



THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MOTIF OF IDENTITY IN CLASSICAL AND MODERN LITERATURE

Jumanova Gozzal Joldasbaevna

The student of the Nukus Branch of the Uzbekistan

State Institute of Arts and Culture

Nukus, Uzbekistan, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19364741>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 21st March 2026

Accepted: 25th March 2026

Online: 30th March 2026

KEYWORDS

identity motif, literature, selfhood, modernism, narrative identity

ABSTRACT

The motif of identity is a central element in literary studies, reflecting changing understandings of the self across historical periods. This paper examines the transformation of the motif of identity in classical and modern literature, focusing on its philosophical and cultural dimensions. Drawing on literary theory and selected texts, the study demonstrates that identity evolves from a stable and unified concept in classical literature to a fragmented and dynamic construct in modern works. The analysis shows that the motif of identity remains essential for understanding both literary meaning and broader cultural change.

Introduction

The motif of identity has long been a key theme in literature, allowing writers to explore how individuals define themselves within social and cultural contexts. In literary texts, identity is not only a personal matter but also a reflection of broader historical and philosophical ideas. In classical literature, identity is generally presented as stable and clearly defined. Characters tend to follow social roles and moral values, reflecting a structured worldview. In contrast, modern literature challenges this stability, portraying identity as fluid, uncertain, and shaped by psychological and social forces. As Stuart Hall (1996) argues, identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through representation. This paper analyzes how the motif of identity transforms across literary periods, highlighting its role in shaping meaning and reflecting cultural change.

Theoretical Framework: Identity as a Motif

A motif is a recurring element that contributes to the central ideas of a text. The motif of identity is particularly significant because it connects individual experience with cultural and philosophical questions. Paul Ricoeur (1992) introduces the idea of narrative identity, suggesting that people understand themselves through stories. Recent research continues to support this view, emphasizing that identity is shaped and negotiated through narrative practices. This means that identity is not fixed but constantly reinterpreted.

Additionally, contemporary studies highlight that identity is influenced by social and cultural contexts. Modern scholarship shows that identity is constructed through interaction, discourse, and representation, rather than existing as a stable essence. These perspectives are essential for understanding literary representations of identity.

The Motif of Identity in Classical Literature

In classical literature, the motif of identity is associated with stability, unity, and moral clarity. Characters are typically defined by their roles, values, and responsibilities. For example, in the works of William Shakespeare, identity is closely linked to duty and social order. Although characters such as Hamlet experience internal conflict, their identity remains grounded in a clear moral framework. This reflects what Charles Taylor (1989) describes as a unified sense of self. Classical literature often presents identity as universal and enduring. The use of formal structure and symbolic language reinforces the idea that identity is stable and meaningful. As a result, the motif of identity supports a coherent and ordered vision of human experience.

The Motif of Identity in Modern Literature

Modern literature introduces a more complex and fragmented view of identity. The motif of identity becomes a way to explore uncertainty, individuality, and psychological depth.

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, identity is presented as fluid and constantly changing. Through stream-of-consciousness narration, the novel reveals multiple layers of thought and perception. Identity is no longer fixed but shaped by memory, time, and social interaction. Recent studies confirm that identity is an ongoing process rather than a stable condition. It is continuously reconstructed through experience and narrative. This idea aligns with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid" identity, which emphasizes flexibility and change. Thus, modern literature transforms the motif of identity into a dynamic and complex element, reflecting the instability of modern life.

Narrative and Symbolism

The transformation of the motif of identity is also reflected in literary techniques. Classical texts use clear symbols and structured narratives, reinforcing stable meanings. In contrast, modern literature employs fragmented narratives and ambiguous symbolism. These techniques reflect the complexity of identity and require active interpretation from the reader. Recent research highlights that identity is closely connected to narrative voice and self-representation, particularly in modern writing. This demonstrates how literary form contributes to the representation of identity as fluid and multifaceted.

Conclusion

The motif of identity remains one of the most important elements in literature. While classical literature presents identity as stable and unified, modern literature portrays it as fragmented and evolving. This transformation reflects broader cultural and philosophical changes in the understanding of the self. The motif of identity continues to shape literary meaning and provides insight into the complexity of human experience.

References:

- Barry, P. (2017). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (4th ed.). Manchester University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity Press.
- Eagleton, T. (2013). *How to read literature*. Yale University Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs identity? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1–17). SAGE Publications.
- Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another*. University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, C. (1989). Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity. Harvard University Press.

Woolf, V. (2000). Mrs Dalloway. Penguin Books. (Original work published 1925)

