly translations.
- 4) **Symbolic density** – The texts exhibit layered metaphorical systems and formal innovations, facilitating structural and symbolic analysis.

From *Thơ Mới*, the corpus includes Xuân Diệu's *Vội vàng* (*In Haste*, 1938) and *Tương tư chiều* (*Evening Yearning*, 1939), alongside Hàn Mặc Tử's *Đây thôn Vĩ Dạ* (*This Is Vĩ Dạ Hamlet*, 1938) and *Trí nhớ* (*Memory*, 1940). The Western corpus consists of Baudelaire's *L'Invitation au Voyage* (1857) and *Spleen* (1857), together with Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922). These works span symbolic registers of erotic vitality, temporal dread, linguistic exhaustion, and spiritual rupture.

C. Analytical Procedure

The study employs a three-phase analytical protocol:

- 1) **Thematic coding and motif mapping** – Close readings identify recurring motifs (mirrors, shadows, seasons, voids) and thematic projections of the lyrical self: death, time, desire, alienation (Bachelard, 1994).
- 2) **Structural–syntactic analysis** – Attention is directed to fragmentation, enjambment, rhythm, and syntactic disjunction. For instance, Hàn Mặc Tử's erratic syntax is read in parallel with Eliot's montage technique, both disrupting lyrical continuity.
- 3) **Intertheoretical interpretation** – Texts are interpreted through existentialist, psychoanalytic, and poststructuralist frameworks. Heidegger's concept of *Sein-zum-Tode* illuminates the temporal anxiety in *Vội vàng*, while Lacan's notion of symbolic castration informs the melancholia in *Spleen*. The aim is not rigid theoretical application but conceptual illumination of poetic dislocation (Heidegger, 1962; Lacan, 1977).

This triadic procedure balances text-immanent close reading with contextual theorization, ensuring both cultural specificity and philosophical rigor.

D. Limitations and Translation Sensitivities

Two methodological challenges merit explicit acknowledgment.

First, linguistic untranslatability poses a comparative challenge. Cultural idioms and symbolic referents—e.g., Buddhist cosmology in *Đây thôn Vĩ Dạ*—often resist precise translation into English or French frameworks. These semantic opacities are treated not as deficiencies but as productive boundaries of meaning, foregrounding the alterity of each poetic tradition (Venuti, 1995).

Second, critical asymmetry must be addressed. Western modernist poetry has been extensively theorized, whereas *Thơ Mới* remains underrepresented in global literary studies. This study attempts epistemic redress by applying a rigorous interpretive apparatus to Vietnamese texts without subordinating them to Western aesthetic norms (Nguyen, 2008).

E. Ethical Considerations and Research Validity

Although no human subjects are involved, the study adheres to ethical standards concerning cultural representation and interpretive fidelity. All translations are cross-verified with bilingual editions, and where translations fail to convey the full poetic resonance, original-language excerpts are retained for transparency and symbolic accuracy.

Research validity is anchored in interpretive triangulation—not in a positivist sense, but through the convergence of symbolic, syntactic, and theoretical analyses across distinct poetic traditions. This triangulation substantiates the study's core claim: in both *Thơ Mới* and Western modernism, the modern lyrical subject emerges not as a unified voice but as a fissured, symbolically overdetermined construct.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Vietnamese Poetic Subjectivity: Temporal Dread and Symbolic Longing

The *Thơ Mới* revolution in Vietnam reconfigured poetic subjectivity as a self-in-crisis—marked not by harmony but by ontological dissonance. This section examines how Xuân Diệu and Hàn Mặc Tử, two central figures of the movement, stage lyrical selves fractured by temporal instability and symbolic longing. Drawing on the existential, psychoanalytic, and poststructuralist frameworks delineated in Section 2, the analysis traces how each poet constructs a distinct crisis-structure of the self: Xuân Diệu through erotic immanence and accelerated temporality; Hàn Mặc Tử through mystical detachment and metaphysical fragmentation.

(a). Xuân Diệu: Erotic Immanence and Being-Toward-Loss

Xuân Diệu's *Vội vàng* (*In Haste*, 1938) reads as a declaration against transience. The opening lines—"Tôi muốn tắt nắng đi / Cho màu đừng nhạt mất" (*I want to turn off the sun / So colors will not fade*)—reveal a subject who responds to impermanence with erotic intensity. This lyrical self resists Buddhist detachment by attempting to prolong presence

through sensory immersion. As Lê (2002) observes, Xuân Diệu pivots from collective morality toward individual temporality, prioritizing immediacy of experience over metaphysical permanence.

The poem's temporality reflects Heidegger's (2010) notion of *being-toward-death*: a consciousness shaped by the finitude of its horizon. Yet in Xuân Diệu, this finitude is not met with stoic clarity; rather, it fuels a desire to intensify life. The celebrated line, “Tháng Giêng ngon như một cặp môi gần” (*January tastes like a lover's lips*), translates mortality into corporeal urgency. The subject consumes the world in anticipation of its loss—what Nguyen (2008) terms a “sensuous metaphysics of despair”.

Formally, the poet's use of enjambment, imperative verbs, and surging syntactic rhythms mirrors this interior acceleration. In *Tương tư chiều* (*Evening Yearning*, 1939), fading light provokes affective dislocation, revealing a subject desperate to anchor itself in desire. Lacan's (2006) notion of desire as a function of absence elucidates this yearning: the beloved becomes a symbolic anchor against dissolution. Xuân Diệu's poetics thus articulate a triadic model of crisis—temporal scarcity, erotic urgency, ontological dread—that recurs across his corpus (Tran, 2015; Dang, 2018).

(b). *Hàn Mặc Tử: Luminous Distance and Mystical Splitting*

In contrast, Hàn Mặc Tử constructs a lyrical self suspended between bodily decay and metaphysical transcendence. Diagnosed with leprosy and immersed in Catholic mysticism, his poetry fuses physical suffering with ecstatic longing. In *Đây thôn Vĩ Dạ* (*This Is Vỹ Dạ Hamlet*, 1938), the opening question—“Sao anh không về chơi thôn Vĩ?” (*Why don't you return to Vỹ Hamlet?*)—frames the poem as a meditation on belatedness and unattainability. Each stanza unfolds an unstable image-field: garden leaves in sunlight, a river boat in mist, a moonlit face dissolving. These images flicker, suggesting a self that can envision radiance but never inhabit it (Tran, 2015).

Such instability aligns with Lacan's (2006) theory of symbolic lack. Yet here the lack is dual: erotic and divine. The subject is split across desiring body, diseased flesh, and redeemed soul. Heidegger's notion of facticity intersects with Catholic eschatology: decay becomes not terminal but transitional. In *Trí nhớ* (*Memory*, 1940), the line “Hồn tôi cháy đỏ trong mưa xứ lạ” (*My soul burns red in an unfamiliar rain*) transforms pain into visionary intensity. As Dang (2018) remarks, Hàn Mặc Tử's metaphysics of suffering reorients crisis into mysticism—not as resolution but as apotheosis.

Formally, the poems rely on image disjunctions, modal ambiguities, and syntactic fragmentation. Unlike Xuân Diệu's forward-driving tempo, Hàn Mặc Tử's language suspends motion, hovering between revelation and collapse. These formal features mirror a subjectivity perpetually on the brink of dissolution—caught between immanence and eternity.

(c). *Temporal Dread and Symbolic Longing: Intra-Traditional Convergences*

Together, Xuân Diệu and Hàn Mặc Tử map opposing yet complementary poles of *Thơ Mới*'s crisis-driven subjectivity. Temporally, Xuân Diệu accelerates toward the present; Hàn Mặc Tử elongates distance toward transcendence. Affectively, Xuân Diệu eroticizes mortality, while Hàn Mặc Tử spiritualizes decay. Formally, Xuân Diệu's syntax surges, while Hàn Mặc Tử's diffuses. Yet both lyricisms manifest what Tran (2015) calls “ontological dissonance”—a disintegration of selfhood dramatized through symbolic and structural fragmentation.

At the heart of both poetics lies longing: to suspend time (Xuân Diệu) or to recover a lost luminosity (Hàn Mặc Tử). Sartre's (2007) view of consciousness as a project doomed never to coincide with itself, and Lacan's (2006) theory of desire orbiting a missing object, illuminate this shared void. These findings establish a coherent foundation for Section 4.2, where Baudelaire and Eliot stage analogous crises under differing metaphysical and cultural regimes (Childs, 2008; Habib, 2005).

B. *Western Poetic Subjectivity: Fragmentation, Irony, and Metaphysical Void*

Western literary modernism marks a decisive rupture with the coherent subjectivity of the Enlightenment. In poets such as Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot, the lyrical self emerges not as unified consciousness but as fractured presence, riddled with metaphysical uncertainty and cultural disorientation. This section examines how both poets dramatize the crisis of modern subjectivity through stylistic fragmentation, symbolic decay, and philosophical irony. Applying the theoretical lenses of existential ontology, psychoanalytic division, and poststructuralist dispersal, the analysis reveals how Baudelaire and Eliot position the poetic self not as the originator of meaning but as the site of its collapse.

(a). *Baudelaire: Melancholy, Dualism, and Poetic Spleen*

In *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), Baudelaire stages the self as melancholic, ambivalent, and internally divided. In *Spleen II*, the opening line—“Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux” (*I am like the king of a rainy land*)—presents an image of sovereign impotence: a subject rendered inert by excess, ennui, and symbolic stagnation. Habib (2005) interprets this persona as symptomatic of modern consciousness—at once hyper-reflexive and emotionally paralyzed.

This inward split anticipates Rimbaud's dictum “*Je est un autre*” (*I is another*) and aligns with Lacan's (2006) theory of the mirror stage, wherein the ego is formed through misrecognition. The Baudelairean “I” never coheres; it hovers between the imagined ideal and the abject real. Melancholy, in this sense, is not a mood but a structural

condition. *Spleen* functions simultaneously as affect and as discursive site of negation—where language, identity, and emotion remain suspended (Childs, 2008).

Spatial motifs intensify this internal dissonance. In *Les fenêtres (Windows)*, the speaker fantasizes about strangers glimpsed through panes—lives imagined yet forever inaccessible. The self exists only in its failure to access alterity. Derrida's (1997) concept of *différance*, where meaning is endlessly deferred, finds poetic expression in this continual reaching toward a never-arriving Other.

Baudelaire's strict formal regularity—decasyllabic lines, fixed rhyme schemes—masks semantic and psychological fragmentation. The tension between classical surface and ruptured interiority enacts the very division it describes. His poetry thus becomes a structure of crisis: ordered in form, broken in essence (Childs, 2008; Habib, 2005).

(b). *Eliot: Irony, Impersonality, and Symbolic Disintegration*

Where Baudelaire melancholically contemplates interior fracture, Eliot actively disassembles the lyric self. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922) present speaker-figures that are not unified voices but composite, tentative, and dispersed. Prufrock's anxious refrain—"Do I dare? / Do I dare?"—signals the collapse of coherent interiority. His consciousness cycles through hesitation, self-surveillance, and ironic detachment. Time becomes measurable not in epochs but in "coffee spoons"—a metaphor of diminished scale and eroded transcendence.

Foucault's (1984) notion of the author-function is salient here: Eliot's persona is not a fixed speaker but a discursive position produced through citation and cultural residue. *The Waste Land* exemplifies this principle, deploying fragmented voices, literary allusions, and multilingual citations across discontinuous sections. Tranter (2006) describes this as "shattered lyricism," where poetic voice emerges not from unity but from discontinuity and syntactic violence.

Irony intensifies this disintegration. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), Eliot famously advocates for impersonality—poetry as an "escape from personality." Yet the emotional intensity of *The Waste Land* belies this doctrine. As Lacan (2006) notes, the unconscious always speaks—even through masks of rationality. Eliot's layering of past voices does not conceal subjectivity; it exposes its collapse, its repetition as residue.

The line, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," encapsulates the existential burden of modern poetics. The lyrical subject, rather than constructing coherence, assembles debris into provisional utterance. Sartre's (2007) claim that the self "is what it is not and is not what it is" underscores this crisis: the Eliotian subject persists through negation, montage, and temporal fracture.

(c). *Fragmented Selves and Metaphysical Dissonance*

Despite aesthetic divergence, Baudelaire and Eliot both construct lyrical selves haunted by metaphysical voids. Baudelaire's persona is dualistic—trapped between desire and decay; Eliot's is multiple—dispersed, evacuated of singularity, sustained only by ironic juxtaposition. In both cases, the poetic self becomes residue: not origin but consequence, not voice but echo.

Formally, each employs fragmentation, juxtaposition, and ambiguity not as avant-garde gestures but as structural imperatives. These devices mirror what Lacan (2006) terms symbolic lack: the subject's failure to fully master or inhabit language. For Baudelaire, this manifests as imagistic yearning; for Eliot, as discursive dissolution.

Thematically, both poets mourn the collapse of coherent cosmologies. While *Thơ Mới* laments the fading Confucian–Buddhist worldview, Western modernism grieves the disintegration of theological and humanist paradigms. Yet both articulate the same ontological condition: the poetic subject as tremor, dispersed across language, memory, and loss.

This comparative insight prepares the ground for Section 4.3, which synthesizes Vietnamese and Western models of poetic selfhood along three axes: temporality, affective structure, and formal articulation.

C. *Comparative Synthesis: Poetic Models of Crisis and Fragmentation*

The preceding analyses of *Thơ Mới* and Western modernist poetry demonstrate contrasting yet structurally resonant constructions of the lyrical self. While the Vietnamese tradition foregrounds temporal dread and metaphysical longing, its Western counterpart emphasizes fragmentation and ontological vacancy. This section synthesizes those findings, identifying three zones of convergence—existential dislocation, affective intensity, and symbolic overload—and two fundamental divergences—cultural cosmologies and formalization of subjectivity.

(a). *Zones of Convergence: Dislocation, Intensity, and Symbolic Overload*

Across both traditions, the lyrical self is presented as ontologically destabilized. Xuân Diệu's compression of time, Hàn Mặc Tử's mystical estrangement, Baudelaire's melancholic bifurcation, and Eliot's ironic dispersal exemplify a poetic self fractured under epistemic and spiritual pressure. Crisis is not an episode within the poem but the constitutive condition of its form.

This fractured self is consistently charged with affective intensity. In *Thơ Mới*, emotion manifests as lyrical urgency—erotic longing, dread of mortality, yearning for transcendence. In Baudelaire and Eliot, affect is less direct yet equally potent: irony, alienation, and melancholia dominate. Across all cases, affect is not merely thematic but structural; it propels syntax, distorts imagery, and shapes rhythm.

Both traditions also engage in symbolic excess. Each poet mobilizes recurring metaphors—moonlight, lips, ruins, shadows—not as stable symbols but as overloaded signifiers that resist resolution. These images function semiotically

as crisis itself: unstable, recursive, and irresolvable (Childs, 2008; Lacan, 2006). Meaning proliferates only to dissolve, producing a symbolic density that both sustains and destabilizes the lyrical self.

(b). *Zones of Divergence: Cosmology and Formal Encoding*

Despite these structural affinities, critical divergences emerge. The Vietnamese poetic self remains situated within residual cosmologies—primarily Buddhist, Confucian, and Catholic—which, though destabilized, still exert ontological pull. Xuân Diệu's dread arises from secularization, while Hàn Mặc Tử's ecstasy emerges from mystical Catholicism. Both gesture toward spiritual unity, even when fractured.

By contrast, Baudelaire and Eliot operate in a post-sacral landscape. Baudelaire's allusions to transcendence are consistently undermined by *spleen* and psychic inertia, while Eliot's invocation of myth dramatizes spiritual collapse. Rather than expressing longing for lost unity, their texts articulate disillusionment with the very premise of wholeness (Derrida, 1997; Foucault, 1984).

These cosmological orientations materialize as divergent formal strategies. *Thơ Mới* retains syntactic momentum and emotive directness, even amid conceptual disintegration. Western modernism often adopts fragmentation, impersonality, and allusive montage. Hàn Mặc Tử extends a single image into a mystic vision, while Eliot dissects imagery into semantic debris. The Vietnamese modern subject still longs for ontological coherence; the Western subject inhabits its absence.

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE MATRIX OF POETIC SUBJECTIVITY IN VIETNAMESE AND WESTERN MODERNISM

Dimension	Xuân Diệu (<i>Thơ Mới</i>)	Hàn Mặc Tử (<i>Thơ Mới</i>)	Baudelaire (Modernism)	T. S. Eliot (Modernism)
Temporality	Accelerated present; fear of mortality	Eschatological longing; suspended time	Cyclical boredom; melancholic pacing	Temporal collapse; historical detritus
Affective Mode	Erotic urgency; existential anxiety	Ecstatic dread; mystical rupture	Melancholy; ironic detachment	Anxiety; impersonality; spiritual exhaustion
Formal Strategy	Lyricism; enjambment; syntactic pressure	Symbolist fusion; tonal fragmentation	Classical meter; semantic inversion	Fragmentation; citation; intertextual montage
Symbolic Anchors	Sun, lips, seasons, fading light	Moon, river, wounds, silence	Windows, spleen, mirror, shadow	Ruins, voices, fragments, ash
Metaphysical Horizon	Aesthetic salvation; secular longing	Catholic mysticism; divine pain	Deferred transcendence; negation	Post-Christian void; ironic recursion

Source: Author's synthesis of textual analyses in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Note: Dimensions reflect dominant tendencies; overlaps across traditions are acknowledged.

Concluding Remark: All four poets encode subjectivity through poetic disintegration across temporal, affective, and symbolic registers.

(c). *Toward an Intercultural Theory of Poetic Crisis*

The comparative model suggests that both *Thơ Mới* and Western modernism construct the poetic self as a crisis-structure—an entity formed by breakdown rather than resolution. They do so, however, through distinct symbolic grammars. The Vietnamese self remains tethered to metaphysical longing; the Western self, by contrast, accepts the void as its ontological ground.

From a theoretical standpoint, this synthesis affirms Lacan's (2006) claim that subjectivity is structured by symbolic lack, as well as Sartre's (2007) notion that consciousness is perpetually non-coincident with itself. Heidegger's (2010) conception of *being-toward-death* reverberates across both corpora—from Xuân Diệu's compressed vitality to Eliot's temporal decay. These traditions do not oppose each other but represent parallel aesthetic responses to existential dislocation.

Crucially, this comparison resists cultural essentialism. It does not cast *Thơ Mới* as a belated imitation of European modernism, nor does it universalize crisis as an exclusively Western construct. Instead, it situates both within asymmetrical modernities—contexts shaped by distinct historical ruptures yet convergent experiences of metaphysical erosion (Dang, 2018; Nguyen, 2008).

Ultimately, the comparative matrix clarifies not only how subjectivity collapses but how that collapse is staged. In *Thơ Mới*, the self mourns the fading cosmological order; in Western modernism, it sifts through ruins. Both traditions respond to the same ontological tremor: the erosion of teleological meaning and the consequent need to construct voice amid symbolic uncertainty.

V. DISCUSSION

The comparative synthesis of *Thơ Mới* and Western modernist poetry reveals a compelling convergence: in both traditions, the lyrical self emerges not as a stable unity but as a structure of ontological rupture. This section elaborates on that insight by proposing a conceptual model of the lyrical self as a crisis-structure, integrating existentialist ontology, psychoanalytic theory, and poststructuralist critique. At the same time, it explores the divergent cultural

grammars that mediate this crisis and articulates the epistemological and aesthetic implications of poetic form as the site of dissonant subjectivity.

A. *The Lyrical Self as Crisis-Structure*

In both *Thơ Mới* and Western modernism, the self is not an essence to be uncovered but a fragmentation to be performed. As outlined in Section 4.3, Xuân Diệu's compressed temporality, Hàn Mặc Tử's mystical rupture, Baudelaire's melancholic bifurcation, and Eliot's ironic dispersal all encode a subject in crisis. These are not anomalies but constitutive features of modern poetics. Crisis functions not as narrative event but as structural condition through which subjectivity is produced and destabilized.

This condition reflects Lacan's (2006) theorization of the subject as structured by lack: caught between the Imaginary promise of wholeness and the Symbolic order of language, which fails to resolve its contradictions. The more poetry seeks to stabilize meaning, the more it exposes its fracture. Xuân Diệu's emotive enjambments, Hàn Mặc Tử's symbolic excess, and Eliot's intertextual debris illustrate this recursive instability.

In existential terms, Sartre (2007) views consciousness as inherently non-coincident with itself—an intentionality that perpetually transcends and negates its condition. This dynamic is encoded in poetic language as the continual deferral of identity. When Xuân Diệu writes, “*Yêu là chết ở trong lòng một ít*” (*To love is to die a little inside*), or when Eliot laments, “*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons,*” both voices gesture toward selves already absent from their utterance. Subjectivity emerges as residue: what cannot be grasped, only dramatized.

B. *Divergent Cosmologies and Residual Teleologies*

Despite shared crisis-structures, the traditions diverge sharply in cultural cosmology. *Thơ Mới* retains vestiges of Buddhist, Confucian, and Catholic metaphysics, even in their dissolution. Xuân Diệu's yearning for permanence echoes a secularized nostalgia for cyclical time and moral order, while Hàn Mặc Tử's torment is grounded in Catholic transcendence. Their crises are not post-metaphysical but post-traditional—they mourn the fragmentation of inherited ontologies.

Western modernism, by contrast, operates in a post-sacral condition. Baudelaire's sacred is saturated with *spleen*, while Eliot's mythic invocations dramatize collapse rather than restoration. Their poetry questions not only the possibility of meaning but its very premise. As Foucault (1984) and Derrida (1997) argue, the modern Western subject is born into a void where identity is textually deferred and origins are overwritten by language.

This divergence affirms Lotman's (1990) theory of semiospheres: symbolic systems are culturally bounded and historically conditioned. *Thơ Mới* does not imitate Western modernism; it reformulates crisis through its own cultural grammar. The Vietnamese self struggles with metaphysical residues, while the Western self inhabits ontological disintegration. Neither model is hierarchically superior—each constitutes a local response to asymmetric but converging historical ruptures (Dang, 2018; Nguyen, 2008).

C. *Poetic Form and the Aesthetic Ethics of Disintegration*

The model of the lyrical self as crisis-structure necessitates a rethinking of poetic form. Form is not ornamental but the site where ontology registers itself. In *Thơ Mới*, rhythmic propulsion and emotive syntax embody impermanence. In Western modernism, fragmentation, ellipsis, and intertextual montage enact dislocation. The poem becomes a laboratory of disassembled subjectivity, where syntax and imagery bear the marks of existential rupture.

This aesthetic aligns with Adorno's (1997) concept of aesthetic negativity—the refusal of harmony and reconciliation. These poems do not resolve contradiction; they amplify it. They gesture toward meaning while asserting its impossibility. Yet this negativity is not nihilistic; it is ethically generative. By refusing closure, modern poetry preserves a fragile space of interrogation, resisting ideological stabilization and offering instead an ethics of ambiguity.

In sum, the modern lyrical self is neither coherent individual nor mere textual effect; it is a crisis-structure, suspended between cultural memory and epistemological vertigo. Whether in *Thơ Mới* or Western modernism, the poem becomes a space where crisis is not overcome but rendered thinkable—and speakable—through aesthetic form.

VI. CONCLUSION AND ACADEMIC IMPLICATIONS

A. *Theoretical Synthesis*

This study has demonstrated that the emergence of the lyrical self in both Vietnamese *Thơ Mới* and Western modernist poetry should be understood as a formalized articulation of existential crisis. Across cultural boundaries, the lyrical subject ceases to function as a unified, rational center and instead becomes a structure of symbolic dislocation, psychic instability, and ontological lack. Xuân Diệu's yearning for temporal permanence, Hàn Mặc Tử's mystical fragmentation, Baudelaire's melancholic dualism, and Eliot's depersonalized voice converge in what this study conceptualizes as the crisis-structure of modern subjectivity.

This model synthesizes three intersecting theoretical currents: Lacan's (2006) formulation of the subject as constituted by lack, Sartre's (2007) account of consciousness as non-coincident with itself, and Lotman's (1990) view of symbolic systems as culturally bounded semiospheres. Through this triangulated framework, the study advances a

new poetics of subjectivity, wherein crisis is not a deviation from the norm but the very ground from which the lyric voice speaks.

The study also challenges developmentalist models in comparative literature that frame Asian modernities as belated or mimetic. Instead, *Thơ Mới* emerges as a culturally specific yet structurally resonant response to global modernity. Its formal innovations—elliptical syntax, affective excess, spiritual inversion—are not imitations of Western modernism but expressions of a symbolic grammar shaped by Buddhist, Confucian, Catholic, and colonial tensions. The theoretical model of crisis-structure thus affirms the **coeval modernity** of both traditions while allowing for radical divergence in their semiotic orchestration.

B. Academic and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the global reconfiguration of modernist studies by positing a non-hierarchical comparative method grounded in symbolic convergence rather than historical priority. By situating *Thơ Mới* alongside Western modernist poetics on equal analytic footing, it avoids Eurocentrism while preserving cultural specificity. This reframing is particularly relevant to scholars of comparative literature, world poetics, and transnational modernism, offering a replicable template for analyzing lyrical subjectivity across asymmetrical modernities.

Methodologically, the study illustrates the utility of integrating existentialist ontology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and semiotic theory in literary analysis. Rather than privileging one paradigm, it demonstrates how intertheoretical dialogue can illuminate the layered architecture of poetic selfhood. This interdisciplinary approach encourages future research to engage modern literature not only as cultural artifact but also as a site of ontological inquiry.

Pedagogically, the model of crisis-structure opens new pathways for curriculum development in comparative and world literature. Placing Vietnamese *Thơ Mới* alongside canonical Western poets in university syllabi enriches understandings of global modernism and challenges hegemonic literary cartographies. It also prompts students to consider how poetic form encodes existential dilemmas and symbolic ruptures that are unique to each tradition yet legible across borders.

Finally, the ethical implications are profound. The modern poem, in both traditions, stages crisis not as pathology but as a mode of meaning-making. Through dissonance, poetry performs an ontological labor—sustaining the unspeakable, preserving contradiction, and giving aesthetic form to a fragmented world. This study affirms that poetry, far from ornamental, is a vital medium through which modern subjectivity is imagined, interrogated, and transformed.

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