

LITERARY CRITICS' JOB IS TO DIRECT READERS, NOT VICE VERSA

/Article by Vu Duc Phuc: "Comments on the New Method of Research"; Hanoi, Tap Chi Van Hoc, Vietnamese, No 5, September-October 1973, pp 53-79/

? The exchange of ideas around Nguyen Van Hanh's article, "Ý kiến của Lê-nin về mối quan-hệ giữa văn học và đời sống" /Lenin's Ideas on the Relation Between Literature and Life/, Tap Chi Van Hoc, No 4, 1971, continued in the review until the end of 1972. Many people took part in the debate, and the review invited Hanh to write a rejoinder, printed in No 6, 1972. On several scientific subjects, there can be many different approaches to research and no need for an early conclusion. But we are dealing here with a theoretical problem. In this article I beg to make a few general remarks about the problems already discussed, then to present some ideas of mine about the method of research without saying that my principal aim is to discuss the controversy.

I. Content and Importance of the Problems Discussed.

In his article "Lenin's Ideas...", Nguyen Van Hanh had several good points with which everyone agrees or at least does not disagree: his ideas about the realism, the popular nature and the partisanship of a literary work, his claim that, in evaluating a literary work -- new or old -- one must examine to see whether or not it has good effects upon the revolution and upon the masses.

But that article also has many complex ideas, some aspects of which are exact but others do not meet the approval of many people.

1. First of all, he maintains that Lenin's method of research "rarely analyzed the writer's thought motives or the shaping of the work very profoundly" and that "most of Lenin's efforts and intelligence concentrated on the minute, accurate study of the socio-historical base and the objective meaning of the work and of its effect upon the masses and upon the revolution." Hanh criticized the excessive attention paid to the creative stage, and observed that "it is in the enjoyment stage that the work gains its practical social significance. This view will

surely lead to new standards in evaluating a literary work and to a new method of research." On the consideration of the effects of literature upon the masses, he wrote: "It is very regrettable that we have not done much here, that we have not fully realized the meaning of this great lesson on methods of research. It is at the enjoyment phase and in the relation between the work and the masses that people are equipped to understand how a literary work can be successful, why works that had been forgotten in the past were suddenly revived in a later period, how works that are not literary under the present historical circumstances may become so under different historical circumstances. That is to say, in the creative stage, value is fixed and lies as a potential, whereas only in the enjoyment stage and in the relation to the masses, would the value be realist and changing."

2. The second problem was the following assertion by Nguyen Van Hanh. He wrote that "being concerned primarily with art's aim to change and its effect upon the masses, Lenin of course praised realist art with its great power of realization and its familiarity with the masses, and he considered it the best. But at the same time Lenin did not limit real art, revolutionary art within the bounds of realism." "Lenin," he said, "did not consider realism a method in creativity, but a direction, or better, a degree of value of a direction in creativity that is closely linked to life."

In addition to the two above problems, there are many other problems, for instance, Nguyen Van Hanh's remark that "Among the views of Marx and of Engels on literature and arts, the tendency of thought did not have a deserving position like realism" whereas "in Lenin's time, the problem was different, since Lenin spoke at the same time of realism and of the popular and partisan character," thus "bringing the tendency of thought to the forefront, in a commanding position" and giving this "a great methodological significance."

Hanh's reply also raised several big problems that we shall discuss later.

The above ideas definitely have some importance concerning literary research, and to some extent literary creation, since these problems touch on research method and method of creativity. If Nguyen Van Hanh's views are correct, he would be helpful to research workers because he would have provided them with "a new research method," and he would also be helpful to writers by not forcing them to follow socialist realism, but opening the door to the creation of other methods also profitable to the revolution. If his views are not correct, however, their harmful consequences would not be negligible. That is why many people had to take part in the controversy.

II. Summary of the Participants' Ideas.

Among the participants, Son Tung,¹ Phung Van Tuu,² Nghia Nguyen,³ Nam Moc,⁴ Nguyen Minh,⁵ and Vu Tuan Anh⁶ opposed Nguyen Van Hanh's ideas around the above three questions although they went along with his ideas on some other points. Do Van Khang,⁷ on the other hand, basically agreed with Nguyen Van Hanh although he was critical of a number of points.

1. Son Tung said that Nguyen Van Hanh "quoted Lenin not very carefully in order to underplay the role of the subjective factor, the role of the individual writer's thought and responsibility in the process of literary creation." Nguyen Van Hanh praised "the new method of research" and paid attention first of all to "the enjoyment stage." Son Tung said, "The relation between literature and life is a complex, multi-stage relation: through the writer's creativity, the reality of life is reflected in the work, and as the work is enjoyed by the reader, through him it in turn would affect the reality of life. Literary studies have always included all those stages, and in the division of labor among literary theory, literary criticism and literary history, each domain is assigned the task to explore more deeply this or that aspect of literature according to its own function. From the viewpoint of the common task of literary studies, they should not be biased and assign a special status to any stage, and in each of those domains the same is partly true, too."

Works "that do not constitute literature under some historical circumstances may become literature under different historical circumstances." This, according to Son Tung, is not due to the fact that since they are necessary to the revolution, people have to consider them literature, nor is it decided, as Nguyen Van Hanh maintained, through the public's subjectivity in the "enjoyment stage." Rather, the reason is that each period views literature in a different light and that the concept of literature has its own historical character.

Some works "completely forgotten in the past may suddenly be revived in a later period." This is not due to the public's subjectivity in the "enjoyment stage" either, but rather to the inherent value of the work, first of all.

Son Tung also rejected Nguyen Van Hanh's idea on the method of creativity (discussed under the second question), and he posed this problem: "The greatest concern is what practical significance the use of Lenin's argument that realism is not a method would have, and whom it would profit. In the present situation, reactionary and revisionist bourgeois scholars are madly engaged in a campaign of distortion and attack, and peaceful evolution vis a vis socialist realism is the best method of creativity according to our Party's policy on literature and arts, the peak of realism as a method in its historical development in the past few centuries."

2. Phung Van Tuu paid special attention to the analysis of the regular change of the value of literary works through time: "The change which the work undergoes in the enjoyment stage of the reader -- when it actually takes place -- is also a phenomenon that obeys some rules. Although the objective significance of the work may change, its direction toward either reaction or progress has been affirmed right from the beginning and cannot be reversed." "Works of art are not secret problems with indefinite answers. Readers armed with the ideas of Marxism-Leninism are able to find out the exact answers of those problems. Later on, readers will not be able to reject that accuracy; on the contrary, on the basis of that very accuracy, they will be able to discover new values of the work in terms of their own needs."

3. Nghia Nguyen wrote that "The lesson drawn from Lenin's articles on Tolstoy is not that we should pay more attention to the objective aspect of artistic creation than to its subjective aspect, but that we should constantly pay full attention to both these aspects, analyze both at the same time in their organic relation and their dialectic effects."

On the method of writing, he wrote, "The method of creativity is a historical category. Its movement is a regular movement of artistic thought. Although any art that is useful to the revolution has its own legitimate standing, revolutionary art in its inevitable movement cannot fail to reach the point of asserting for itself a method that is best and most advantageous to the realization of its socio-esthetic ideal. In the history of the development of proletarian literature, that inevitable movement led to the method of socialist realism." Lenin "confirmed the realist method right in its fundamental principle."

4. Do Van Khang, who basically came to the defense of Nguyen Van Hanh, wrote, "The interests of the revolution are the foremost objective in Lenin's literary viewpoint." "Here, if we speak of Lenin's method, we should not understand it to be anything else but Lenin's ways to go straight to the basic nature of things. This is the shortest route of a genius" and "that is a judicious and subtle remark by Nguyen Van Hanh." But Do Van Khang on this score also wrote that Nguyen Van Hanh "showed a couple of shortcomings" that is to say, "Nguyen Van Hanh might give the reader the impression that he did not really pay attention to the role of the writer's motivation although he had a long paragraph before that," and that when Nguyen Van Hanh overemphasized "the useful," "the profitable," but did not explain fully, he might make the reader feel that he advocates "pragmatism."

Do Van Khang also remarked that "Nguyen Van Hanh was on the right track when he looked for the practical foundation, a base for the verification of the writer's subjective motivation in his effectiveness. But unfortunately he has not yet developed this direction proportionately to the problems that he raised."

Do Van Khang also affirmed that "in considering the reader, Nguyen Van Hanh wanted to reach a stage that is closely related to the standards by which one evaluates the sincerity of a literary work."

5. Nam Moc remarked that "the fundamental bias in Nguyen Van Hanh's new method of research is that he concentrated too much on the reader's enjoyment stage," "which reminds us of what Nguyen Van Trung [a student of literature in South Vietnam has said about 'different truths' which different readers attribute to a work of literature'."

6. Nguyen Minh rejected Nguyen Van Hanh's idea that we have not paid much attention to the effect of literature upon the revolution and upon the masses: "Those of us who are engaged in literary studies today have been bathed in the atmosphere of the revolution since our childhood and adolescence... To a revolutionary the realities of the revolution constitute the first lesson, the introductory lesson." However, "to metaphysically separate the effect from the motivation and consider the former more important than the latter, as Nguyen Van Hanh has done, can be compared to giving more weight to the 'success' of insincere persons and not paying attention to their deceit."

Nguyen Minh also thought that, when talking about Lenin's articles on Tolstoy, Nguyen Van Hanh misunderstood Lenin and failed to consider the historical circumstances and requirements or to the needs of the realities of the revolution at the time Lenin wrote those articles. On the other hand, Nguyen Van Hanh also misunderstood Engels and failed to see that Engels paid attention to both "the thought tendency" and "realism," and that "never, at any time, did Engels fail to mention tendentiousness in literature."

Nguyen Minh also remarked: "To pay attention to the effect of literature upon the masses is an entirely necessary thing, but it is a different thing to raise it to the rank of the most fundamental and most promising direction. This will lead to vagueness as far as objective and aim are concerned." Nguyen Minh also based himself on the requirement of "the realities of the revolution" at present to assert that "at the enjoyment stage, there is no problem so serious that Hanh has to consider it a most urgent problem requiring solution. If it is in fact urgent, then we should study problems posed in the creative stage and strive, together with writers, to have more and better works."

7. Vu Tuan Anh analyzed the cause-and-effect relationship between the motivation and the effect, and at the same time he asserted that motivation is only part of the world view, and that in order to have good effects, the work needs other conditions in addition to good motivation. Therefore, in studying the effect, we must study all factors, including motivation, that have caused that effect, and we must not pay attention only to the effect and overlook the motivation, as Nguyen Van Hanh has done.

III. "The Value of the 'New Method of Research.'"

On the previous page I have summarized the principal arguments used by the participants in the discussions. We shall discuss later Nguyen Van Hanh's answer printed in Tap Chi Van Hoc, No 6, 1972, since it raised a number of rather important new problems. Of course I have not been able to summarize all the ideas, and the readers should reread all the articles because there are several points that I was not able to mention.

1. Of the three problems discussed, the most important ideas are those revolving around the first problem regarding methodology.

Nguyen Van Hanh meant that Lenin's entire activity, including his study of literature, aimed at the revolutionary objective, at improving life, and that therefore Lenin's method of literary research "concentrated first of all on the most fundamental, most urgent and most promising problems, and paid special attention to the result and the effect." And, "from the viewpoint of change for the better, from the viewpoint of revolutionary realities, it is only at the enjoyment stage that a literary work has its practical social significance. This viewpoint inevitably will lead to new standards in the evaluation of the work and to a new method of research. Of course, other methods of research, for instance the study of the subjective aspect of creativity, that of the relation between the work and its author, are necessary, but the direction that stresses the objective aspect of literature, especially Lenin's effects of literature upon the revolution and upon the masses, is an extremely important and very promising direction."

I think that Lenin, and all of us -- writers and literary research workers of the socialist regime -- are all working to serve the revolution and to serve the working people. This is a very simple truth which the Party has taught us for a long time. Except some individualists or other persons who do not think straight, literary workers (in the theory, criticism and history of literature) under our system have no other objective than to serve the revolution and to serve the working masses. Here Nguyen Van Hanh was right, but he put it in an abstruse manner, and besides he did not really discover anything new.

Because of this objective of service, it is also very correct in studying a literary work, that one must pay attention to "the effects of the literature upon the revolution and upon the masses," as Nguyen Van Hanh said. But this is a problem which everyone has long understood and which is nothing new or novel. In order, however, to understand that effect the job is not simply to investigate the influence of the work upon the masses. Since the August Revolution, the Party has taught us many times -- and the authentic literary workers have followed this -- that we should oppose any literary work which is harmful to the revolution and to the masses, and that we should praise any literary work which is good and helpful to the revolution and to the masses. This, I think, is evident.

But to recommend "a new method of research" which not only underplays the study of the author and of his motivation, but also glosses over the "creative stage," paying attention only to the "enjoyment stage," would be a skewed method that cannot be used. Not only does it limit several facets of the task of literary research in serving the revolution, but also it makes people deviate from the Party's policy on literature, and if applied systematically it would even lead to the liquidation of literary criticism.

(a) First of all, realities for many years have proved that in order to write works that are useful to the revolution, the writer must "revolutionize his thought" and strengthen his partisanship. To speak of partisanship is to speak of the ideal and motivation in creativity. In order for a literary work to have objective meaning and good effects upon the revolution, the creative writer must fulfill several requirements, the first of which is to cultivate his party spirit, that is to say, the policy and the language of the Party, that is to say, the truth. Theory and criticism must always consider this. In examining a work or all the works of an author, a history of literature must probe his thinking, his way of life, which would reveal his motivation. But from a good departure point (that everyone knows) -- the work must have good effects upon the revolution and upon the working people -- Nguyen Van Hanh said wrongly that literary research according to Lenin must "pay special attention to the result and the effectiveness." He often mentioned "effectiveness" and "the enjoyment stage" as part of the "new method of research," and he minimized the study of the creative writer, of the literary creation. The Party requires that literary theory and criticism lead literary creation and at the same time the readers. What the Party told them to do, Nguyen Van Hanh said is necessary all right, but not the most fundamental, the most urgent or the most promising. Did he not, in so doing, veer off the direction of literary research? Early in 1973, Premier Pham Van Dong asked the writers to try to have works that are worthy of our very heroic people, of our very great nation, and of our very glorious victory. This is also a theme for literary studies, especially literary theory, and in order to discuss this, theory must discuss the need for the writer to cultivate himself subjectively. Hanh tried his best to demonstrate that the effect is in contradiction with the motivation, so he minimized the study of motivation. He also opposed the "exaggeration, the one-way emphasis on subjective and individualist factors in artistic creation." He also deliberately misinterpreted Lenin's idea that "in politics, who directly defends this or that viewpoint is not important, but what is important is whom would those viewpoints, recommendations or measures benefit" in order to claim that whether the writer has a good or bad motive is not important, and what matters is the effect of his writings. If it is so, then, in accordance with the Party's demand and with the realities, we who are theoreticians and critics, we who must study the problem of giving the writer some "subjective factors," we who must study literary creativity and the essential activities to build a socialist literature, we have acted against Nguyen Van Hanh's directives!

If the effects sometimes contradict the motivation, the problem is not to minimize the latter, but to see that, while there is a cause-and-effect relationship between them, it takes several causes to reach an effect, and therefore it is not enough to pay attention to the ideal of creation. For many years we have spent so many efforts studying the realities before we were able to find out that, in addition to cultivating the partisanship, a writer must also cultivate other things -- his experience in life, his general knowledge, his knowledge of literature, his method, his talent, etc. We must still go deeper and develop all these facets. Nguyen Van Hanh, however, talked constantly about realities, yet he minimized all the complex problems related to the writer and creation at the very time when these are given prominence in literary theory, even in South Vietnam. How can a research worker who pays attention to the revolutionary realities and the effects upon the revolution overlook realities to such an extent?

To praise an author to the skies, as some bourgeois critics have done, is not correct. But we have to make a profound study of the "subjective factors" of literary creation, then emphasize them in order to help the writers produce good works and build a socialist literature, thus accomplishing the task of guiding literary creation according to the Party's requirements. How can this be called an exaggeration?

If we think that problems of writing are not problems a literary worker must study, then shall we simply leave the writers to struggle by themselves? And if the writers themselves discuss the problems of literary creation don't they concurrently assume the work of literary theory and criticism?

In short, Nguyen Van Hanh's "new method of research" would make research workers veer away from the Party guideline, which is that we must lead literary creation and pay attention to "the creative stage."

(b) That method actually does not help the "enjoyment stage" much, but merely runs behind it to record, evaluate and assess the value of the work.

When a literary work has just been published, and even before it was printed, we already have to evaluate it, examine to see whether it is helpful or harmful to the revolution, thus reviewing it in time, instead of waiting for the readers' evaluation. If we wait to see "the practical effect of the work and the reader's reaction to it," as Nguyen Van Hanh said, if we wait for the decision of the "enjoyment stage" before we "study and evaluate," then the result of this not only would convert literary criticism to the job of a Gallup Institute, that is to say, liquidate criticism, but also would allow such books as Vao doi /Entering Life/, Chuyen mot dem doi tau /Waiting for the Train That Night/, etc. to flood the market and lead to chaos.

Nguyen Van Hanh surely does not want that to happen, but if his method of literary research and criticism is systematically applied, that would be the result. But here, we must resolve a question for those who have an automatic and oversimplified understanding of the "pragmatic viewpoint": what is the criterion for saying that a literary work is helpful or harmful to the revolution and to the masses when its value has not been proved by the realities?

Here is our answer: we must use the realities of the old, and past experience as a theoretical base on which to evaluate the new: literary theory according to Marxism-Leninism has used the realities of existing literary works and their concrete effects in life to draw the necessary principles. These principles are being further developed and supplemented every day, and a competent literary worker would lean on them to give an immediate evaluation of a literary work. Our Party has spent many efforts in studying the realities before it could recommend a very correct policy on literature that would serve the revolution and the working people. During the resistance war against the French imperialists, for instance, we have studied such problems as how to enable literature and the arts to have good effects upon the revolution and to serve the working people. But in studying those realities, we found out the experience and theory for the "creative stage" and first of all "the author's stage" including his motivation. That is why in 1948 a slogan was developed for that stage: "revolutionize the writer's thought, and popularize his life." From then on, the Party's policy on literature also developed in accordance with the needs of the revolution, but problems concerning the author and literary creation have always been given special attention.

That is why, as far as the enjoyment stage is concerned, literary theory needs to study what the needs and requirements of the working people in literature are for each period in order to help literary creation follow the right direction. But that is a subject of study for the theory, and not a new method of research whereas the study of literary history and literary criticism in general must base itself on the literary theory already existing according to Marxism, and on the Party's serious policy on literature in order to study and evaluate old and new literary works at home and abroad, to analyze and evaluate the works themselves to guide both creation and the readers -- instead of waiting for the readers' opinions about the works before their critical studies. The critic's high quality is reflected in his own evaluation of the work before it reaches the reader and conforms with the most legitimate opinion of the people when the people have read that work.

The bulk of the work of a literary critic in judging a new literary work consists in analyzing and evaluating every aspect of it. Regarding its effects upon the revolution and upon the masses, he is also in a position to affirm them immediately (although in a general way and in broad outlines) and thus will not have to wait for the reader's opinion or to wait until after he has studied the concrete effects of the work upon the

revolution. His "most urgent" and "most essential" task is to complete the analysis and evaluation of the work itself and to consider every element concerning its form and content. Of course the critic will concentrate on that factor which is most noteworthy. Before having an opinion on the possible effects of the work, he should have very carefully analyzed both the content and the form of the work first. And in many cases, he will have to go deeply into many other problems, for instance the "author's stage" and the "author's motive." Of course the attitude of the masses toward the work later on will help the critic verify whether his previous opinion about the work was correct or not and thus gain experience.

The articles authored by the Nhan van - Giai pham group, aside from helping us judge their own writings, also unmasked their real identity with all their evil "motives." There were quite a few of those articles, and that is why all of them got unmasked. Why say, therefore, that the "author's stage" and the "creative stage" are not so urgent and so important as the "enjoyment stage"?

When dealing with a great work of literature, people usually have to go very deeply into every aspect, including the author's life, and not just his "motivation."

The literary research worker is rigorous in every aspect in order to guide both writers and readers. The concrete effect of the work, at most, can be ascertained through some factors, such as the number of copies printed and sold, their circulation in libraries, the opinions of critics, the concrete opinions of some people -- we simply cannot know them all, -- and usually only general ideas can be gathered. When Lenin studied Tolstoy to evaluate him in terms of the requirements of the revolution, the peasants were reading little by Tolstoy, and even among those communists who had read Tolstoy then, many misunderstood him. Had Lenin waited to examine the realities of the concrete effects of Tolstoy's works upon workers and peasants before giving an evaluation of them, he would never have been able to write on them. In studying such a work as the Iliad and trying to introduce it to great masses of Vietnamese readers, we cannot say that it is most "fundamental and urgent" to try to understand the "enjoyment stage" and the "effects" of the work when despite our great efforts we can only learn a tiny portion of "the effects" of the Iliad upon the world during these thousands of years, much less "its effects" upon Vietnamese workers and farmers. Comparative literature, after tremendous efforts, has been able only to find some effects of the Iliad upon the literature of this or that country, or upon this writer or that poet. What is the purpose of that is still considered a problem. So it is really idle talk to mention such adjectives as "fundamental" and "urgent."

When a great work has been written, we need to study its author in order to help the reader receive it deeply and at the same time to help the reader receive it deeply and at the same time to help the writer gain

experience in living, studying and writing in order to be able to write so well. Why is this not useful to the "realities of the revolution?" The leaders of our Party in the field of art and letters hold most conversations with writers to lead the "author's stage."

However, when talking about the method of literary research, we do not speak just of one period. In literature when the revolution requires us to study something, we have to consider a given place, a given time, the capabilities of a given area of literary research, the extent to which a given problem has been solved. Methodology, on one hand, must set forth the most common and most fundamental principles, and cover all studies, for instance the partisan and scientific character (to speak of the party character is to speak of how to serve the revolution) in literary research, the objectives and guidelines of literary research, etc., and on the other hand, set forth principles on methods to study a work, its author, a movement, a period in literary history, the whole literary history, methods of criticism, methods of reasoning, and many other problems. The study of subjective conditions (that the writer must fulfill in order to be able to produce good works), including the creative ideals and the motivation -- something which is part of the writer's view of life -- is also one of the most important problems of literary research. Our Party is much concerned with this. In order to study this problem adequately, we also need a method. The whole literary life, including the "author's stage" is the object of literary research. The study of a literary work is a most fundamental area within the field of literary history and literary criticism, but literary history and literary criticism study other things as well. As to the object of literary theory, it is the study of rules and principles, and not the concrete evaluation of a literary work, although it is imperative to tie theory to the study of the book. Many times, while it does not separate the study of the work, literary theory has to consider every problem of the writer and the policy regarding literary productions. As for the reader problem, we have, during the past few decades, not only posed the problem of "popularization" and that of serving the working people in every respect, but also brought the whole culture into the hands of the working people. We fight anyone who goes off that objective. Moreover, even in the study of a literary work, we need some principles for the overall study and we should not lift out just one element -- the "effect of the work upon the masses and upon the revolution" or the "enjoyment stage" -- and call it the "new method of research," "the most urgent," "the most promising," "the most fundamental," and "the extremely important one." To say so means not to understand what literary studies require us to study for the purpose of serving the revolution and the working people, or to put it more bluntly, not to know the "realities" of literary research. Consequently we wonder whether Nguyen Van Hanh has got "promoted" too soon when he made this remark about the work of those of us engaged in literary research, "It is very regrettable that we have not done much here, and that we have not even fully realized the meaning of this great lesson on methods of research." Personally, I can modestly thank Nguyen Van Hanh for that lesson -- whether it is right or wrong --

but literary research workers since Hai Trieu's time will consider Nguyen Van Hanh groundlessly belittling them. Furthermore, they may also think that his judgment has been somewhat too rash.

At any rate, we can still agree with Nguyen Van Hanh on one point: that our literary theory has not adequately studied what the working people require now in the realm of literature so as to help writers work more effectively. In other words, what problems of present-day concrete life do the masses want a writer to set forth and solve in literature? How should we write to be useful to the people and at the same time please them? How should we write to suit labor, combat and the people's life? Which social class likes which genres of literature? At the present time some excellent literary works that are well liked by the people are considered lightly by critics, whereas other books, although very boring, have been praised to the skies. It is for this reason that the Central Committee of our Party has asked critics to respect the opinion of the masses. But let me repeat, the study that aims at setting forth a theory on the acceptance of literature at this "enjoyment stage" is only a topic of literary theory, but not a method of research. Secondly, the consideration of the opinion of the great masses in the critique of new writings can be applied only to those books that are slow in getting reviewed by the "experts." The quality of a good critic and a good student of literature is precisely to immediately determine the value of a book while or before it reaches the reader. The remark criticizing those critics who disregard readers is very judicious.

(c) Something must be said about another big problem. Nguyen Van Hanh wrote: "It is at the 'enjoyment stage' and in the relation between the work and the masses that people are equipped to understand how a literary work can be successful, why works that had been forgotten in the past were suddenly revived in a later period, and why works that are not literature under some historical circumstances may become literature under different historical circumstances. That is to say, in the creative stage, value is fixed and lies as a potential whereas only in the enjoyment stage and in the relation to the masses would the value be realist and changing." He also said that "it is only in the enjoyment stage that the work gains its practical social significance."

If we follow Nguyen Van Hanh's theory about the value of a book and the change of that value, we definitely must remark: "that a literary work does not have any value that resides in itself. Before being read, the value of a book is "fixed and potential" (We all know that possibility refers to something that may be possible, but has not happened, has not existed). It is the reader -- or the enjoyment stage -- that creates that value and convert its possibility or potential value of the book into reality. The reader can also change that value provided that it agrees with the potential or possibility of the value of the book.

A literary work is the most delicate product of man's labor. When it has been realized in language -- the physical shell of thought -- or in words printed in ink on paper, then it has acquired a material shape. Without the spoken language or the printed page the work would not be expressed. In sum, the value of a work can be said to be the quality of the whole work or of each component of its content and form. The "crude matter" of the work with all its characteristics has automatically concretized the intrinsic value of the book, just as the utilization value of a garment, to use a simple example, is concretized by its physical being. (As for the exchange value of the book in monetary terms which we are not discussing here, it can be figured out through statistics about the selling price, the royalties paid to the author, the publisher's profit, etc. The real value is shown in the relation with other merchandises, but does not depend on the reader, either.) The piece of clothing does not wait for some actual user before having its utilization value. As soon as a book appears and regardless of whether people have read it or not, it acquires its intrinsic value right away, although this is only a moral value -- but also in terms of its utilization.

But what is the "quality" of a literary work? In defining its quality, we have to consider three aspects: does it reflect reality and the problems of reality? What is the thought behind it? Is it artistic? The determination of the value of literary works -- old and new -- is very scientific. As a work was born in a given social environment, it immediately acquired a given social significance and value, depending on how it reflected, posed and solved the problems of life at that time, on whether its theme and thought are helpful or harmful, and to what extent, to the development of life (which always has both positive and negative aspects), and on whether its art is uniquely attractive or not, whether its language has any historical role, etc.

When we move to another country or to another period, then in addition to that social meaning and that intrinsic value, and depending on the position which the book holds in the development of the society of that country at that time, it will acquire a new meaning and a new value closely linked to its old meaning and its intrinsic value. Marxism-Leninism affirmed that a literary work which was sincere and progressive under the circumstances of its birth will definitely retain its valuable contribution to the development of society. The assessment and understanding of the present effect and value of a literary work must be based on its old value, on one hand, and on the other hand on its total character in its relation to the new milieu and its position in the new social environment with the class conflict of that society, and do not depend on how many times the reader has read the book or whether he has understood it or not. 8

This is the theory of dialectic materialism on the value of a literary work, whereas Nguyen Van Hanh's theory that the reality of the value of a book and the change which that value undergoes are induced by the reader is an idealist theory.

Lenin himself, when evaluating Tolstoy, used the historical viewpoint which originated from Tolstoy's reflection, thought and esthetic value to argue against so many individuals who either misunderstood or distorted Tolstoy. Lenin never started with a study of the "enjoyment stage" and considered it the reality of the value of the work. Lenin thoroughly understood Tolstoy's life and put each of Tolstoy's works in the circumstances of its birth to see whether it is true or false, progressive or not. He made a concrete study of the social situation to determine the value of the work right away. Lenin studies the "enjoyment stage" only to correct whoever made a mistake and to approve whoever correctly understood, and mainly he criticized those who misunderstood or distorted Tolstoy. The use of the historical viewpoint to study the social situation with the class struggle of the time and, by the same token, to try to understand the author in order to understand and evaluate the work is a very scientific method. But Nguyen Van Hanh has instead distorted Lenin's ideas and method, saying that Lenin studied the "enjoyment stage" in order to evaluate the literary work.

It is precisely the readers, principally the working people, who gradually understand and evaluate the literary work correctly: they do not create that value or change it into reality.

Readers' opinions, once expressed in spoken or written words, constitute a kind of reality. But if we want to examine that reality in its relation to some capability, we can see only that it concretizes the capability of the reader himself. Capabilities and realities are two categories that indicate the development of the same thing, and we cannot conceive of the former lying in one material structure and the latter lying in another material structure. Which philosophy has enabled Nguyen Van Hanh to affirm that the capabilities lie in the book whereas the realities lie in the reader? In the relation between the reader and the work, what matters is that the reader must realize, understand, and thereby give a correct evaluation of the work, discover its meaning, see its effect (or use) and value, and that the reader cannot say that only his thought about a book can be the reality of its value. Since generally speaking, and in the long run, the working people will gradually discover the deep meaning of the work, see its effect and evaluate it right, we must base on the influence that a work has already had upon legitimate readers in order to understand its value. But this serves only as a proof, a basis that helps us understand further the real value of the work, and we cannot confuse that basis and the intrinsic value of the work. The main problem is that the readers must look for and find the intrinsic value of the work.

When a really good book was forgotten in the past, it is not because, as Nguyen Van Hanh thinks, former readers changed the capabilities into "realities" then threw them away and when present readers value the book highly this does not mean that they have changed capabilities into

"realities," either. It was forgotten for many reasons: many people had not read it; the backward, exploiting ruling class and its reactionary intellectuals suppressed the book because it did not serve their interests; people of good will were ignorant and could not understand it; the working people were not equipped to accept the book (peasants were illiterate, and workers were so uneducated and so exploited as to have no time for books), etc. A book will be praised or underestimated by this or that social class depending on the historical circumstances with the class conflicts under those circumstances. Today the working people in North Vietnam welcome those great works that were forgotten in the past because, through the education and leadership of the Party, the political and cultural level of the working people has been raised to enable them to evaluate literary works in a relatively serious and scientific manner.

Nguyen Van Hanh's viewpoint originates from an idealist theoretical foundation regarding the value of literary creation, so actually he did not really believe in the scientific criterion in the evaluation of a work, or he observed only one criterion -- the reader's opinion. According to him, this idea naturally cannot go so far as not to have anything to do with the work, but it can be deduced for convenience's sake, because any deduction can be caused by the "capability" of the value of the work. We shall see that Nguyen Van Hanh developed this same reasoning as required by Do Van Khang "to correspond with the problem posed by him" in his argument about "a collective creativity" between the author and "the enjoyment stage" which I shall discuss below. That viewpoint denies the scientific character of literary research, which leads the literary critic and research worker to have bad ideas in the haphazard evaluation of literary works -- something Hanh definitely does not want.

Nguyen Van Hanh could argue that he does not allow a haphazard evaluation outside the scope of the "capabilities" of the value of the work. But why allow people in view of that "capability" to consider a book as junk at one time, then to praise it at another time? If the "capability" of value reaches that low it would be only sheer expediency. Besides, Nguyen Van Hanh's argument is also an argument that holds the reader's expediency as truth. It also leads to the liquidation of literary research, since it does not see that the function of the literary researcher is to lead the readers. In other words, if Nguyen Trai's poems are still useful to the revolution nowadays, the research worker has the responsibility to fully expand its good effects, to enable the readers to absorb all its beauty and interest; the research worker does not wait to see how the readers, workers and peasants receive Nguyen Trai's poems before he can evaluate them. To wait like that would amount to a liquidation of research.

Moreover, the average reader, whether he is a worker or a peasant, ordinarily prefers current books to classics. For instance, workers, peasants and soldiers in general like those hundreds of poems, stories

and sketches by contemporary writers better than the works of Nguyen Trai (except his "Binh ngo Dai cao" /Proclamation on the Defeat of the Chinese/). If we evaluate those writers more highly than Nguyen Trai, those readers themselves would laugh at us.

Of course, under the socialist regime, people in general give a correct evaluation of literary works. However, an evaluation that is objective, thorough and standardized is different from individual evaluations, and even when the people have already given a good evaluation, research workers still must make them evaluate even more correctly and more profoundly. Furthermore, the people do not necessarily evaluate a book correctly in every instance, because the conditions in which a literary work is received are not only contingent upon the fact that readers have to be working people. Revisionism may lead the working people astray during a rather long period, and the reception of dogmatic and leftist bad books may make the people trample on many traditional values. Under the old regime, on the other hand, the situation was really tragic, since the vast majority of working people could not read or write. How can we then evaluate a book on the basis of that "non-existent readership?"

We have had to point out the above in order to affirm that although our re-evaluation of literary works, old and new, under the leadership of the Party must serve the revolution and the working people, it must also be very scientific. The party character here is organically linked to the scientific character and does not mean pragmatism. To us Marxists, as research on some point is unscientific, it would be harmful to the revolution on that point. Scientific means absolute subtlety, and not simple, "raw" reliance upon the enjoyment stage to record the value of the work. It is of course essential to understand the readers' views.

(d) "Why works that are not considered literature under some circumstances may become literature under other historical circumstances?" It is not because of the "enjoyment stage." Therefore we cannot examine this matter from the viewpoint of a study of this enjoyment stage as Nguyen Van Hanh has said. Marx's Das Kapital is an extremely influential book, but the literary worker cannot wave his magic wand to change that work into "literary creation." De dat de nuoc /the epic poem of the Muong people/ is a "shaman" work on religion, but it is still a literary work. Many bad books such as pornographic novels or knights' stories have been rejected by the masses, but they still belong to "literature." To maintain that on the basis of the "enjoyment stage" we can convert into literature what was not literature before is really using a "miraculous" method. This is far from being scientific.

In its development, literature follows this rule, that at the very beginning it was mixed with many things, but later on through a division of labor, literature took shape more and more distinctly every day. The literature of ancient Greece and ancient Rome included such philosophical

works as those of Plato and Aristotle, and such political works as those of Cicero, etc. In our country in the old days there was also a situation where literature and history could not be distinguished. But nowadays literature cannot be so confused. Of course the concept of "literature" still contains many elements which we need to discuss, but basically many points have been clarified. Many people who have an incomplete theory on the characteristics of literature have arbitrarily brushed aside many works, excluding them from literature. In trying to decide what is a literary work, we must be very scientific in principle and follow the historical viewpoint to its full scientific extent. This has nothing to do with the haphazard evaluation by the masses, and on the basis of the so-called "requirements of the revolution" we just cannot call literature everything that cannot be called so. The requirements of the revolution and of the working people do not need to, and do not permit us to do so, since it would be unscientific.

2. On the second problem -- Nguyen Van Hanh's assertion that socialist realism is not a method of literary creation, but only a direction -- all those who took part in the debate have said that he was wrong, and they have used very good arguments. I will therefore not say much here, but will add the following points:

(a) We have put forth socialist realism as the best method. (There may be another good method, but since it displays shortcomings it cannot be considered the best, and therefore should be discarded.) This is after we have very scientifically reviewed the experience in creative methods, and integrated all the good elements from other methods in history.

(b) At present we can say that the study of the method of socialist realism is not yet thorough, since it has not been able to follow the publishing situation in order to evolve some persuasive theory on methodology. So some writers feel that they should look for a newer method. But this is wrong. If we find that the theory on socialist realism has not matured, we must try to reinforce it and develop it, and thus help writers expand their creativity, but we should not distort Lenin's ideas and say that realism is just a general "direction."

(c) Although the theory about socialist realism has not yet been elaborated in time, it has basically been able to set forth several serious principles. But it is not easy to write seriously according to socialist realism. For instance it is not easy to write a realist book that truthfully, eloquently and attractively reflects our people's struggle against the U.S. for national salvation and to make it worthy of the dimension of the time. First of all, the author needs an awful amount of life experience, and this is really difficult. Socialist realism is a very difficult method, but since the revolution needs to be highlighted in terms of the requirements of history, we would not be able to serve the revolution well if we do not write according to that method. In

revolution everything is difficult, and literary creation, too is difficult -- just as difficult as the war against the U.S. pirates. That is why a writer who is without life experience but wants to write would definitely have to invent some argument, to the effect that it is good enough to write to serve the revolution and that he does not have to follow socialist realism. Nguyen Van Hanh's argument about method, of course, agrees with those writers. This is not good at all.

(d) Since 1943 our Party has always struggled for socialist realism. The Party set forth a requirement that writers should constantly better the socialist realist method. Nguyen Van Hanh's ideas may lead young inexperienced writers to deviate from policy of the Party. We may ask him for what purpose has he leaned on Lenin to assert wrongly that real art, revolutionary art is not confined to realism?

IV. Method of Doing the Easy and Abandoning the Difficult; The Road That Is Both Short and Secure; Structuralism and Marxism-Leninism.

In his article "Mot so diem can noi ro them ve van de nghien cuu tac pham van hoc /Some points To Be Elaborated on the Problem of Studying Literary Works/ in Tap Chi Van Hoc, No 6, 1972, Nguyen Van Hanh accepted a few points, clarified some other points in order to avoid misunderstanding. But he still maintained some old ideas and at the same time advanced some wrong ideas about the method of research. Here I shall mention only a few major ones.

1. On motivation, Nguyen Van Hanh was in complete agreement with those who debated against him about the cause-and-effect relationship between the motive and the effect. However, he also maintained that:

(a) The problem of motivation is "a problem of the writer" and not a "problem of literary research." He wrote: "We must keep apart problems of writing and problems of literary research" and in the previous article he merely "concentrated his thought on the problem of literary research and research of literary works."

But how can he say that the problem of the writer is not the problem of literary research and why literary studies are synonymous with the study of a particular work? Do not literary theory, literary history and literary criticism -- the principal disciplines of literary studies -- study the problems of the writer? Who, according to Nguyen Van Hanh, should study the problems of the writer then? What science should do that? And in confining literary studies to the study of literary works, has not Nguyen Van Hanh fallen into the above-mentioned regrettable mistakes? Nobody prevents him from "concentrating his thought" on the study of the work. To say that all departments of literary research can be separated from the study of the work is even very right. But to maintain that literary research must be most concerned with the "enjoyment stage" and the "effectiveness" would mean not only overlooking

all other researches that are necessary to literary life, but also being biased in the study of the work itself.

(b) "The problem of the writer's motivation is easier to see through current works," he wrote. "As for works that are farther from us in history and space (Li Sao, The Iliad) the discovery of the author's motivation would be very difficult. With regard to anonymous works or works that cannot be dated, this approach would be nearly impotent. Therefore, if for some scientific reasons, someone abstracts the problem of the author's motivation and goes straight to the work, trying to understand its theme and its ideological and artistic value, and to study not what the writer wanted to tell the readers, but what he actually was able to communicate to the readers (not simply through motivation, but through all the richness and forcefulness of his thinking and feelings, of his talent and experience), where is that bias which Son Tung worried so much about? I think that this route is shorter, safer, more necessary and even has more popular value, too."

This is a research "method" which is highly "amateurish," very unscientific although it has been praised to the skies. Here are just a few points about its unscientific character:

Hanh maintained that "the writer's motivation can be more easily seen through current works." This remark is very subjective. I think that in many cases it is not easy to see. Take, for instance, those works that are called "two-faceted" and generally amount to tricky inventions by all the bad elements under our regime. It is not necessarily true that authors of those works with two contradictory themes had bad motives like the Nhan van - Giai pham people. Here lies precisely the difficulty: we do not know whether we are dealing with an inexperienced writer who has unwittingly caused his book to have bad effects or with a writer who has had bad motives. Even when we can be fairly sure that it is the latter case, it is still difficult to prove conclusively that bad motive in the authors of double-objective works. And if we cannot be persuasive it is because we have not grasped all the concrete facts.

Under such a strong and stable regime as ours, it is very difficult to see and to condemn the bad motives of those individuals who write for money or who write to attack the regime in a subtle way as members of the Tran Dan group have done in their "final summaries of experience." No wonder Tran Dan himself wrote that "if we put it into the book, they cannot beat us to death." That is why we have to try to understand the author if we want to find the motive -- and we must do that.

Nguyen Van Hanh asserted that, because it is difficult to find "the motive" of such classical works as Li Sao and The Iliad, because we are "nearly incapable" in the search for the motives of "anonymous or undated works," and for "scientific reasons" similar to those, we may "abstract the problem of motivation" and go straight to the work, to try to understand not "what the writer wanted to say," but only "what the writer

has actually said." Hanh also affirmed that that approach is "shorter, safer, more necessary and even has more popular value, too." He had previously praised "the new method" with several beautiful epithets -- the most fundamental, the most essential, the most urgent, the most promising, the most important! Now he went even further and used superlative adjectives. In science, to blow up one's own ideas too much would arouse suspicion. To my mind, even though such an "amateurish" method of research may be short and popular -- serious research workers who labor hard are few as compared to those many individuals who prefer expediency -- there is nothing that can make that method safer. That practice of doing only easy things and abandoning difficult things for so-called "scientific reasons" can guarantee nothing. The motive behind Chu Yuan's Li Sao has been defined for centuries. Why say that it is a very difficult job. The discovery of the motive behind Li Sao, not only through that work itself, but through Chu Yuan's entire life, helps us better understand the poignancy and the patriotic content of Li Sao. That is how the study of motivation is important to the understanding of a work. We see clearly that Nguyen Van Hanh has perhaps never read Li Sao or paid attention to the "realities" of studies about Li Sao. This is not required of all research workers, but one should not discuss this work if one has not read it.

Concerning The Iliad, not only is there the problem of its "motive," but people still are grappling with the question whether its author was Homer or not. Under those circumstances, then, the analysis and evaluation of The Iliad will just have to leave a gap, a blank, and we cannot just relax and comment gratuitously that the method is both short and safe.

And why is the defining of authors' motives in the case of anonymous or undated works "almost impotent?" Such scholars as Mien Trai, Dao Duy Anh, Truong Chinh, Bui Van Nguyen, etc. have tried to understand the circumstances under which and the period during which Nguyen Trai wrote his poems; only when they understand his motives and his inner feelings can they help us reach a deep and correct understanding of Nguyen Trai's poems. Hoa Bang succeeded in identifying the author of Quan Am Thi Kinh and affirming what prompted its author to write that story. It is these patient, painstaking efforts which step by step ensured our deep and firm understanding of literary works. Short cuts are not good at all. Nguyen Van Hanh concentrated on the analysis of the work itself, and he paid attention not only to its "practical effects." This was some progress of his. But why is it not necessary to study what the author wanted to say, but only necessary to study what he was actually able to tell the reader? If one cannot study what the author wanted to say, then one can grasp only part of what he was able to say, and the rest would just be idle talk, wild comments -- a rather "popular" ailment.

A principle regarding the scientific character of methodology that is very normal among literary workers or critics is: if there is something we do not know about the events surrounding a book, then we should try to look for it; if we have not found it, we must absolutely not

invent or fabricate things; we may put forth a hypothesis, but it must have a sound basis, and the analysis and commentary about the work must reach a given level commensurate with the degree to which facts have been grasped, the extent to which the hypothesis is logical and whether that is just a hypothesis or proven facts. Literary research is a difficult science. The shortest way consists in holding the scientific method in the most delicate manner, "not being afraid of tiredness and fatigue," as Marx put it. Only then can we succeed. To do only easy things and to let go difficult things, to sit with folded arms, confess one's incompetence, and call this "scientific reasons," to overlook the study of such facts as "motives" and "what the author wanted to say" in the work, to leave "the problems of creation" out of "literary research," then to claim that this is more essential, more secure, that is what Nguyen Van Hanh advertised as miraculous medicine and called the methodology of Marxism-Leninism. How can we follow that new method? Although he often quoted Lenin, Nguyen Van Hanh failed to see that Lenin has addressed a point in the scientific character of the method of research: that "one needs to examine, without exception, all the facts related to research, and not only individual facts. Otherwise people would justly suspect that those facts have been selected or collected in expediency to defend dirty schemes by presenting a subjective" hodge-podge to replace the connection and organic relation among historical phenomena examined in their entirety (Khoa hoc thong ke va khoa hoc xa hoi / Statistical Sciences and Social Sciences, 1917).

Many people have studied Lenin's "research method" through his articles on Tolstoy. Of course those very important articles teach us a lot about research methods, which we have not been able to accurately understand in full. But they cannot teach us everything and we must see a very simple truth that also belongs to the principle of polemical criticism -- Lenin thoroughly understood the person and the works of Tolstoy, but he wrote only concisely about what needed most to be said according to the needs of criticism of the time. We cannot make what Lenin discussed in some articles a really complete research method. If he needed to introduce the entire problem of Tolstoy and of his entire work, Lenin would not have written that way. Therefore, if we have read only those articles, we can only grasp some very basic problems on Tolstoy. If we consider those articles sufficient, then the work of scores of scientists (including several white-haired academicians) who are still grappling with the Tolstoy problem would indeed be superfluous. When the time came for him to study Karl Marx, Lenin was urged by the needs of the revolution, and although he could only write very little, he wrote not only about Marx's life and works and the main aspects of Marxism, but also about his parents, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, his friends, and even appended "a rather complete bibliography on Marx," as Lenin himself put it. Consequently, if we want to study Lenin's research method, we must first of all study what he directly taught about research method (and he taught a lot), and then we must read all the works representative of his methodology concerning a series

of problems. Only then will we be able to completely grasp his research method in social sciences in general, and in literature in particular.

2. Nguyen Van Hanh mentioned "three directions in research" as follows -- "first, to study the work in its relation to its premises; secondly, to study the work as a system, a structure, and thirdly, to study the work in its relation to the reader." He also said, "Each researcher, for particular purposes and according to his own preparation, may go more deeply into this or that direction. But if literary research shows bias in posing its problem, then the understanding of the work and of literature will definitely be shallow and even slanted." We can interpret this to mean that Nguyen Van Hanh wanted to say that all three directions are necessary. But actually they are only three continuous actions, or three segments of a single action, and the whole thing represents only one direction and not three. It is not necessary, however, to discuss the concept. Generally speaking, we can accept the above idea of his as accurate, although we have not gone into an analysis of the value of his three directions. But that, in a sense, would contradict his "approach which is short, safe, essential and popular at the same time" -- approach which we criticized above. At any rate, his phrasing here is very unclear and self-contradictory, and we shall see many other contradictions in his article.

(a) Regarding "the first direction," that is, "the study of a work in relation to its premises," if we look at it closely there will be several minor points that may be taken up. But since they are not very important, I shall not discuss them, except calling attention to the main point -- what Hanh called the premises of the work, i.e., the author, the relation between literature and society, social classes, the nation, the period. As for the author, he paid attention to his view of life and his actions, and he also said that it is "very important and very fundamental" to study those. We warmly welcome this idea. It is something that is usually done by us, and to call it "the old method" is adequate. In that case, all his ideas about "the new method" leaning completely on the "enjoyment stage" are erroneous, and here he had seen that. But this would still amount to a contradiction with the short, safe, essential and popular approach which he mentioned in the above passage, from the same article, and which we have criticized. Because the "short way" has overlooked something "very important and very fundamental." Nguyen Van Hanh's argumentation is not consistent, since his viewpoint is still confused and vague. And he always used absolutely affirmative adjectives.

(b) We will also see this inconsistency and vagueness in Nguyen Van Hanh's theory about the second direction -- "study the work as a system, as a structure." On one hand, he opposed structuralism, thinking that "it is most disastrous that structuralism separates literature from society, art from thought." This criticism is correct, and we approve of it. However, after affirming that the study of "the premises of the work" is "very fundamental," Hanh did not, when discussing the second direction,

consider the first direction fundamental or important any longer. Hanh said that "the discovered of the two categories of element and structure in their positive aspects can suggest to us some ideas useful to the study of a literary work." Thus Nguyen Van Hanh was critical of structuralism, but at the same time asserted that structuralism "can be discovered," that it possesses "positive aspects" and needs to be accepted in a "limited" way. We would be able to agree with this if Hanh's argument had been solid. But let us try and see the extent of that "limitation." "On the basis of a comprehensive and dialectic concept of literary activities and of the life of a book and its value, if we aim at a limited goal, then at a given step research, we can abstract elements outside the work, in other words, temporarily put them into the "black box" in order to study the work as a determined system with its internal relations. Only in a system, a structure and a combination, can the writer's selective art and the fundamental elements of the work reveal its unique practical value." Hanh also said that "we study the work as a system and as a structure" in order to find out "the general principle governing the entire work" before we can see "the soul that created the unique life and visage of the work."

This means then that Nguyen Van Hanh's "comprehensive and dialectic concept of the activities of literature and of the life of a literary work" can still allow him to put life and the elements outside the work into "the black box" and to study "only" the structure and the elements of the work "for a limited objective." But to me that "limited objective" is too big, because Hanh thought that "only" through such a study of the work can we find "its unique practical value."

What kind of theory is that, if not a kind of methodological eclecticism that combines Marxism-Leninism and structuralism? It is even simple structuralism although Hanh is against structuralism. Structuralists know that literature has its diachronicity, yet they do not study it. They know that literature is related to life, yet they would not study that relation. They do know all this just as Hanh does. But they put all those things into the "black box," and maintain that "only" through a study of the system and structure of a work can they find its "unique practical value" or something similar to another concept of Hanh's -- the "soul that created the life and the unique visage of the work." The term "black box" itself was created by them and accepted by Hanh as a discovery.

That same "limited objective" is also the ultimate objective of the study of a work. If one needs only to follow Hanh's second direction in order to reach that objective, then what is the use of studying in other directions and according to other methods? Marxism discovered extremely scientific laws about the relation between literature and life, and through them opened innumerable doors to the task of literary studies. Yet, when studying the work, one has to apply Marxism in a very subtle and serious manner if one wishes to determine the "unique practical value of the work," "the soul that created the unique life and visage of the work." What Marxism could do only with great difficulties and with "tired-

ness and fatigue," can be accomplished by putting those things into "the black box." Long live the short cut! But let us ask: what realities did Hanh use to be able to assert that? Please tell us, please give us just one example, a persuasive one. The result of this approach to research still lies in Hanh's imagination. As for those who have tried to apply structuralism in literary research, they can offer us only odds and ends and secondary things, since once life and the author have been put into the "black box" we can under no circumstances distinguish and evaluate the content and the form of a work. To Marxism "to study the work in its relation to life" does not mean to study life separately in order to write something as "historical background." Of course we can study the life of an author separately and life separately in order to write "about the historical background" as many people do. But when studying a work with all its content and form, Marxism always requires us to see its relation to life in every respect -- from the subject, the theme, the images, the emotions, the feelings, the thoughts, etc. to the genre, the language, and the organic relation among those elements -- and it absolutely does not allow us to put life in "the black box." This does not mean going beyond the scope of a study of the content and form of the work. Even Hanh, when talking about the few smallest elements of creative language, also wrote, "in order to see whether an image or an expression has been used appropriately and creatively, we must contrast it with reality -- structuralism fails to do this, and it is wrong -- and at the same time place it within a system, within a concrete structure." We are used to Hanh's inconsistent reasoning. But even when he criticized structuralism, even when he said that even a word has to be examined in its relation to life, he merely said it for the sake of saying it. He clumsily prepared himself to affirm that only by studying the "direction," putting the work "in a system, in a concrete structure" and putting life into "the black box" can we see the "unique practical value of the work," its "soul," its "life" and its "unique visage." People have the right to think that Hanh set forth "the first direction" just as a formality while from the bottom of his heart, he wanted to uphold this black box direction instead!

In the final analysis, then, what he did was: to laud Marxism-Leninism but not to understand it thoroughly and, instead, to play it down; to criticize structuralism, but actually to accept it by asserting that, if we follow it, we will be able to reach the fundamental objective of the study of a literary work.

Another extremely strange thing: in the more recent article Hanh still maintained his old idea that "in the reception by the readers, the value of the work will change somehow, and that is the reality," whereas when separated from the readers, that value was only a "possibility." Yet here he put all "the outside elements," that is, the entire life and history into the "black box" and he studied "only" the "elements and structure" of the work, "he studied it as a determined system with its internal relations" and he claimed to be able to find its "unique practical value." Therefore, if we want these two doctrines of "value" to go together in a

logical manner, Nguyen Van Hanh must be a follower of George Berkeley, since the entire world, including the readers of these lines, has entered the "black box," leaving only Nguyen Van Hanh, who is both the research worker and the reader, standing in front of the structure of the work hanging in time and space, with his individual spirit changing a "possibility" into "reality."

Ordinarily such an utterly queer methodology is considered dangerous by a Marxist research worker, and he cannot follow it despite the fact that Hanh extolled it with fantastic adjectives preceded by "most" and "extremely."

(c) Nguyen Van Hanh's third direction advocates the study of a literary work in "the reader's reception and acceptance of the work." Here he dealt at length with his viewpoint on "the enjoyment stage," thus once again displaying the errors contained in his article "Lenin's Ideas..." even more patently.

He thought that "the value of a work lies not only in how it reflects life, but also in its practical effect." I have already presented the principle according to which to determine the historical and the present values of a work. Of course, a good book sooner or later will exert some good influence upon the people, and in our study to determine the value of a work, it is very necessary to pay attention to the opinion of the people -- if the people have read it. But many economic, political and cultural reasons, in general, and the lack of subjective requirements on the part of the people (for instance, their being kept illiterate through the imperialists' obscurantist policy), in particular, may prevent the work from expanding its influence. That is why to determine the value of a work, we cannot rely only on "the reflection" and "the practical effect." It would anyway be too simple and maybe erroneous to rely simply on the "reflection" because, although closely linked to reflection, the ideological nature of the work is most important for this reason that the educational function of literature is most important, and besides, a literary work has other values -- artistic, linguistic -- as well.

Not only did Nguyen Van Hanh think that the value of a work is decided by the readers, he also thought that the enjoyment stage, i.e., the reader, decides even on the social significance of the work as it developed through different periods. He wrote, "The real social meaning of the work through different milieus and periods underwent given changes on the foundation of the fixed content and form of the work. These changes do not lie in the enjoyment stage, or in the internal structure of the work, but in its application, in the "enjoyment stage" in relation to the readers." Hence he required that literary studies must study "the practical effect of the work upon its readers, the opinion of the masses about it" in order to determine its social meaning and value.

He confessed that "acceptance of the work by readers can never be entirely impartial and entirely objective," but he confessed this in order to affirm that one has to rely on such readers if one wants to determine "the social meaning" (he did not use the word "objective") of the work and its value.

Above I have spoken of the principle according to which one determines the changes undergone by the value of a literary work. Here I shall add only a few points:

Hanh saw on one hand that a work has a fixed content and form, and on the other hand that its effect varies with each period, so he invented the thesis that the "work is fixed, and its meaning lies in the range of possibility" and that only the concrete readers of new periods can make that meaning change "into reality and evolve." But this time he went further and said that "the change does not lie in the creative stage or in the internal structure of the work, but instead in its utilization, in the enjoyment stage and its relation to the readers." This means that the changes are completely cut off from the creation. If they do not lie in the very body of the creation, then there will not be anything left of its "fixed capability."

Hanh erred because he did not clearly understand the meaning and intrinsic effect of the work and of its discovery. Such a thing as a literary work with its nature, characteristics and intrinsic objective value in its relation to society will vary from place to place and from period to period. A work moves in space and time, and its social meaning changes with its relation to the environment. But where it was born, it already had some historical objective meaning. And in order to determine the change in the meaning of the work, we cannot rely on what the readers think of it, but we must rely on the work itself with all its nature. On the other hand, through an analysis of the social situation in general with all the concrete social contradictions, we can see where the work stands with its intrinsic nature, which side it is on and so to speak which role it plays. For example, in studying Nguyen Trai's poems or The Story of Kieu, we should try to determine what objective social meaning these works still have in the building of socialism and the struggle to completely liberate South Vietnam and move toward reunification of the Fatherland. That new meaning is closely linked to the nature of the works and their social meaning and intrinsic historical value, and it is the same as the historical meaning. But it has now appeared because the works have been thrown into a new relation to the new times. But the analysis of the social situation and of new concrete social contradictions for the purpose of finding the status of old works is a general analysis of every aspect of society, and it does not have to be based on the concrete ideas which the readers can attribute to the work. Readers' opinions are only subjective, and at most they will agree with the objective meaning of the work. When we study Uncle Ho's Prison Diary, we cannot apply Nguyen Van Hanh's method. When He first wrote that great work, nobody read it, nobody knew about it for about 20 years. If we rely on this fact, then we would

erroneously conclude that the work had no value and no social meaning for 20 years. On the contrary, when Prison Diary had just been written, and was still lying in Uncle Ho's pocket, it already had its thought, and a really great social meaning -- a very objective meaning -- and a very great value related to the period in which it was born. Nowadays, it has acquired a new objective meaning and a new great value, which is very much the same as the old meaning and value -- in the light of the anti-U.S. stand of the whole world.

Hanh made the mistake to rely on the "enjoyment stage" and "the practical effect" of a work upon its readers in his search for its social meaning. That is why he had to accept the readers' subjective and partial views as truth. He quoted Gorki to support his argument: "The acceptance of a work, especially by the average reader, is a lively, direct action, a sympathy which more or less has the element of collective creativity..." (Gorki) But actually here Gorki simply recorded a phenomenon, but he absolutely did not affirm that the research worker has to consider "the creativity" which the average reader brings to the work as the truth or the objective meaning of the work. A scientific research method should have started from that remark by Gorki, watched what has been called "the additional creativity" of the reader and kept that subjective element out. Gorki, on the other hand, said -- and he was quoted by Hanh, too -- "It is through the harmony, the coincidence between the writer's experience and the reader's experience that we can obtain the truth of art." But he meant coincidence, and coincidence of experiences, but not a situation wherein the reader after some convenient thinking "created" the truth of the work, the meaning of the work and attached them to it.

An author should write for the working people and according to the requirements of Uncle Ho. A research worker should definitely pay attention to the opinions of the people in his evaluation of the work, especially when the latter although being old, has not been studied and reviewed in the press. In the 4th Congress on Literature and Arts, the Central Committee of our Party mentioned this in its criticism of those critics who did not respect readers' opinions. The Nhan van group, when attacking To Huu, also ignored the legitimate opinion of readers. But when following these guidelines, the critic can only select some standard ideas, true ideas that agree with the work and with the development of society to help him determine the value of the book more clearly. If he notes opportunistic, subjective ideas, the critic must eliminate the extremely individual "creative" ones or point them out to the people to prevent misunderstanding. Instead of that, Nguyen Van Hanh maintained that the additional "creativity" which the average reader adds to the book also constitutes its truth and its social meaning! Uncle Ho's principle "Who are you writing for?" certainly does not allow us to think along those lines.

Once we say that truth does not lie inside the basic nature of things, but inside the minds which men attribute to things, we will be idealistic and subjective -- no matter how persistently we invoke Marxism.

To accept Hanh's research method means to destroy literary studies as an extremely difficult science, and to convert study and criticism into idle happy-go-lucky talk, because the critic must, as Hanh requires, note "the partial and the non-objective" as truth, and at the same time the critic can say anything he wishes about the work -- since the critic after all is just another reader who contributes to the collective creativity! We thus understand why Nguyen Van Hanh made fun of those literary workers who work in a scientific way.

Several modernist schools have affirmed that an author has his own understanding of his work and that the readers may understand the work any way they please. If we simply substitute "the people" for "the readers" here, we would change their theory into Hanh's research method. The only difference is that those bourgeois modernist schools do not dare consider their theory a method or a science, whereas Hanh considers his a scientific method that is very loyal to Lenin and very "practical."

To sum up, Nguyen Van Hanh erred in several respects. His methodology is based upon an eclecticism that is both raw and uncooked and that combines elements of Marxism-Leninism with subjective idealism, pragmatism, and structuralism. It is raw and uncooked because several categories of Marxism-Leninism such as "pragmatism," "cause and effect," "possibility and reality," etc. have been understood in an oversimplified, insufficient or distorted way. It is also raw and uncooked in that several elements of Marxism-Leninism have been simply "added" to many idealist and structuralist elements, thus leading to the permanent contradictions and inconsistencies in his arguments, remarks and conclusions. This methodology is detached from the realities of research, and anxious to take short cuts, it eliminates even several aspects of literary life which require study and thus deviates from the Party's policy on literature. This method also praises structuralism, as well as subjective, haphazard, unscientific criticism.

The technical revolution is the key. We must contribute to the building of social sciences in general, and literary studies in particular strictly according to Marxism-Leninism. But "to launch an offensive into science" and "to dare to think and to act" does not mean destroying science with Mr. Berkeley's weapons; with the "black box" theory!

Conclusion

1. From the point of view of literary research workers, I think that if one desires to acquire the ability to do research on methodology, one has first to firmly grasp the serious policy of the Party and the research method according to Marxism-Leninism, primarily in its most common principles, instead of belittling them and eliminating them; secondly to try to concretely understand how research workers have labored, not repeating the word "realities" then ignoring the realities of research work; and thirdly, to be always vigilant toward bourgeois argumentation so as not to

think that one can accept it without any harm -- since it might knock one down just as a gust of wind would knock down a weak plant standing in its way. Haphazard and amateurish style in research work may lead us to very serious mistakes in spite of ourselves.

2. With regard to readers clear-sighted readers are always suspicious of theories that are advanced through new technical terms and a strange-sounding jargon, made attractive and learned through extensive quotations and an overuse of philosophic concepts.

3. It is true that the debate has been going on for a long time, but as our readers have seen, the problem needs to be debated. Our review could not refuse the request of such a collaborator as Nguyen Van Hanh although we contributed some of the ideas above and also tried to persuade him long before printing both his articles. It is normal to have mistakes and shortcomings in scientific research. But it is of course necessary to have a serious and minute criticism of erroneous concepts, especially those which might become more serious as everybody offers more constructive ideas in the dragged-out process.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Doi song, nha van, tac pham, ban doc" (Life, the writer, the work and the reader), Tap chi Van hoc, No 5, 1971.
2. "Y nghĩa khách quan của tác phẩm văn học" (The objective significance of a literary work), Tap chi Van hoc, No 6, 1971.
3. "Quan điểm thực tiễn và công tác nghiên cứu, lý luận văn học" (The practical viewpoint and literary research and theory), Tap chi Van hoc, No 1, 1972.
4. "Khắc phục tính phiến diện và tính siêu hình trong phương pháp nghiên cứu văn học" (Overcome bias and metaphysicalness in the method of literary research), Tap chi Van hoc, No 5, 1972.
5. "Điều cần chú ý trước hết trong khi vận dụng sáng tạo quan điểm thực tiễn của Lê-nin" (What needs attention in the creative application of Lenin's practical viewpoint), Tap chi Van hoc, No 5, 1972.
6. "Mối quan hệ giữa động cơ sáng tác của nhà văn và hiệu quả của tác phẩm. Giá trị tác phẩm văn học ở khâu tiếp thu của người đọc" (Relation between the writer's creative motive and the effect of the work. The value of a literary work at the reader's receiving end), Tap chi Van hoc, No 6, 1972.
7. "Phản ánh luận của Lê-nin với mối quan hệ giữa đời sống, nhà văn, tác phẩm và bạn đọc" (Reflection of Lenin's viewpoint on the

relation between life, the writer, the work and the reader), Tap chi Van hoc, No 2, 1972.

8. "To discover different facets and through them to discover different uses of things, that is one task of history...The use of something makes it become a value in use. But that use has nothing vague and undefined. That use is determined by the character of the merchandise. That is why it cannot exist without the merchandise... Therefore that object itself is a value in use." (Marx, Das Kapital) Of course the effect of a work is its effect upon people, the readers. But the readers have to discover that effect upon themselves, since the effect does not lie in the readers' stage.

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