

Traumatic Characters in Southern Vietnamese Novels of the Early 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how past trauma impacts the behavior, gestures, attitudes, and psychology of characters in the present and future... through several Southern Vietnamese novels from the first half of the 20th century. Using statistical classification and synthesis, the study reveals that each character type makes different choices depending on the type of trauma they experienced in the past. All characters are unfortunate, and the conclusion drawn is that the more types of trauma a character suffers, the more negative their actions become, and vice versa. Furthermore, the application of trauma theory in the study of Southern Vietnamese novels from the first half of the 20th century has been largely neglected in previous studies. Therefore, our research partially fills this research gap, especially regarding inter generational trauma (or genetic trauma).

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, trauma theory originated from the study of psychologically traumatized patients in the field of psychology. This theory studies the "impacts of traumatic events on human psychology, such as: attacks, rape, war, famine, imprisonment (...)." From the 1990s onwards, this concept was developed in interdisciplinary research across literature, psychology, history, and philosophy. The concept focuses on questions of memory, forgetting, and narrative. (Trauma Theory, n.d.). Since then, trauma theory has been of interest to literary researchers, leading to the development of a movement to study trauma – healing through literature. This movement flourished in the early 21st century with numerous works, articles, and conferences worldwide and in Vietnam.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2018) defines trauma as any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events include those caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, war, industrial accidents) as well as by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge an individual's view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place. It also refers to any serious physical injury, such as a widespread burn or a blow to the head.

Trauma theory is addressed by Cathy Caruth (1991) in her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History* and a series of other works in subsequent years. In these works, Cathy Caruth addresses the basic concepts of trauma and its manifestations (Caruth, 1991, 1995, 1998). In particular, she developed issues of trauma theory approached from a psychoanalytic perspective through Freud's (1895) concept of *Nächtraglichkeit* (in German).

In summary, trauma theory is defined as an interdisciplinary approach (psychology, psychoanalysis, literature, history, sociology, cultural studies, etc.) to analyze the psychological impact of symbolic personal/collective memories such as war, violence, genocide, exile, abuse, etc., that cause profound harm to individuals or communities.

At the beginning of the 21st century, trauma theory was introduced in Vietnam and became popular in literary studies. Typical works introducing trauma theory include: the article by Hoang Phong Tuan (2012), the concept of trauma viewed from the Western transformation model (Dang Hoang Oanh, 2021), workshops, and seminars... In addition, there are applied research works in the analysis of specific works and authors such as: research on the central female character and psychological trauma in Lu Xun's short stories (Tran Le Hoa Trinh, 2009); the traumatized self in diaries and detective fiction through novels (Nguyen Thanh Thi, 2011); Doan Minh Phuong and the perspective on trauma (Le Tu Anh, 2014); the traumatized character type (Tran Nhat Thu, 2018; Dang Phuong Thao, 2018); trauma and love in Harry Potter (You-shuan Shiong, Ya-huei Wang, 2022); "Trauma, sexuality and personal identity in Marguerite Duras's *Lover* and Doan Minh Phuong's *Burning Grass in the Field*" by Tran Tinh Vy, Nguyen Duc Lam Thao (2023)...

Furthermore, researchers have focused on intergenerational trauma passed down from one generation to the next. This type of trauma is also specifically defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) through the concept of "intergenerational trauma," which reflects the inheritance of traumatic imprints. This is a form of trauma:

the transmission of trauma or its legacy, in the form of a psychological consequence of an injury or attack, poverty, and so forth, from the generation experiencing the trauma to subsequent generations. The transference of this effect is believed to be epigenetic—that is, the transmission affects the chemical marker for a gene rather than the gene itself. The trauma experienced by the older generation is translated into a genetic adaptation that can be passed on to successive generations. The trauma reactions vary by generation but often include shame, increased anxiety and guilt, a heightened sense of vulnerability and helplessness, low self-esteem, depression, suicidality, substance abuse, dissociation, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, difficulty with relationships and attachment to others, difficulty in regulating aggression, and extreme reactivity to stress. The exact mechanisms of the phenomenon remain unknown but are believed to involve effects on relationship skills, personal behavior, and attitudes and beliefs that affect subsequent generations. The role of parental communication about the event and the nature of family functioning appear to be particularly important in trauma transmission. Research on intergenerational trauma concentrated initially on the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of survivors of the Holocaust and Japanese American internment camps, but it has now broadened to include the impact of slavery and structural racism on Black people, as well as the historical trauma experienced by American Indian communities, the families of Vietnam War veterans, and others. Also called historical trauma; multigenerational trauma; secondary traumatization. (Intergenerational Trauma, 2023).

Some studies on genetic/intergenerational trauma in the literature include: Allison Crawford's (2013) work on intergenerational trauma in the history and narratives of the Inuit people in Nuvavut, Canada; Shofi Mahmudah Budi Utami & Muammar Kadafi's (2023) work on the psychological trauma of Japanese Americans in Mike Shinoda's *Kenj*...

METHOD

In general, this section describes how the study was conducted. The subject matters of this section are: (1) the study design; (2) the sample population or subject of the research; (3) data collection techniques and instrument development; (4) and data analysis techniques. Please use descriptive paragraphs. Use these questions as a guideline to write the method: (1) Is the design suitable for answering the question posed?; (2) Is there sufficient information present to replicate the research?; (3) Does the article identify the procedures followed?; (4) Are these ordered in a meaningful way?; (5) If the methods are new, are they explained in detail?; (6) Was the sampling appropriate?; (7) Have the equipment and materials been adequately described?; (8) Does it clear what type of data was recorded?; (9) Have the data been precise in describing measurements?

It is important to note that not need to use too many formulas or tables unless it is necessary to be displayed. This section must be written out briefly, concisely, clearly, but adequately to be replicated. This

section explains the research approach, subjects of the study, the conduct of the research procedure, the use of materials and instruments, data collection, and analysis techniques. These are not theories. In the case of statistical methods, formulas that are generally known should not be written down. Any specific criteria used by the researcher in collecting and analyzing the research data should be thoroughly described. This section should be written not more than 10% (for qualitative research) or 15% (for quantitative analysis) of the body. This article uses statistical methods and classification in specific criteria (see Table 1) to statistically analyze the types of trauma suffered by the characters and their influence on their subsequent actions. The study also employs a synthetic analysis method to identify the characters' actions as a unified series of interconnected events. This method is used to summarize essential research issues systematically. Furthermore, our article applies trauma theory to study and understand the literary work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To Hoai (2016) stated that "Characters are the only place where everything is concentrated and resolved in a work." To Hoai (2016) also affirms the important role and position of characters in a work:

Characters are not only a form for the writer to figuratively generalize the reality of life, but also the place where the artistic values of the work are concentrated. Through characters, the writer expresses his artistic conception and aesthetic ideals about humanity (To Hoai, 2016).

Starting from the idea of writer To Hoai (2016), we develop this article by generalizing the types of unfortunate characters in Southern Vietnamese novels of the first half of the 20th century from a trauma perspective.

The Unfortunate Character Type and Character's Choice of Action

Unfortunate characters are those who bear the marks of an unhappy and unsafe childhood. These marks persist in their psychology, personality, and even actions, continuing into the present and future. Unfortunate characters can be characterized by internal or external trauma, which may be hereditary or non-hereditary. The non-hereditary nature of trauma is more pronounced than the hereditary type (see Table 1). This can also be simply explained by the fact that authors during this period were adopting a Western writing style, focusing on structure and plot rather than analyzing and explaining the causes of the characters' actions, particularly their psychology. Character actions are often more random than inevitable. The explanations for these actions are largely contrived. Therefore, the stories sometimes have somewhat forced endings. This is also a legacy of the early stage of learning to write prose as fluently as spoken language and approaching popular literature among Southern Vietnamese writers in the first half of the 20th century.

Table 1. Typical Injury types of the characters

Author	Title of Work	No.	Character	Orphaned	Emotional Trauma	Inferiority Complex Gender	Other Trauma	Here-ditary	Character's Actions
Nguyen Trong Quan	Thầy Lazarô Phiền	1	Thầy Phiền	x	x		Psychological trauma after a family crisis	x	Murder
Le Hoang Muu	Hà Hương phong nguyệt	2	Hà Hương			Inferiority due to poor background		x	Attempted murder (twice, unsuccessful)
Nguyen Chanh Sat	Nghĩa hiệp kỳ duyên	3	Chẳng Cà Mum	x				x	
Le Hoang Muu	Oan kìa theo mãi	4	Hồ Cảnh Tiên		x			x	Indirect murder

Le Hoang Muu	Người bán ngọc	5	Hồ Phú Nhân			Inferiority regarding female status under hegemonic masculinity			
Le Hoang Muu	Người bán ngọc	6	Hồ Quốc Thanh		x	Superiority complex shaped by hegemonic masculinity		x	Murder
Le Hoang Muu	Đêm rối của người tội tử hình	7	Cô Năm	x			Psychological trauma after a family crisis	x	Murder
Phu Duc	Tôi có tội	8	Xê Xinh Nguyệt	x	x			x	Planned murder
Phu Duc	Tôi có tội	9	Anh Phong Hiến	x	x			x	
Ho Bieu Chanh	Dây oan	10	Lê Thị Đăng		x			x	Murder
Ho Bieu Chanh	Người thất chí	11	Phụng	x		Inferiority due to poverty	Weak, overly sensitive personality; easily influenced	x	Murder
Total	9	11		6	6	4	3	4	8
Percentage (%)				27.78	33.33	22.22	16.67	36.36	72.73

Our article examines nine psychological-social novels from the first half of the 20th century (1887-1938) by authors such as Nguyen Trong Quan, Le Hoang Muu, Nguyen Chanh Sat, Phu Duc, Ho Bieu Chanh, etc. These works utilize the element of trauma in the psychological portrayal of characters.

The article categorizes genetic trauma into types of trauma, such as: orphan-hood (either father, mother, or both), emotional trauma (forbidden love, betrayal, etc.), gender identity issues (in patriarchal systems), and other issues (psychological trauma after a family crisis, psychological weakness, sensitivity, susceptibility to unfavorable circumstances, etc.).

Total show that 11 characters in the 9 novels mentioned above suffer trauma. This means that each work has approximately 1.3 characters experiencing trauma. This indicates that the authors are interested in portraying traumatized characters as a way of expressing their awareness of the changing times.

The statistics show that, with 04 types of trauma— orphan-hood, emotional trauma, gender identity issues, and others—each character suffers at least one type of trauma, and at most 03 overlapping types of trauma, totaling 19 instances of trauma. Furthermore, the statistics also show a direct correlation between the more overlapping types of trauma a character experiences and the greater their tendency to choose violence (in this case, murder or attempted murder) to resolve conflicts. In particular, characters suffering from emotional trauma (heartbreak, betrayal, etc.) are also more likely to commit murder.

Specifically, out of 11 characters (in 9 novels), 8/11 characters chose to commit murder/ or planned to commit murder, accounting for 72.73%. These characters almost all suffered from overlapping types of trauma, like Teacher Phiền (3) and Phụng (3). In particular, emotional trauma also easily leads to murder/planned murder, such as: Teacher Phiền, Hà Hương, Hồ Cảnh Tiên, Hồ Quốc Thanh, Xê Xinh Nguyệt, Lê Thị Đăng... The remaining 3/11 characters suffered from one type of trauma and chose not to take revenge or not to act, accounting for 27.27%, such as: Chăng Cà Mum, Hồ Phú Nhân, Anh Phong Hiển.

This confirms our observation that the more types of trauma or emotional distress a character experiences, the more likely they are to develop murderous intentions, as analyzed above.

The types of trauma caused by orphan hood and emotional heartbreak are equally distributed, affecting 6 out of 11 characters, accounting for 31.58%. This suggests that the authors have recognized the strong impact of circumstances (orphan hood) and emotional betrayal on the characters' thoughts and actions in the future. Trauma caused by other issues is the least common, affecting 3 out of 11 characters, accounting for 15.79%. This indicates that, besides orphan hood and heartbreak, other types of trauma also significantly influence the characters' inner lives, actions, and behavior in the future.

For example, Mr Phiền (Thầy Lazarô Phiền - Nguyen Trong Quan) suffers from three types of trauma in his life: orphanhood, emotional trauma, and family misfortune; Phụng (Người thất chí - Ho Bieu Chanh) suffers from three types of trauma: orphanhood, feelings of inferiority due to poverty, and a weak, sensitive psyche... This shows that the number of types of trauma is directly related to the character's personality, psychology, thoughts, and actions. In this case, it is the character's act and thoughts of murder.

The Orphan Character Type and the Character's Choice of Action

The majority of the traumatized characters we studied in the socio-psychological novels in this article are orphans. Orphans are also a type of unfortunate character and constitute the majority of the characters in the novels we studied (6/11 characters). This is because "Orphans are characters belonging to the class of unfortunate people, suffering the most profound pain in every aspect" (Le Trung Vu, 1991, p. 10). There are two typical types of orphans: firstly, the type of orphan who lived without affection from a young age, experienced all kinds of hardships, and valued family ties; secondly, the type of orphan who lived recklessly, seeking every way to enjoy life and destroy everything good in the world, including family ties. Typical examples of the first type of orphaned characters include: Mr Phiền (Thầy Lazarô Phiền), Chăng Cà Mum (Nghĩa hiệp kỳ duyên - Nguyen Chanh Sat)... Typical examples of the second type of orphaned characters include: Bạch Tỷ Thoàn (Hà Hương Phong Nguyệt); Cô Năm (Đêm rối của người tội tử hình); Phụng (Người thất chí); Tô Thường Hậu (Người bán ngọc)... However, the imprint of their past misfortunes has led to characters with somewhat different gestures, actions, and deeds, but all reflect the psychological trauma they suffered from a young age.

As an orphan, Mr. Phiền always felt insecure in his relationships. In his marriage, he was a man of deep affection and loyalty, stemming from a past far beyond the comprehension of a child. He was the son of a Catholic family persecuted by the imperial court, his father sacrificing himself to save him from a fire that killed over 300 people after the French colonialists withdrew. Because he was orphaned at a young age, he cherished every affection he received in his unfortunate life: He valued friendship and respected the family of his close friend, Mr. Liễu. He fell in love with Mr. Liễu's cousin, and her family supported the relationship, giving their daughter in marriage to him. It seemed his life would turn a new page with joy and happiness. However, that happiness was short-lived. A Vietnamese woman, the wife of a French officer, was envious of how well Mr. Phiền treated his wife, so she tried to seduce him. As a man who had experienced countless ups and downs in life, faced death numerous times, and lost all his loved ones, he wouldn't be easily deceived. He rudely refused the woman. Driven by jealousy, she plotted revenge, making him suspect his wife and friend of having an affair. This caused him great suffering, and he sought revenge against those he believed had betrayed him, unaware that it was a vengeful scheme orchestrated by the deranged wife of a French officer.

Like Mr Phiền, Hồ Cảnh Tiên was also a man with a happy family. Due to a misunderstanding about his wife and his friend having an affair, he heartlessly abandoned his wife and left with their young child. This caused a once peaceful and happy family to fall apart suddenly. While his situation is similar to Mr. Phiền, Hồ Cảnh Tiên didn't carry the burden of past trauma, so he didn't take the lives of his friend and wife. However, he chose a different, albeit less negative, solution. Although he didn't directly kill his wife, his act of taking the child without a word of farewell caused his young wife to wither away and die in

sorrow. The child, deprived of a mother's care, also died prematurely. Therefore, at the end of his life, he confessed his guilt to a traveler he met by chance. He confessed, "Yes, yes, I killed my wife. And not only did I kill my wife, I also killed my close friend, Chánh Tâm!" (Le Hoang Muu, 1922, p. 35). He is also a type of person who "doesn't know what it means to live happily" (Le Hoang Muu, 1922, p. 36) because although he has taken revenge for a love affair, his purpose in life is also gone. His family is shattered, and his life, without a wife and children to hold him back, is like a boat drifting aimlessly on the turbulent currents of life. At the same time, to take revenge on life and on love, wherever he goes, he tries to seduce women and then abandon them. He is somewhat similar to Út Vũ (Endless Field - Nguyen Ngoc Tu) in that, because of revenge against one woman, he causes unhappiness to other women. However, in his old age, even if he regrets what he did in his youth, it is too late "because of me, the bond between husband and wife, father and son, is broken" (Le Hoang Muu, 1922, p. 38).

Both Mr. Phiền and Hồ Cảnh Tiên suffered emotionally from feelings of betrayal. Neither sought to resolve their suspicions; instead, these suspicions grew and were further confirmed by their distrust of those around them. Meanwhile, Mr. Phiền endured another pain: the pain of a miserable childhood, living on the brink of death and being hunted from a young age. This led to a negative attitude towards life: he found no joy in living. In Thầy Lazarô Phiền, the instinct to die was stronger than the instinct to live. Therefore, Mr. Phiền's attitude towards life and revenge differed somewhat from Hồ Cảnh Tiên's (as mentioned above).

Another type of orphan character we want to discuss here is the one who tries to destroy everything good in the world, including family and human relationships. Typical examples of this type of character include: Cô Năm (Đêm rối của người tội tử hình - Le Hoang Muu), Phụng (Người thất chí - Ho Bieu Chanh)...

Ms. Năm – a woman no less pitiable than Mr. Phiền (Thầy Lazarô Phiền - Nguyen Trong Quan). She had a beautiful childhood, living in luxury and wealth, pampered by her parents. However, coupled with the robbery of her house and the immediate death of her mother, her life became tragic. Unable to live with her father and stepmother, she has lived with an unmarried aunt. Her greatest psychological shock was witnessing her mother's murder at such a young age. But thanks to her aunt's love, she temporarily forgot that memory deep in her subconscious. She married Trần Bồ, a former robber who had reformed. The couple loved each other deeply. Having experienced the breakdown of a family, and her true love for her husband, she felt secure in their peaceful relationship. By chance, she discovered her mother's belongings among the looted possessions of Tran Bo and realized that the two perpetrators—her husband and his friend—were the ones who had robbed her family and murdered her mother years ago. "These two items were indeed the jewelry my mother bought for me when I was born" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 78). From then on, she lived in agonizing torment because she had unknowingly married "the man who killed my mother" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 78). From that moment, she looked at her husband as a monster with a sharp beak ready to devour her. She looked at him with "eyes blazing, face flushed, liver boiling," as if she were seeing a ferocious demon or evil spirit "invading her house" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 78). That demon had a "face as flat as a sieve, teeth protruding in two rows like jagged nails, and it had stripes, claws, and fangs; truly a grotesque and bizarre creature" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 78). From then on, she sought revenge against her husband and his friend. Her revenge was carried out step by step. The first step was to plant a false idea in her husband's (Trần Bồ - Lỗ Trí Thâm) mind that: cô Hai - the wife of Xích Đầu Tử (her husband's friend) - had feelings for him). The second step was to escalate this misunderstanding and carry it out (Trần Bồ, instigated by his wife, forced cô Hai, the wife of his close friend, Xích Đầu Tử, into a relationship). The third step was to make those who killed her mother pay for their past crimes (one died - Tran Bo; the other was punished by law - Xích Đầu Tử). But even after taking revenge, she couldn't live peacefully with a calm and happy heart. In her mind, she was haunted by images of her mother lying dead in a pool of blood, her husband's death at the hands of Red Headed Man, Red Headed Man's execution, and Red Headed Man's poor wife, Miss Hai, suffering the pain of losing her husband... She couldn't find happiness in this world either. Because, she questioned herself:

"Remembering my husband, tears stream down my face:/ Thinking of my own wicked schemes and deep plots,/ I fear that good and evil will be repaid in due time./ Even though the time is not yet right,/ The reputation of being inhuman and immoral is undeniable,/ Instigating my husband, plotting to harm him,/ What remains of me standing within the realm of heaven and earth?/ To uphold filial piety and love, I must lose/ To fulfill my duty and love, I must lose loyalty and devotion;" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 163).

In this person, the immense pain of the past, witnessing her mother's death in a pool of blood, left an indelible mark on her memory. Her stepmother was cruel, so she had to live with her biological aunt, who loved and cared for her so much that it was widely rumored. She vowed to remain unmarried to care for her aunt and repay her for raising her. "I vow to wholeheartedly repay the debt of gratitude for raising me." (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 160). Having experienced such a major life event, this young woman possessed a more mature and experienced mindset than others her age. Furthermore, she lived very rationally, unaffected by emotions. Even though the love and devotion between husband and wife were strong, and the unwavering loyalty to her husband was evident in her words, "Together we vow to turn gray with age / Our hearts will never change, even if mountains crumble" (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 161), upon discovering her mother's crime, this marital affection became the basis for her to devise a cunning and treacherous scheme, leading her husband and his friends step by step into a labyrinth. "From now on, I will arrange a series of schemes / Using the beauty's scheme to avenge my mother, fulfilling my filial duty to my mother, my love is severed / The bonds of sisterhood and friendship are broken." (Le Hoang Muu, 1929, p. 162). She had foreseen the outcome of her revenge against her parents and the misfortune of her own life.

The character Phụng (Người thất chí - Ho Bieu Chanh) is also a typical example of an antisocial character. He grew up in luxury, focusing solely on his studies, and when life didn't go his way, he displayed a typical antisocial personality. He criticized society's practices, the way the rich and poor treated each other, and opposed the idea of trying to conform to others and believing only in his own right. He hated the rich, those with money and power, for one sole reason: they were rich. However, instead of striving to build his own social standing and wealth, he sought to destroy the rich in order to bring justice to society.

Furthermore, having grown up in luxury, he was unaware of the many hardships faced and therefore lacked ambition and a competitive spirit. Moreover, he was an overly idealistic and unrealistic person; when life didn't go as planned, he developed negative thoughts. Phung's negative thoughts led him to seek ways to kill and rob people with the goal of "eliminating the cancerous growth" of society. He wrote articles with titles like "Virtue Means Foolishness" and "Heaven Is Not Just" (Ho Bieu Chanh, 1938, Chapter 4). His purpose in writing these two articles was:

"We are determined to overthrow the corrupt customs left behind by our ancestors, and then establish new customs with the qualities of courage, determination, and proactive action, to help our compatriots quickly advance and catch up with other nations." (Ho Bieu Chanh, 1938, Chapter 4).

He himself was a sentimental, weak person with an overly romantic and sensitive soul. Even Trinh, Phung's friend, had to warn him, "Your overly sensitive mind leads you to commit the sin of excessiveness all the time. Before, you were excessively sad, now you are excessively angry... and excess is not good." (Ho Bieu Chanh, 1938, Chapter 4). This shows that changes in his living environment and circumstances had a significant impact on the character's inner thoughts and actions.

Phụng (Người thất chí) is a selfish, incompetent, and useless man: because of his incompetence and uselessness, he cannot find a job that can support himself; because of his incompetence and uselessness, he has antisocial thoughts, viewing society as heartless and inhumane. Furthermore, if we examine this character from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, he is a type of marginalized masculinity (Connell, 2005). He has antisocial thoughts while simultaneously doubting himself. He thinks he is reforming society, but his reform is through committing crimes to purify society. His purpose is grand, but his actions contradict his beliefs. This is a problem that can be seen as a wake-up call from the author to the younger generation in society. What was most needed among the youth of that period was a fervent heart, a positive mindset, and a realistic view of all the changes in political and social life. Perhaps, from within his family, he was raised too cautiously, without exposure to the realities of life, and therefore, he was naive and gullible when he entered adulthood. He always considered his actions right and rejected all positive viewpoints of others: from negative perspectives to intentions (to commit murder). This is an extremely negative and dangerous ideology for society, both then and now. However, the author (Ho Bieu Chanh) seems to be contradicting himself by ultimately allowing him to escape legal punishment. We believe that the issue Ho Bieu Chanh raised about the lifestyle of the youth remains relevant today. Although this is an adapted novel, the work vividly and distinctly portrays young Vietnamese men and women during a transitional period.

Past traumas are deeply ingrained in the characters' psychology and personalities, creating individuals with unique characteristics and a profound sense of loneliness – people disconnected from

society, isolated from the majority. They even see themselves as superior beings, possessing the power to bestow joy and life upon others. They lack insightful perspectives and instead resolve issues through personal viewpoints.

This perspective is influenced by past failures and deeply embedded personal memories, dictating their behavior in the present and future, mostly in a negative way. These individuals withdraw into their own shells or assume a superior position (as described by Ho Quoc Thanh), along with complex emotions such as resentment, torment, and regret. This is the root cause of the tragic lives of the characters in these novels.

CONCLUSIONS

In interdisciplinary research, applying theories from one discipline to study another is a contemporary trend. Therefore, applying trauma theory in psychology to the study of literature is an essential need. Our article focuses on developing the main aspects of applying trauma theory in literary research. We explore the relationship between different types of trauma and the psychology, personality, and actions of characters in nine socio-psychological novels from the first half of the 20th century (1887-1938) by authors such as Nguyen Trong Quan, Le Hoang Muu, Nguyen Chanh Sat, Phu Duc, Ho Bieu Chanh, etc., which utilize trauma in the psychological portrayal of characters. The characters exhibit various types of trauma, primarily orphan hood, emotional trauma, an inferiority complex (from a poor family, patriarchal society), and others (psychological trauma after a family tragedy, psychological weakness, sensitivity, susceptibility to adverse circumstances). Among these, orphan hood is the most prevalent. This indicates that the favored plot type in Southern Vietnamese novels during this period was the orphaned, unfortunate character.

Through this article, we hope to contribute a perspective and a small research direction in affirming the literary tradition of Southern Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century within the broader context of Vietnamese literature on its path of exchange and integration.

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