

HỒ BIỂU CHÁNH² AND THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIETNAMESE NOVEL

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The novel—tentatively defined as a long work of prose fiction—did not appear in Vietnam until the first quarter of this century, much later than in China. There were several reasons for its late arrival, the most important having to do with the nature of *chữ nôm*, or 'Southern script', an inconsistent and complicated method of writing the Vietnamese language using Chinese characters. Until the early twentieth century, Vietnamese scholar-gentry and court officials either wrote in Chinese using, of course, Chinese characters, or, if they wished to write in the vernacular for their compatriots, most of whom were not literate in Chinese or Vietnamese, they wrote in *chữ nôm*. If they wrote a story in *chữ nôm*, they wrote it in verse not prose because verse contained the mnemonic aids of rhyme, parallelism, and rhythm that facilitated memorization and oral dissemination among non-literate members of the society. This is why, when *chữ nôm* was the only writing system available, Vietnamese wrote *truyện thơ nôm*, verse narratives in *nôm*, not long prose novels. The novel emerged in Vietnam when *quốc-ngữ*, or 'the national script', the new alphabetical writing system using roman letters, replaced the old *chữ nôm*.¹ Changes in the socio-economic situation—namely the growth of cities, the development of a petty-bourgeois class, a weakening of traditional communal values, the rise of individualism—also prepared the way for the novel. These changes have accompanied, and perhaps caused, the rise of the novel in other countries.²

Story telling is an ancient art in Vietnam as in other countries. To discuss the beginnings of the novel one must decide when narrative discourse becomes novelistic discourse and to do that one needs a definition that distinguishes the novel from other types of narrative. One cannot rely on labels because labels are rarely applied to literary works in a precise way. Some Vietnamese, for example, use the term '*tiểu-thuyết*', literally 'a small story', to refer to both nineteenth-century verse narratives and modern works of prose fiction.³ We assume that a novel has to be long and in prose. In contrast to the romance, a genre that preceded the novel in both Vietnam and England, a novel is set in recent times usually in the country of the author, not in some

"distant, idealized past".⁴ A romance, which has affinities with the epic, does not stress verisimilitude. A novel, however, aims to give an authentic account of individual lives—to record life as it is—and thus it resembles history and journalism. To achieve verisimilitude, novelists often use less ornate language than that used by romance writers; they have their narrators and characters speak as people commonly speak in everyday life.⁵ Novels tend to be more "middle-class in scope": usually they present middle-class, not aristocratic, characters and are intended for a middle-class readership. While romances "value the preservation of virtue and chastity", novels "tend to focus on illegal doings and forbidden passions".⁶

Finding a definition of the novel was relatively easy. A more difficult problem arose when we tried to square what many critics were saying about its early development in Vietnam with what we were learning about a southern writer named Hồ Văn Trung, who wrote under the pen name Hồ Biểu Chánh. Most Vietnamese literary historians and textbook writers identify either Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tổ Tâm* [Pure Heart] or Nguyễn Trọng Thuật's *Quả dưa đỏ* [The Red Melon] as being the first modern novel in Vietnam.⁷ Both works were published in 1925 in Hanoi, but they are completely different kinds of stories. *Tổ Tâm* is a love story which became a *cause célèbre* in part because it breaks with tradition by ending tragically, with the death of the heroine. *Quả dưa đỏ*, in contrast, is a greatly expanded and embellished version of an old Vietnamese folk tale about a loyal subject who is banished to an uninhabited island by the king who has judged him wrongly. After he turns the island into a center for watermelon production, he is pardoned by the king and reinstated on the mainland. We could easily see why *Tổ Tâm* has been considered a modern novel, and although we would classify *Quả dưa đỏ* as only a quasi-novel—as part novel, part romance, part didactic prose fiction along the lines of *Gulliver's Travels*⁸—still it *is* written in prose and it *is* long and so we could see why Vietnamese scholars have also called it a novel. What we had trouble understanding was why Hồ Biểu Chánh was so rarely mentioned in discussions of the early novel.

Hồ Biểu Chánh was born in Gò-công Province in the Mekong Delta area of southern Vietnam. In 1912 when he was 27 years old and an official in the French colonial administration, he volunteered to be transferred to Cà-mau at the southern tip of Vietnam. Before moving to Cà-mau he had assisted in the translation of a collection of Chinese stories and had written some poetry, including a narrative titled *U-tình lục* [A Story of Sad Love], which he composed in the traditional six-eight verse form. After finishing it he decided he could reach his readers more effectively in another genre. He had read some prose narratives written by other Vietnamese living in the Delta region,⁹ including one by Trần Chánh Chiêu titled *Hoàng Tô-Anh hàm oan* [The Unjust Suffering of Hoàng Tô-Anh], a work which he later referred to as "the first novel in the Six Provinces [the Delta region], a love story which de-

picted local characters and was written in prose". After reading this work he decided that "it was easier to move people in prose" than in verse and so, inspired by Trần Chánh Chiêu's example and by the poetic scenery of Cà-mau, he tried his hand at prose narrative.¹⁰ The result was a work titled *Ai làm được?* [Who Can Do It?], a story set in Cà-mau which tells about a girl's struggle to escape the treachery of an evil stepmother.

Hồ Biểu Chánh wrote *Ai làm được?* in 1912. This 1912 version was serialized in the southern weekly newspaper *Nông cổ mìn đàm* [Discussions of Agriculture and Commerce] beginning on March 20, 1919. In 1922 Hồ Biểu Chánh rewrote *Ai làm được?* and published it in book form.¹¹ Hoàng Ngọc Phách wrote *Tổ Tâm* in 1922 and published it in 1925,¹² the same year *Quả dưa đỏ* appeared. Therefore *Ai làm được?* definitely predates both these works. And this was only the beginning of a long career as a novelist. By 1925 Hồ Biểu Chánh had already written six novels—we would call them novels—and he went on to write over 60 novels and was still writing when he died in 1958. In contrast, both Hoàng Ngọc Phách and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật wrote only one long fictional work in prose. So why do some literary historians, including the respected Dương Quảng Hàm, not even mention Hồ Biểu Chánh's contributions to the novel?

Seeking answers, we turned first to Hồ Biểu Chánh's early works. *Ai làm được?* is about a girl named Bạch Tuyết, the daughter of a district chief, whose real mother is poisoned by her father's concubine when Bạch Tuyết is six years old. Bạch Tuyết later learns from a faithful servant of the family the circumstances of her mother's death. When she is seventeen, a man named Chí Đại comes to Cà-mau looking for work. He meets Bạch Tuyết's grandfather, a wealthy man, who recognizes his talent and honesty and finds him a job as a clerk in his son's (Bạch Tuyết's father's) office. In order to obtain Bạch Tuyết's grandfather's money when he dies, the stepmother plans to have Bạch Tuyết marry her nephew. Worried that Bạch Tuyết's grandfather may arrange a marriage instead with the personable and talented Chí Đại, she gets him fired; and after he has left Cà-mau, she tries to rush Bạch Tuyết into a marriage with her nephew. To avoid this match Bạch Tuyết runs away in search of Chí Đại. She finds him and they endure a miserable existence in Saigon: he works as an office messenger, then as a rickshaw driver; Bạch Tuyết gets pregnant, then sick, the baby dies. Finally Bạch Tuyết's grandfather finds them, gives them money, arranges for them to be formally married, and finds Chí Đại a job on an expedition going to the Indian Ocean to dive for pearls. Bạch Tuyết returns to Cà-mau. The stepmother, still after the grandfather's fortune, tries to poison Bạch Tuyết, but Chí Đại returns just in time to rescue her. In the end, the stepmother is sent to prison and Bạch Tuyết and Chí Đại have two children and become one of the richest families in Cà-mau.

Some critics argue that *Ai làm được?* is modeled on Paul Bourget's *André Cornélis*, a French psychological novel about a boy who sus-

pects and later proves that his stepfather murdered his father.¹³ Paul Bourget was a popular author in Vietnam.¹⁴ Hồ Biểu Chánh may have read André Cornélis and received from this French novel the idea of writing a story about a child who has a parent killed by a stepparent. But *Ai làm được?* is clearly not modeled on André Cornélis: the stories are completely different in plot, form, tone, and theme. André Cornélis unfolds like a detective story: André, the young man, begins with only a vague suspicion that his stepfather killed his father; the novel is the story of how, through careful detective work, he turns this suspicion into proof. *Ai làm được?* completely lacks this detective-story quality: at the beginning of the story Bạch Tuyết and the reader already know that Bạch Tuyết's stepmother poisoned her real mother. Bạch Tuyết and Chí Đại's struggle to eke out an honorable living in Saigon takes up a large part of *Ai làm được?*. There is nothing comparable in André Cornélis to this love story between Bạch Tuyết and Chí Đại: André is too obsessed with revenge to have any romantic interests. André Cornélis is written in the first person: it is André's written confession. *Ai làm được?*, however, is written in the third person and there is nothing confessional about its tone. Bourget's work is a psychological novel that explores the effects of suspicion, vengeance, and guilt on the mind of a young man. *Ai làm được?*, on the other hand, is a moral tale about the wickedness of greed and the value of righteousness.

Further evidence that *Ai làm được?* is not modeled on André Cornélis is found in Hồ Biểu Chánh's autobiography in which he includes a list of the twelve works that he says were modeled on French novels.¹⁵ *Ai làm được?* is not on this list. *Ai làm được?* probably would have been a better work if Hồ Biểu Chánh had modeled it on André Cornélis. It exhibits the weaknesses of what Phạm Quỳnh in 1921 called the *đường thẳng* [straight road] method of narration:¹⁶ events in *Ai làm được?* are narrated one after the other with no detours for descriptions of characters, feelings, or setting. This was the traditional method of narration, the method used in Chinese romances like *The Three Kingdoms* and Vietnamese verse narratives like *Lục Vân Tiên*. Since *Ai làm được?* was Hồ Biểu Chánh's first novel, it is not surprising that it contains weaknesses. His later works reveal that he learned new and more complex methods of narration, probably by reading French novels and by writing Vietnamese novels modeled on French novels. Nevertheless, *Ai làm được?* fits most of our criteria for novelistic discourse: it is a long work written in prose; it is set in the time and country of the author; it portrays ordinary people who might have lived in south Vietnam around the turn of the century; and its characters speak naturally in the southern dialect of Cà-mau.

Hồ Biểu Chánh's next two prose narratives are on the author's list of works modeled on French novels: *Chúa tàu Kim-Quy* [The Captain of the *Golden Turtle*] (1922), modeled after Alexander Dumas père's *Comte de Monte-Cristo*, and *Cay đắng mùi đời* [The Bitterness of Life] (1922), modeled after Hector Malot's *Sans Famille*, a very popular work

in Vietnam. Although the plots of these novels roughly follow the plots of the French works, the characters and situations are completely Vietnamized. The Count of Monte-Cristo becomes a Vietnamese living during the reign of Minh Mạng (1820-40) who is imprisoned when he breaks the arm of the man who has seduced his younger sister. The Abbé who tells Edmond Dantes of the hidden treasure becomes in Hồ Biểu Chánh's work a descendant of a Chinese lord who controlled parts of Cambodia and South Vietnam in the seventeenth century. Signor Vitalis, the leader of a traveling trick dog show who adopts the familyless Rémi in Hector Malot's novel, becomes in *Cay đắng mùi đời* a Vietnamese interpreter in the French colonial administration who, after a falling out with his mandarin boss, takes to the road with the hero, an orphan youth named Đước. They perform as singers and guitar players rather than as animal trainers. More importantly, Hồ Biểu Chánh's characters espouse traditional Confucian values. When a rich lady wants to raise Đước, Thầy Đàng, the ex-interpreter, explains that he must raise him himself so he will—by experiencing the bitterness of life—learn to respect *nhân-nghĩa* [benevolent love (and) righteousness], a common Sino-Vietnamese phrase used to suggest the Confucian moral code.

Tình mộng [Awakening from a Dream] (1923¹⁷), Hồ Biểu Chánh's fourth prose narrative and the first that no critic has suggested is modeled on a French novel, concerns Yên Tuyết, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a prefect's wife, who is seduced by her first cousin, Trường Xuân. The fact that Trường Xuân is already married and was raised by Yên Tuyết's mother, becoming therefore like a brother to Yên Tuyết, makes his action even more scandalous. Yên Tuyết becomes pregnant and so her mother and Trường Xuân must quickly hire someone to marry Yên Tuyết so that family honor will be protected and Trường Xuân's career chances preserved. They find a husband in the person of Kỳ Tâm, an ex-student thrown on hard times by financial setbacks suffered by his father. The wedding scene is remarkable because it reveals Hồ Biểu Chánh dealing ironically with the talent-meets-beauty motif at a time when his northern counterpart were unable or unwilling to do so. Striving to keep up appearances, a relative of Trường Xuân gives a speech in which he refers to the groom as a *tài-tử* [talented youth] and the bride as a *giai-nhân* [beautiful girl]. Since the bride is already pregnant and the groom hastily rented for the occasion, this is definitely not the kind of ideal match one might find in a verse romance. Kỳ Tâm is, however, a talented—and principled—young man. He refuses all money for becoming a rent-a-husband, taking on the assignment to help Yên Tuyết's mother and to examine at first hand the hypocrisy of the rich. Eventually he earns the respect of Yên Tuyết and the story ends with their agreeing to become husband and wife in fact as well as name.

All four of these stories by Hồ Biểu Chánh are long narratives. All are written in prose. All, except perhaps *Chúa tàu Kim-Quì*, satisfy the criterion of recentness. All take place in southern Vietnam in the prov-

inces where Hồ Biểu Chánh worked as an administrator for the colonial government. They are not about kings and queens or high court officials but ordinary civil servants and farmers that one would meet in south Vietnam during the first quarter of this century. In short, these early narratives of Hồ Biểu Chánh appear not only to be novels but to be novels in some respects more modern than *Tô Tâm*.

One modern feature concerns the social class of the characters. Although like Hoàng Ngọc Phách he makes representatives of the middle and upper class his major characters, he also populates his works with characters drawn from lower levels of Vietnamese society. Two particularly successful characters are the peasant woman (Bà Thối), who raises the abandoned child named Đước, and her no-good husband (Hủ) from *Cay đắng mùi đời*. These two characters converse in very realistic dialogue which reveals character and cultural attitudes as it advances the plot.

A second modern feature is Hồ Biểu Chánh's frank subject matter. *Ai làm đước?* contains a murder and a premarital sexual relationship, *Chúa tàu Kim-Quy* includes a rape scene, and in *Tình mộng* a young unwed girl becomes pregnant after being seduced by a married man who is also her first cousin. In comparison to these actions the transgressions of Hoàng Ngọc Phách's characters in *Tô Tâm* seem hardly worth worrying about. Hồ Biểu Chánh was less afraid than his northern counterparts to deal with the "illegal doings and forbidden passions" that Lennard J. Davis and others have identified as common topics in the modern novel.

A third feature relates to plot construction. Although *Ai làm đước?* has, as we have explained, a simple linear plot, Hồ Biểu Chánh's next three novels are more intricately constructed. His works focus on the social relations of rural middle- and upper-class Vietnamese; in this sense they are novels of manners—exposés of the hypocritical lives led by provincial officials and landowners and their families. Usually, however, his works contain a love story also and often, as in *Chúa tàu Kim-Quy* and *Cay đắng mùi đời*, add elements of the adventure story. By combining these different types of the novel Hồ Biểu Chánh produced plots less psychological than the plot of *Tô Tâm* but more intricate in terms of the way different elements are blended into a whole.

Hồ Biểu Chánh's style represents another innovation. He was the first Vietnamese novelist to experiment with realistic dialogue,¹⁸ the first to write close to the way people spoke. The literary critic Thanh Lăng points out that it is in the novels of Hồ Biểu Chánh that we first hear characters refer to each other using the vulgar pronouns *mày* and *tao*.¹⁹ Like the narrators in *Tô Tâm* and *Quả dưa đỏ*, the narrator in Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels often speaks in the balanced parallel phrases of the Chinese style (*lời Hán-văn*), but Hồ Biểu Chánh has his other characters employ the colloquial rhythms and diction of their southern dialect. At a time when northern writers still favored a more formal, literary style, Hồ Biểu Chánh pioneered a very different, a more realistic ap-

proach to representing speech in prose.

REASONS FOR HỒ BIỂU CHÁNH'S TREATMENT BY CRITICS

Why do some Vietnamese critics overlook Hồ Biểu Chánh's contributions to the Vietnamese novel? We have concluded that there are at least four reasons, two primarily textual and two primarily extra-textual.

The first textual reason is the fact that many of Hồ Biểu Chánh's first novels—two of his first three novels and eight of his first fifteen—were modeled on French works. Although critics may point out that Hồ Biểu Chánh completely Vietnamized characters and scenes and that all writers in the early 1920s were, to some degree, imitating French works, still one senses that his reliance on French novels for plots and situations has hurt his reputation.²⁰

The second textual reason has to do with the themes of Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels. Although he was innovative in the use of certain novelistic techniques, and although he dared to focus on forbidden passions and illegal doings—murder, premarital sex, adultery, etc.—he was very old-fashioned in his morality. He wrote his works to support Confucian values, the three bonds and five principles.²¹ Despite his more complex plots, his works—from 1912 to 1958—have the traditional happy ending, a 'hậu', in which the virtuous are rewarded and the wicked punished. In this sense, his works are closer to the romance than the novel: they follow the romance rule of *bienséance*, or decorum, that demands that good characters ultimately be rewarded for their virtue.

Nhật Linh and other writers began in the 1930s to write novels as part of a program to smash the traditional family and Confucian values,²² but Hồ Biểu Chánh continued to support both. In some works he may reveal the bad consequences of arranged marriages, but through wisdom and flexibility, he suggests, a solution can be found. There was no need to destroy the entire moral system. Hồ Biểu Chánh was by no means a revolutionary. He exposes the cruelty, greed, and selfishness of mandarins and landowners but he does not want to overthrow them, only reform them. The distinctions that interest him are not class distinctions but moral distinctions: those who have *nhân-nghĩa* [benevolent love (and) righteousness] and those who lack it.²³ If only, he laments, more people would *trọng nghĩa khinh tài* [honor righteousness (and) despise riches], the *lục-tỉnh* [six delta provinces] would be a better place to live. By continuing to write works that espoused traditional Confucian morality when other writers were advocating more radical solutions, he made it easier for later critics to reject his works as dated—as lying outside the main line of development of Vietnamese prose fiction.

There are, however, extra-textual as well as textual reasons why Hoàng Ngọc Phách or Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, not Hồ Biểu Chánh, is usually mentioned as the first Vietnamese novelist.

The first has to do with the isolation of the south from the central

and northern regions. This isolation led northern literary historians like Dương Quảng Hàm to, in effect, write literary histories that were histories of the north and central regions, not of the whole country. The southern writer and scholar Bình Nguyên Lộc told us that he is convinced Dương Quảng Hàm failed to mention southern novelists in his well-known school textbook (1941)²⁴ for the simple reason that he had not read their works.²⁵ Until they began to be serialized in the popular magazine *Phụ nữ tân văn* [Women's News] in 1929, few readers in the North were acquainted with the works of Hồ Biểu Chánh.²⁶ When this periodical was shut down by the colonial authorities in 1934, northerners forgot about him. The literary historian Vũ Ngọc Phan, writing in 1942, says that "there are not many people in the North who remember [Hồ Biểu Chánh] anymore".²⁷ He learns from reading a work by a southern critic that Hồ Biểu Chánh is also the author of other works besides those printed in *Phụ nữ tân văn*, including *Ai làm được?*, but Vũ Ngọc Phan admits he has not seen them. This unfamiliarity with Hồ Biểu Chánh's earliest works no doubt explains why he says Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, not Hồ Biểu Chánh, was the first Vietnamese to write a long narrative in prose.²⁸

But even if Hồ Biểu Chánh's works had been more readily available to northern and central readers, one doubts whether northerners would have considered them as on a par with *Tổ Tâm* and *Quả dưa đỏ*. Hanoi was the ancient capital of Vietnam whereas parts of the South had not been acquired from Cambodia until the second half of the eighteenth century. Education in Chinese characters never was as developed in the South as it was in the northern and central regions. Because the Mekong Delta is a fertile rice-growing area, life was easier in the South. Partly for these reasons, northerners regarded (and the attitude persists today) southerners as simpler and less affected—less culturally sophisticated—and these impressions of southern personality undoubtedly influenced their judgments of southern literature. "People from Hanoi," Bình Nguyên Lộc points out, were like the Chinese who thought of themselves as living in the 'Middle Kingdom' and regarded all the peoples to the south as barbarians."²⁹

This second extra-textual reason why Hồ Biểu Chánh's contributions to the novel have not, in our opinion, been sufficiently recognized cannot be separated from textual features of his novels. By letting his characters speak naturally as they spoke in real life Hồ Biểu Chánh, in the view of northerners, was only demonstrating the typical southern preference for simplicity and informality. Northerners, especially northern intellectuals associated with the review *Nam phong*, preferred a more formal style. Both Hoàng Ngọc Phách and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật wrote for *Nam phong*. It is true that, when he wrote *Tổ Tâm*, Hoàng Ngọc Phách wished to create a style different from the rhythmic parallel prose referred to as the Chinese style. He states in a 1942 interview with Lê Thanh that the Chinese style was one extreme he wanted to avoid. But, he adds, he did not want to go to the other extreme and write

awkwardly. "Especially in a novel," he says, "in which one has to describe feelings a great deal, it is always better to write in a style that sounds pleasing when read out loud."³⁰ Characters in the novels of Hoàng Ngọc Phách and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật speak in voices close to poetry and indeed they sometimes abandon prose completely and recite their own or someone else's verse.

Characters in Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels, on the other hand, speak as people typically talk and do not suddenly begin to recite verse. Northerners clung tightly—much more tightly than southerners like Hồ Biểu Chánh—to the notion of linguistic ornateness, to the notion that language was not a purely referential medium, not simply a tool to tell a story, but was itself a source of aesthetic interest. Therefore one should not write exactly as one spoke but should dress up one's language with parallel structure and Chinese loan words. This hesitation to give up a more ornate style is partially a result of the lingering prestige of the Chinese style, partially a result of the Vietnamese passion for poetry—of their feeling that anything that deserves to be called literature should please the ear when read aloud. This passion for poetic language led northern critics to underestimate Hồ Biểu Chánh's accomplishments. Writing in 1967, the literary critic Thanh Lăng asks: "Have those in literary circles in the North not paid attention to Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels because he adopted the position that one should write Vietnamese as one speaks?"³¹ It seems likely this is exactly what happened.³²

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude, first of all, that the first Vietnamese novels were written in the Mekong Delta region by southern writers. The most prominent of these writers was Hồ Biểu Chánh. Although his works do uphold traditional Confucian virtues—especially filial piety (*hiếu*) and benevolent righteousness (*nhân-nghĩa*), themes associated with earlier verse romances like Lục Vân Tiên—they are not only novels but modern novels. Their accurate depiction of middle-class life, frank subject matter, more complex plots, and colloquial dialogue make Hồ Biểu Chánh's works more modern certainly than *Quả dưa đỏ* and as modern as *Tổ Tâm*. By calling attention to Hồ Biểu Chánh's achievements we do not mean to minimize the impact of Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tổ Tâm*. Its psychological structure, its analytical/descriptive prose style, and most importantly its bold presentation of the temptation of individual freedom, especially in matters of the heart, made it an important precursor of later works by writers associated with the Self-Strength Literary Group (*Tự Lực Văn Đoàn*).³³ We would argue, however, that it was not the first novel and that Hồ Biểu Chánh, too, has inspired later writers, especially southerners like Bình Nguyên Lộc and Sơn Nam.

Our second conclusion relates to how literary judgments are made. Until recently readers, including professors of literature, have assumed, without much reflection, that the selection of literary texts for honors and for inclusion in anthologies and for discussion in scholarly works was based primarily on purely literary criteria. The treatment of Hồ

Biểu Chánh by Vietnamese critics provides an interesting example—a case study—of what scholars investigating the formation of the Anglo-American literary canon have found: namely, that purely literary judgments do not exist—that all judgments are influenced by socio-political and cultural factors.

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NOTES

1. For descriptions of *chữ nôm* and *quốc-ngữ* and the story of how the latter emerged as the dominant writing system in Vietnam, see John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet-nam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1983).

2. For information on the social, economic, and political situation in Vietnam in the 1920s, see David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

3. One Vietnamese literary historian who uses '*tiểu-thuyết*' in this way is Thanh Lăng, in *Bảng lược-đồ văn-học Việt-Nam: Quyển Hạ—Ba thế-hệ của nền văn-học mới (1862-1945)* [Survey of Vietnamese Literature: Vol.2—Three Generations of Modern Literature] (Saigon: Trình Bày, 1967), pp. 441-49. Another literary historian, Phan Cự Đệ, sometimes refers to traditional Vietnamese verse narratives as 'classical novels' (*tiểu-thuyết cổ-điển*) to distinguish them from modern prose novels, which he refers to simply as '*tiểu-thuyết*'. See his *Tiểu-thuyết Việt-Nam hiện-đại* [The Contemporary Vietnamese Novel], Vol. 2 (Hanoi: Đại-Học và Trung-Học Chuyên-Nghiệp, 1975), pp. 39, 52.

4. We quote here from Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 40. Our definition of the novel is based primarily on Davis' discussion. In "From Verse Narrative to Novel: The Development of Prose Fiction in Vietnam" *Journal of Asian Studies* (forthcoming), we illustrate Davis' definition and the movement in Vietnam from verse narrative to novel by contrasting Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's *Lục Vân Tiên* (ca. 1860), which we argue is a romance, with Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tâm Tâm* [Pure Heart], which we argue is a novel—but not the first Vietnamese novel.

5. See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 27-30.

6. Davis, p. 40.

7. The following literary historians do not mention Hồ Biểu Chánh at all: Trúc Hà, "*Lược-khảo về sự tiến-hóa của quốc-văn trong lối viết tiểu-thuyết*" [An Outline of the Development of National Literature Based on the Writing of Novels], *Nghị phong* 175 (Aug. 1932): 116-134; Dương Quang Hàm, *Việt-Nam văn-học sử-yếu* [A Historical Survey of Vietnamese Literature] (Saigon: Bộ Giáo-Dục, [1941] 1968). The following literary historians mention him as a southern writer but do not credit him with writing novels before Hoàng Ngọc Phách and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật: Mộc Khuê, *Ba mươi năm văn-học* [Thirty Years of Literature] (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1942); Vũ Ngọc Phan, *Nhà văn hiện-đại* [Contemporary Writers], Vol. 2 (Glendale, CA: Dainam, [1941] 1977 [date of reprint not indicated]), pp. 359-366; Maurice M. Durand and Nguyễn Trân Huân, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature* (New York: Columbia

University Press, [1969] 1985); Bùi Xuân Bào, *Naissance et évolution du roman vietnamien moderne: 1925-1945* (Paris: Đường Mới, [1972] 1985).

8. It is quite possible that Nguyễn Trọng Thuật was influenced by Swift's work and by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Fénelon's *Télémaque*. Vietnamese translations of all three of these works were available in Vietnam before 1920, often appearing in serial form in the periodical *Đông-Dương tạp-chí* [Indochina Magazine]. Often the translation of English works was based on a French version. See Thanh Lăng, pp. 199-230.

9. The authors of these prose narratives were Nguyễn Trọng Quảng, Trương Duy Toàn, and Trần Chánh Chiểu. See below, note 10, for information on Trần Chánh Chiểu. We have not been able to find any biographical information on Nguyễn Trọng Quảng or Trương Duy Toàn. Hồ Biểu Chánh mentions these writers in an unpublished autobiography *Đời của tôi* [My Life]. Nguyễn Khuê obtained a copy of the type-written manuscript of this autobiography from Hồ Biểu Chánh's oldest son. It becomes an important source for his critical biography, *Chân-dung Hồ Biểu Chánh* [A Portrait of Hồ Biểu Chánh] (Saigon: Lửa Thiêng, 1974).

10. Trần Chánh Chiểu, known also as Gilbert Chiểu, was a Vietnamese with French citizenship. He was an editor of two southern newspapers and was also active in anticolonial efforts led by the revolutionary Phan Bội Châu. See David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 136, 144-45. Hồ Biểu Chánh's comments on Hoàng Tô-Anh *hàm oan* appear in a short summary of his life that he wrote himself in 1957, a year before he died, and had printed in many editions of his novels. We found it in a 1978 reprint of *Cha con nghĩa nặng* [The Heavy Duties of Father and Son], a novel originally published in 1929. The name and location of the publisher are not included in the 1978 reprint.

11. In a note on p. 39, Nguyễn Khuê explains that on his copy of *Ái làm được?* the date of first publication is listed as 1922, but that on Hồ Biểu Chánh's list of publications in his unpublished autobiography (see our note 9) the date is given as 1925. In his autobiography Hồ Biểu Chánh mentions that he wrote *Ái làm được?* in 1912 (see Nguyễn Khuê, p. 39); and the final installment of the version printed in *Nông cô mùa đông*, which appeared on March 18, 1920, ends as follows: "Camau, manh thu [autumn] 1912, H. Biểu Chánh." We read *Ái làm được?* as it appeared in *Nông cô mùa đông* and unfortunately could not obtain a copy of the 1922 (or 1925) version to see what changes the author made. We did read plot summaries of the 1922/1925 version in Nguyễn Khuê, pp. 158-163, and Thanh Lăng, p. 560. These summaries suggest there are no substantive differences in the plot of the earlier and later versions.

12. A portion of *Tô Tâm* appeared in a school publication before 1925. See Lê Hữu Phúc's "Quyển Tô Tâm ra đời" [*Tô Tâm Comes into Being*]. This article appears as a Preface to the 1925 and subsequent editions of *Tô Tâm*.

13. See, for example, Đoàn Quốc Sỹ, *Văn-học và tiểu-thuyết* [Literature and the Novel] (Saigon: Publisher not listed, 1972, p. 227; and Thanh Lăng, p. 560).

14. In 1918 Phạm Quỳnh wrote and published in *Nam phong* a long laudatory review of André Cornéllis, complete with translations of the most exciting scenes. *Nam phong* 9 (March 1918): 139-154.

15. The list appears in Nguyễn Khuê, p. 160.

16. Phạm Quỳnh, "Bàn về tiểu-thuyết" [A Discussion of the Novel], *Nam phong* 48 (Jan. 1921): 8.

17. Bùi Xuân Bào, p. 105, expresses difficulty in determining when *Tĩnh mộng* was published and assumed it was after 1925. Its date of publication (1923), however, is clearly indicated in a list Hồ Biểu Chánh prepared of all his works. This list is printed in Nguyễn Khuê, pp. 39-45; and in many editions of Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels.

18. In writing realistic dialogue Hồ Biểu Chánh was no doubt inspired by two other southern writers, Trương Vĩnh Ký and Huỳnh Tịnh Của. Although neither of these writers wrote novels, they did produce collections of folk tales and humorous stories written in a colloquial style. Two well-known collections are Trương Vĩnh Ký's *Chuyện đời xưa* [Stories of Olden Times] (1866) and Huỳnh Tịnh Của's *Truyện giải buồn* [Stories to Relieve Boredom] (1880).

19. Thanh Lăng, pp. 567-68.

20. On this issue see Phạm Thế Ngũ, *Việt-Nam văn-học-sử giản-ước tân-biên* [A Concise Modern History of Vietnamese Literature], Vol. 3 (Saigon: Quốc Học Tùng Thư, 1965), pp. 378-79; and Thanh Lăng, pp. 566-67. We cannot agree with Phạm Thế Ngũ's suggestion that "[p]erhaps it was only in 1928, especially after he started writing for *Phụ nữ tân văn* [Women's News], that Hồ Biểu Chánh began to produce stories truly his own" (p. 379).

21. The three bonds are king-subject, parent-child, and husband-wife; the five

principles are benevolent love, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness.

22. For information on Nhật Linh, whose real name was Nguyễn Tường Tam, see Huỳnh Sanh Thông, "Main Trends of Vietnamese Literature between the Two World Wars", *The Vietnam Forum* 3 (Winter-Spring 1984): 99-125.

23. This explains the lukewarm treatment he has received from contemporary Hanoi critics like Phan Cự Đệ. See *Tiểu-thuyết*, Vol. 1 (1974), pp. 29-50.

24. The work mentioned in note 7.

25. Personal communication, January 5, 1987.

26. Ngô Vĩnh Long, "Publishing, Audience, and Society (1920-1945)", a paper presented at the Harvard Conference on Early Vietnamese Literature, Cambridge, MA, June 22-27, 1982.

27. Vũ Ngọc Phan, Vol. 2, p. 359.

28. Vũ Ngọc Phan, Vol. 1, p. 158.

29. Personal communication, January 5, 1987. Bình Nguyên Lộc made this remark in the course of a long interview. He was speaking of attitudes that existed when transportation and communication linking the different regions of Vietnam were not well developed, a situation that caused, in his view, a great deal of mutual misunderstanding. He made it clear that he believed a lack of knowledge of southern literature on the part of northerners, not regional prejudice, was the main cause for their lack of appreciation for southern writers.

30. Lê Thanh, *Cuộc phỏng-vấn các nhà văn* [Interviews with Writers] (Hanoi: Đời Mới, 1942), p. 108.

31. Thanh Lang, p. 568.

32. In pioneering a less ornate style Hồ Biểu Chánh resembles Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson in eighteenth-century England. When Defoe and Richardson broke with tradition and wrote in a less adorned, more referential style, they were criticized for writing awkwardly. See Watt, pp. 27-30.

33. For information on this group, see Huỳnh Sanh Thông, "Main Trends".