

ABSTRACTS

From *LITERARY STUDY IN VIETNAM — POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES*

Edited by LÊ HỒNG- LY and TRẦN HẢI-YẾN

VIETNAM'S LITERARY CRITICISM – A METHODOLOGICAL PROFILE

Đỗ Lai-Thúy

Abstract:

Over the past decade, Vietnam's literary criticism has modernized and integrated with the world. This essay reviews the field and situates Vietnamese literature and literary theory in history. This is a complex task. The essay does not describe the complex life of literary criticism in Vietnam but only analyses its essence, which is methodology. A critic's methodology expresses both his literary ideology and his specific treatment of each literary work. Therefore, for us, the names of methodologies link to names of theories, schools and doctrines. From the methodological perspective, the essay will not address journalistic criticism but only scholarly criticism. Even within scholarly criticism, the methodologies are often unclear and inhomogeneous; therefore the essay only deals with a few typical works. Moreover, due to lack of time and access to materials, the essay does not touch on criticism in Southern Vietnam between 1954 and 1975, or overseas since 1975.

Key words:

Criticism, scholarly criticism, literary theory, research, study, methodology, paradigm.

TRAVELING THEORY AND ORIENTALISM IN EAST ASIA

Hoàng Lương-Xá

Abstract:

Through the introduction of Edward Said, together with his traveling theory and his work Orientalism, this paper examines how Said's Orientalism has traveled throughout East Asia (including Vietnam), and how it has been received and transformed. Moving from its original

time and space to new temporal and special environments, theories may lose their primordial aspects: some of their resistential characteristics can be lost, and they can be simplified, or localized accordingly. On the other hand, situated within new times and spaces, theories can absorb new rebellious aspects, or undergo the addition of novel and positive (or negative) features that were completely absent in the original. Translation plays a crucial role in the transmission of theories as well as in the improvements (or deductions) of their effects. The reception of Said's Orientalism stands out as an excellent example of the traveling theory. This paper presents some thoughts on the critical spirit and attitude in the reception of theories (in general) and literary theories (in particular) from "the West"; it also warns about the existence of orientalism in a portion of Western scholarship, and the risk of "self-orientalization" of "the East" to fit in with the stereotypical expectations of "the West".

Key words:

Orientalism, representation, discourse, the Other, postcolonialism, the Orient, the Occident.

**REMARKS ON DIFFERENCES IN THE PRESENTATION OF
LITERARY THEORY IN AMERICA AND IN FRANCE**

Cao Việt-Dũng

Abstract:

This paper is a critical reading of Gregory Castle's The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory, examining how literary theory is represented, how it is formed conceptually, and how its history is presented depending on literary scholars' various perspectives or approaches. The paper deals with the points of view of French and American researchers in their presentation of a number of literary issues and historical moments that are important in literary theory on both sides of the Atlantic. Differences resulting from these observations are not only described as superficial "conflicts" but are also located in the relationship with a broader concept of literary theory and in the ways in which each "school" typically treats the historical dimension. The chapter also suggests some changes in the reception of foreign literary theories in Vietnam: rather than questioning what to receive, the question now is how to receive literary theories from overseas.

Key words:

Theory, difference, history, reception, presentation.

**ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM AND THE ARCHETYPE OF WATER
IN VIETNAMESE LITERATURE**

Nguyễn Thị Thanh-Xuân

Abstract:

Established in the middle of the 20th century, archetypal criticism does not aim to create a common theoretical framework. Rather, it praises experimentation. In this essay we utilize the concepts and methodology of the archetypal criticism of Carl Gustav Jung, Gaston Bachelard and Northrop Frye as important foundations to explore the archetype of water in Vietnamese literary works. Based on the criteria of prominence, flexibility, and frequency of appearance, the essay explores a number of the archetypes of water from a wide range of literary forms, with a focus on the works of Hồ Xuân Hương, Trần Dần and Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, in order to point out the similarities and differences in Vietnamese art and that of the rest of the world. The essay acknowledges the contribution of archetypal criticism in helping researchers gain a deeper understanding of the work, in evaluating the dynamics of literature from multiple perspectives (psychological, cultural, anthropological), in recognizing humanity and ethnicity in literature, in helping to link Vietnamese literature with world literature, and in helping to encourage Vietnamese writers and readers to revive the desire to connect past and present. It has also helped to minimize the dependency of writing and reading on political life, to increase the multiple voices in written texts and the power of imagination in creation from sustainable cultural resources.

Key words:

Symbol, unconsciousness, archetype, archetypal criticism, water.

**THE MOVEMENT OF REFORMING LITERARY FORMS, LITERATI'S MINDSET,
AND LITERATURE'S DYNAMIC FORMATION IN VIETNAM
IN THE LATE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES**

Nguyễn Kim-Son

Abstract:

During the medieval period, civil service examination literature and creative literature were closely related. As both the forms of representation and the characteristics of the creative subject, literary forms could be both issues of the civil service examination and the reflection of the literati's spirit and the status quo of literary composition in general. During the period from the late 17th to early 18th centuries, Vietnamese Confucians figured out numerous irrational issues in education and civil service examination, especially in its literary forms. A literary form reform movement was carried out with great enthusiasm. A number of questions have arisen about this movement: What was the nature of the movement? What did contemporary Confucians wish to reform? What did the movement reflect in spiritual life that was the main concern of the literati? What effects did it have on the literary life of this period? What were its socio-cultural effects? Through cultural and intellectual approaches, this paper hopes to elucidate these issues in literary history.

Key words:

Literary forms, studies of the heart-and-mind, substantial/practical learning, literati, dynamic formations of literature.

DISCOURSES ON SEXUALITY IN VIETNAMESE FICTION

(From the beginning of the 20th century to 1945)

Trần Văn-Toàn

Abstract:

According to Foucault, sexuality does not exist independently from human conscious but it is historically constructed. Sexuality, as argued by Foucault, is produced by discourse to legitimize power relations in order to implement a plot. From Foucault's suggestion, we propose to study the discourse on sexuality in Vietnamese literature from the beginning of the 20th century until 1945. This sexual discourse was formed as a result of the interaction of many factors: cultural, economic, class relations, readers' taste, etc. Discourse on sexuality has a mutual relationship with other discourses (on science, politics, law, etc.) but is at the

same time unique due to its humanistic and aesthetic values. The study of discourse on sexuality can provide us with an understanding about reform by taking a perspective on literature of the time. In addition, another goal of our study is to lay a foundation for a theoretical discussion to shed light on sexualization in contemporary Vietnamese literature. Besides a contribution to historical literature, this article also confirms a new dynamic in research on Vietnamese literature: approaching literature from a cultural perspective.

Key words:

Sexuality, discourse, power, body, city, citizen, Vietnamese literature.

**THE FIRST THREE DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE
FORMATION OF LITERARY FIELDS IN VIETNAM**

Phạm Xuân-Thạch

Abstract:

The first three decades of the 20th century were a special period in the history of Vietnamese literature: the transformation period from the pre-modern, bi-lingual (Han and Nom), Chinese-influenced structure to the modern, Romanized Vietnamese language and Western-influenced structure. In other words, this was a restructuring period when modern Vietnamese literature was formed. One of the special processes of the period was the gradual development of literature into a relatively independent field, its escape from the influence of power and politics as in the pre-modern period, with the rise of professional writers. During this period Vietnamese literature also searched for independence, drawing boundaries with other spiritual forms and creating separate rules with the values and relations of the literary figures of the times. Therefore, the period was a formative period for the literary field, to borrow the phrase from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. This theory has been formed from research on French literature of the second half of the 19th century. Therefore, in applying it to the situation of Vietnamese literature, modifications must be made. If scientifically applied, this theory can help address issues of concern to Vietnamese literary scholars and contribute to an understanding of modern Vietnamese literature and the social and cultural position literature has occupied in this country.

Key words:

Sociology of literature, literary history, modern Vietnamese literature, literary field.

A SOCIO-LITERARY STUDY ON TRẦN DẦN

Phùng Ngọc-Kiên

Abstract:

Trần Dần is a special literary phenomenon, not only because of his personal life but also because of the distinctive position he assumes in the development of contemporary Vietnamese literature. His position, first and foremost, is closely linked with the historical transformations due to the direct dependence of literature on political requirements. Moreover, as an artist whose desire for reform was expressed through the selection of political-romantic poetry in the 1950s, Trần Dần showed that he carried himself as a decent citizen. However, it was his attitude and his desire for ultimate reform that formed the philosophy of his literature, which holds symbolic value as the highest sign of art and is indifferent to the opinions of others. This very typical characteristic of interaction between society and literature has led us to experiment with a socio-literary study based on Pierre Bourdieu's suggestion to examine the impacts of external textual factors on internal structure.

Key words:

Trần Dần, Tố Hữu, Pierre Bourdieu, sociology of literature, "field", reform, political-romantic poetry.

FROM CHILDREN'S FOLK SONGS TO MODERN POETRY:

THE CASE OF TRẦN DẦN

Trần Ngọc-Hiếu

Abstract:

In the period between 1963 and 1965, Trần Dần creatively applied the model of children's folk songs to begin a period of determined and thorough reform. Children's folk songs gave Trần Dần ideas for the construction of poems according to which words were not simply a

vehicle to transmit meaning already formed but the focus of the poems – that is, the poems’ meaning was language itself. More specifically, children’s folk songs have stimulated Trần Dần’s interest in an experiment where sound precedes meaning and creates meaning. The treatment of tempo and especially rhyme in his works during this period is very special: from the use of difficult rhyme, he came to implement variations of sound, completely erasing references and making poems “open works.” With these experiments, Trần Dần became the founder and central figure of language poetry in Vietnamese contemporary poetry.

The essay focuses on exploring Trần Dần’s experiments during the period between 1963 and 1965, using descriptive and comparative methodology, referring to related history in order to express the importance of these poetic searches in the progress of Vietnamese poetry. The essay also analyzes Mùa sạch, a work typical for the application of Trần Dần’s model of children’s folk song, and also a few other poems written in a later period but still in the style that Trần Dần established during this period.

Key words:

Literary criticism, modern Vietnamese poetry, poetical language, Trần Dần, children’s folk song.