

# The Comparison Of The Novel "Paul And Virginie" With "Life And Death With Love"

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## Abstract

The 20th century is a century of interference in many aspects. Among them the influence of French literature on Vietnamese literature is undeniable, with a series of famous adaptations. Considering Hồ Biểu Chánh's case, his novel "Life and Death with Love" borrows ideas from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel "Paul and Virginie"; however, it still retains its features in many aspects to exist as an independent work. This research shows the inheritance of the theme, character type, plot, and narrative art (from Paul and Virginie) of "Life and Death with Love" and shows the success in creating the context space and cultural imprint of the Southern region. Since then, we can see Hồ Biểu Chánh's creative merit in doing works that "borrowed the West's core" but still kept the "Vietnamese soul" and, at the same time, rejected the notion that its adaptation was inferior.

Keywords: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Hồ Biểu Chánh, Life and Death with Love; Paul and Virginie.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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While studying Hồ Biểu Chánh's works, we found that many of his adaptations are famous works. To get this popularity, it is necessary to rely on many factors, such as the tastes of readers and the name of Hồ Biểu Chánh, but the most important thing is the value of his work. Therefore, it can be seen that the advantage of adaptations is to have a good plot that easily attracts readers. However, the adaptation must also have outstanding points to make an impression and enter the audience's heart.

It is known that in Vietnam, some researchers have also mentioned the issue of adaptation in the novels of Hồ Biểu Chánh, such as author Nguyễn Kim Anh in the book "Southern Novels at the End of the 19th Century - early 20th Century". In this book, when talking about Hồ Biểu Chánh, Nguyen Kim Anh commented that Hồ Biểu Chánh was influenced by Western literature, "the writing techniques of Western novels" etc., but still retained the characteristics of Vietnamese people (Nguyễn Kim Anh, 2004). In addition, the thesis "The Issue of Adaptation in the Novel "Grass and Wind Play" by Hồ Biểu Chánh" (by author Thai Thi Ngoc Nhanh, Can Tho University) also has many contributions in affirming the value of the adapted novel "Grass and Wind Play" (Thái Thị Ngọc Nhanh, 2012, tr.40).

On the other hand, the issue of the influence of French literature on modern Vietnamese authors (including Hồ Biểu Chánh) is also mentioned a lot, especially in the book "Outline of the Relationship between French Literature and Modern Vietnamese Literature.

Therefore, researching and affirming the value of Hồ Biểu Chánh's adapted novel is reasonable and feasible. In this study, we focus on clarifying the similarities and differences between the novel Life and Death with Love (by Hồ Biểu Chánh) and the original novel Paul and Virgine (by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre) to see the role of Paul and Virgine as a model in helping Hồ Biểu Chánh to simulate and write Life and death with love, as well as seeing the inheritance, uniqueness, and value of the novel Life and death with love.

## **2. CONTENT**

### **2.1 Similarities between the novel "Paul and Virgine" and "Life and death with love"**

The trend of adaptation has not been new in Vietnamese literature; in the past, we also had “Đoạn trường tân thanh” (Truyện Kiều), which was adapted from “Kim Vân Kiều Truyện,” based on the available plot, characters, and details, the author changes and creates more to create a “derivative” work, with “new nuances, different from the original work” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Intellectual property law, 2005). However, considering the two novels Paul and Virgine (by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre) and Life and Death with Love (by Hồ Biểu Chánh), we see many similarities in themes, characters, plot, and art narrative.

### 2.1.1 Topic

The novels Paul and Virgine and Life and Death with Love revolve around love, specifically the love tragedy of two generations (with four incomplete loves).

In the first generation, both novels reflect people who love but are prevented by social prejudices. They resist and follow the call of love, but in the end, the result they receive is still tragic. Such is the case of Madame De La Tua and her husband (in the novel “Paul and Virgine”) and of Miss Thiên Hương and her husband (in the novel “Life and Death with love”). Furthermore, there are cases where one loves wholeheartedly but is betrayed, such as the case of Ms. Lê (Life and Death with Love), which is similar to that of Mrs. Margaret (Paul and Virgine).

In the second generation (children of the first generations), both novels tell the tragedy of love, “green plums and bamboo horse”; although loving wholeheartedly and fiercely loyal, ultimately still do not get together. At the end of the work, the death of the characters evokes sadness but also brings a sweet message to any era; love is stronger than death. Specifically, it is the love story between Xuân Sơn and Thu Thủy. When Xuân Sơn returns to Saigon to reunite with his father, Thu Thủy misses him so much that she falls ill. When she hears the news that the ship carrying Xuân Sơn has an accident, Thu Thủy is so shocked that she faints and hits her head on a rock. However, when Xuân Sơn returns safely, Thu Thủy has already passed away. Shortly after, Xuân Sơn also dies of grief. This story is similar to the story of Paul and Virginie in Paul and Virgine: Paul and Virgine have loved each

other since childhood, so when Virginie has to go to France to inherit her aunt's estate, Paul misses her crazily; when Virginie has an accident on the way back and died, Paul suffers and dies shortly after.

#### 2.1.2. Types characters in the story

The novels Paul and Virgine and Life and Death with Love are similar in theme and character types.

Firstly, Life and death with love is similar to Paul and Virgine in the type of character who is in love and being betrayed. In the first generation, Ms. Lê (Xuân Sơn's mother) falls in love with the wealthy son Khai Quang and becomes pregnant but cannot get married, causing her to be kicked out of the house; she has to ask Uncle Hai Cường to flee her to Phú Quốc. This type of character is similar to Madame Magrit (Paul and Virgine); her gullibility makes her pregnant with a noble name, and she is betrayed.

Second, Life and death with love are similar to Paul and Virgine in the solid and loving character Hai Cường. In the novel, Hai Cường is the type of person who is assertive, loving and respectful and ready to protect his granddaughter, Ms. Lê, when she is unexpectedly pregnant and rejected by her family. In addition, the character Hai Cường also generously protects Thien Huong's mother and daughter, considering her daughter Thien Huong as her biological daughter until her death. It can be seen that this type of character is very similar to the character of Mrs. Magrit in Paul and Virgine: strong personality, determination, and courage to overcome circumstances to find happiness; same with Mrs. De La Tua, although weak, full of love and respect for family happiness; and similar to Vigini: ready to help the weak in need (helping the black slave woman).

Third, Life and death with love are similar to Paul and Virgine in the type of character, staunch loyalty, and Life and death for the lover. When she hears the news that Xuân Sơn has an accident, Thu Thủy is in pain until she faints, and when Thu Thủy dies, Xuân Sơn also suffers and dies not long after. This story is similar to the story in the novel Paul and Virgine: the character Vigini, when there is a storm incident on the ship, chooses to die instead of taking off her clothes in front of others (if she takes off her dress, death may not come).

Virgini's lover, Pol, when witnessing her death, also risks her life to swim out to save it but cannot, and then sadly dies along with it.

Fourth, Life and death with love are similar to Paul and Virgine in the type of "victim" character. They are victims of a money-driven society full of customs and prejudices. Specifically, the person that Ms. Lê (Xuân Sơn's mother) loves is Khải Quang. However, Khải Quang has to marry a rich woman for "the subject of registration," agrees with her parents, and leaves Ms. Lê (because Ms. Lê's family is just an ordinary family). Later, Ms. Lê also wants Xuân Sơn to return to Saigon to accept his father (Khai Quang) so that he can ask for financial help (that trip leads to Xuân Sơn's accident on his return, causing Thu Thủy to suffer from death at home and when Xuân Sơn returns, he also suffers and dies as well). Alternatively, like Thiên Hương, because she loves a man who does not share her religion, her family forbids her. In addition, the character Khải Quang is also a victim of the custom of "where parents put their children to sit" because they do not dare to disobey their parents, but have to betray their loved one, Ms. Lê: "Strict because one side is filial piety and the other is filial. On the other hand is love, as a man is not allowed to respect the love side, but despise the filial side" (Hồ Biểu Chánh, 2005). These victim characters are similar to the victim characters in Paul and Virgine. Specifically, Madame De La Tua (Vergini's mother) and her husband genuinely love each other. However, because her husband is not a child of aristocracy, her family is not approved, and her dowry is not accepted. In the end, the couple has to run away and live a difficult life, and then, wanting to escape poverty, her husband goes to Madagascar and dies there. However, she later becomes a money-hungry person because she realizes that she is suffering because of money (she asks her daughter Virgine to go to France to receive a dowry from her aunt, but her aunt is evil. The weather causes Virgine to return and die when a storm hits the ship).

Besides, Life and Death with Love are similar to Paul and Virgine in the type of character who rises to protest but fails and chooses to avoid life. For example, Ms. Thiên Hương is someone who opposes the notions of the old society. She chooses to love and marry someone not of the same religion.

After her husband dies, she also finds a secluded place to live, away from the hustle and bustle of society. It can be seen that the character of Ms. Thiên Hương is similar to the character of Madame De La Tua in *Paul and Virgine*: she rises to marry the one she loved, then misfortune happens, and she chooses to avoid Life (to escape from a society of money, full of prejudice and suffering). Margaret, too, was determined to "go to a remote colony to hide her mistake" (Bernadin de Saint Pierre (Đỗ Đức Hiểu translate), 2007).

In particular, *Life and Death with Love* are similar to *Paul and Virgine* in the type of nature-oriented character. In the two works, readers can see the imprint of nature and the living environment: it brings misfortune to people (natural disasters, rainstorms, etc.) and peace. In it, many characters feel happy when living with nature (such as Hai Cường in *Life and Death with Love* and Madame De La Tua in *Paul and Virgine*).

### 2.1.3 Plot structure and artistic narration

The plot of the novel *Paul and Virgine* and *Life and Death with Love* are all five parts: presentation, knotting, development, climax, and opening. Specifically, the beginning of the two novels is the narration of a character who claims to be "I," from there to the stories and episodes in the past. According to the story, problems appear (knotting), then develop and push to the climax between love and family, between love and the future of money, and between Life and death; then come to the death details of the main characters, and the plot is unlocked. Although the knots are open, both novels are tragic with the deaths of lovers. This shows the attitude of criticizing the money-driven society, full of customs and prejudices; At the same time, it also praises faithful love and human affection.

In addition to the plot, the narrative style of the two novels is also the same, with the narrative style being flashback - reversing the chronological order from the present to the past. As for building the narrator's image, Hồ Biểu Chánh is similar to Bernadin de Saint Pierre when he lets a character calling himself "I" tell the whole story (to increase objectivity). Specifically, in the novel *Life and Death with Love*, Hồ Biểu Chánh lets the character "I" tell the story that monk

An Viên said, from the present to the past: "If you know how to read this love history, you must know how to read this love history. not happy but angry" (Hồ Biểu Chánh, 2005, pp). This way of telling the story is similar to Paul and Virgine when the author Bernadine de Saint-Peter lets the character "I" narrate the story of an old grey-haired old man telling about the past: "Dear! twenty years, in these two huts and this piece of land, two families live happily, the story is touching." (Bernadin de Saint Pierre (Đỗ Đức Hiểu translate), 2007). After that, the memories came, and the story was told spontaneously.

Besides, in these two novels, we also encounter an omnipotent narrator who can understand the psychology of each character and evaluate them. For example, in *Life and Death with Love*, we come across this passage: "Two children who sleep all the time often lie close to each other; Xuân Sơn is four years older than Thu Thủy. He knows how to joke, laugh, and bear to sit. Whenever he sees Thu Thủy, he laughs and laughs, wants to hold on to it, and talks as if he wants to talk" (Hồ Biểu Chánh, 2005).

In addition, *Life and Death with Love* are similar to Paul and Virgine in the story's structure. Specifically, the story begins with the space in Saigon in the novel *Life and Death with Love*. The character "I" recounts his conversation with monk An Viên (in Phú Quốc) and is told the tragic love story of two generations. Through this "dubbed story" way of telling, the author can freely express his views and compassion for the character while creating high credibility. This structure is similar to the structure of the novel *Paul and Virgine*: the story begins with space on the island of Indonesia, and the character "I" tells about the meeting between the character "I" and an old white-haired man; then, the grey-haired old man told the character "I" about a story related to 2 huts (the main story of the novel).

## **2.2. Life and death with love" has successfully developed from "Paul and Virgine."**

*Life and death with love* has many similarities and differences with *Paul and Virgini*. While adapting the novel by Bernardin de Saint Pierre, Hồ Biểu Chánh has skillfully "changed skin and flesh" to create a work with bold "Southern breath."

### **2.2.1 Event space and time**

The context is the first difference between *Life and death with love* and *Paul and Virgine*. The main story in *Life and Death with Love* takes place on Phú Quốc island (Vietnam) at the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast, the story in the novel *Paul and Virgine* takes place a remote island of the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth century, with its prejudices and slavery, and racism at that time.

Not only that but the space and scenery of these two novels are also entirely different. In *Life and Death with Love*, readers see the image of Phú Quốc island, 40-50 nautical miles from Ha Tien. It is an island with a favorable climate and fresh produce, especially potatoes, bananas, jackfruit, papaya, coconut, corn, beans, eggplant, mango, tortoise, fish sauce, etc. In addition, the author also mentions places like Dương Đông, Rạch Giá, Hà Tiên, etc. Readers also encounter the familiar space of *Daily Life in the South* in the past, when "the moon rose from the top of the tree and fell. Bright courtyard. Thiên Hương hugged the mat and spread it under the tree, where Mr. Hai Cường had prepared it so that at night he could sit and enjoy the view of the sky in the cool breeze."<sup>4</sup>.. These are very Vietnamese spaces. In the novel *Paul and Virgine*, the reader is impressed with the space of the remote, wild, vast, and charming Indo-France island. When standing on Phat Kien mountain, one can watch the port city of Lui, the sunset, the sunrise, and the sound of the ocean waves. On that island, there are two ruined huts and tragic stories. In addition, the typical climate here is also highly harsh: in the dry season, the streams dry up, and in the rainy season, there are fierce storms. After the storm passed, the island reappeared with a unique ecosystem, with native trees: "Tatamac trees, ebony trees and trees in this area called apple trees, olive trees, cinnamon trees. , bunches of date palms...."<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, although It's an adaptation, the novel *Life and Death with Love* by Hồ Biểu Chánh has the "breath" of Vietnam, with space, time, and scenes of bold Southern Vietnam. This shows

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<sup>4</sup> Hồ Biểu Chánh. (2005). *Sống thác với tình*. Nxb Phụ Nữ, Hà Nội.

<sup>5</sup> Bernadin de Saint Pierre (Đỗ Đức Hiểu dịch). (2007). *Paul và Virgine*, Nxb Thanh Niên, Hà Nội.



the love for the homeland and the spirit of recreating the Vietnamese culture, land, and people.

### 2.2.2 Culture and ideal

It can be said that *Life and Death with Love* is a novel with bold Southern "breath," and "Paul and Virgine" are bold with Western "breath." Specifically, in *Life and Death with Love*, readers catch the image of people with Eastern and bold Southern characteristics, from speech to lifestyle, costumes, and beliefs. For example, Hồ Biểu Chánh describes Southern Life at that time with the after-dinner habit; it is customary to spread a mat to watch the moon, talk and reflect on Life. In that place, women never smoke; the clothes are Áo Bà Ba, the fabric is linen - the preferred fabric at that time, and the leading food was rice, corn, potatoes, dried, fish sauce, etc. The novel *Paul and Virgine* is different. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre builds the image of people imbued with Western culture. The characters in this novel love to watch plays and re-enact plays, wear skirts, and women also smoke cigarettes for entertainment like men; the leading food is millet, wheat, corn, etc.

Besides, the habitation of the characters in the two novels is also different. In the novel " *Life and Death with Love*," the characters have a habit of coexistence - many generations live under one roof. Meanwhile, in the novel, *Paul and Virgine*, despite very close, Madame De La Tua and Madame Magrit do not live in the same house. This difference shows that the Southern imprint has been deeply imprinted in work on how Hồ Biểu Chánh builds the character's Life. In particular, the people in Hồ Biểu Chánh's novels are people with a solid Southern character, typically the character Hai Cường: respecting the meaning of contempt for talent, honesty, and determination.

Not only that, *Life and Death with Love* is also different from *Paul and Virgine* in terms of religious imprints. The novel *Life and Death with Love* shows a clear imprint of Taoist thought. For example, Mr. Hai Cường's character respects Taoism and is willing to live in a remote place. He says: "I adhere to the Way of Wu Vi, so I am looking for a quiet place to build a hut to live in with the natural surroundings outside the mundane world, live without sadness, die without

fear of seeing, knowing yes or no. Despite not contrary to natural law, anything can be done" (Hồ Biểu Chánh, 2005). Alternatively, like the character of monk An Viên, he worships Thái Thượng Lão Quân and follows the method of refining gas, refining gas, and refining the spirit of unity. In Paul and Virgine, it is different. In this novel, the reader sees the imprint of Christianity through many details, such as many characters go to the Grapefruit Tree church every Saturday and Sunday; When in tribulation, the characters pray to God because they believe that God determines fate: "God determines human health and life. Now, You are testing me to bless me later. You should think that we live only to do good deeds". Even the character Vigini believes in religion to the extent that she is willing to listen to the priest who, in the name of God, persuaded her to return to France.

In addition, the languages of these two novels are also culturally different. The language in the novel *Life and Death with Love* is oriental and influenced by Chinese culture. Hồ Biểu Chánh writes: "Miss Thiên Hương said: so the train runs on the 23rd, on Tam Nương's day" (Hồ Biểu Chánh, 2005). The "Tam Nương" day here, according to the Eastern concept, is a bad day; one should not depart, get married, etc. Meanwhile, the language of "Pon and Vigini" bears a bold Western imprint when The author compares Pon and Vigini are inseparable, like the constellation Gemini (the West believes in constellations).

Regarding ideology, *Life, Death with Love*, *Paul*, and *Virgine* promote love, compassion, and human aspiration. However, in terms of criticism, *Life and Death with Love* is weaker in social criticism than *Paul* and *Virgine*. It can be seen that Hồ Biểu Chánh was influenced by humanism, so he has a benevolent view toward reconciliation (the character of Hai Cường has a happy ending). On the other hand, *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre* is different. He was dominated by French romanticism, so through the tragic plot, he wants to criticize the society of that time and intends to separate from society, breaking with the urban civilization that runs after money.

Thus, when writing the novel *Life and Death with Love*, Hồ Biểu Chánh not only adapts a foreign literary novel but also conveys his love for the South. Without a delicate

observation and love for the homeland, it is difficult to "blow the soul of the South" into his work like that: from the name of the land and the name of the person to the description of costumes, lifestyle, beliefs, customs, etc.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Life and Death with Love by Hồ Biểu Chánh is a novel adapted from Paul and Virgine by Bernardin de Saint Pierre. These two novels are similar in theme, plot, narrative art, and character types (such as the love and betrayal character, the brave and loving character, who live and die with love, the nature-oriented characters, the characters who are "victims" of society, rise to protest but the result falls into tragedy). These are the types of characters commonly seen in daily life, so Hồ Biểu Chánh simulates these types of characters to create an engaging story for the novel and, through that, also conveys his thoughts.

Besides, Life and Death with Love also have some differences from Paul and Virgine, and that difference has made its feature. It is the difference in event space and time; about food, clothing, religion, lifestyle, and beliefs. It can be said that Hồ Biểu Chánh "breathed the soul of the South" into his adaptation because his readers in this period were mainly Southern people. However, on the other hand, Hồ Biểu Chánh is also a writer who has a strong sense of preserving the beauty of Southern culture, so through his novels, readers can see each person and each story come to Life. And not only the novel Life and Death with Love and many other novels adapted by Hồ Biểu Chánh are well received by many readers because of their bold Southern imprint.

In addition, Hồ Biểu Chánh's work is different from the original work in that it not only praises love but also praises gratitude through the honorable character of Hai Cường. This type of character can be found in many other novels by Hồ Biểu Chánh. This is also a particular expression of the Southern imprint in Hồ Biểu Chánh's novel.

Thus, Hồ Biểu Chánh inherited the essential elements - the "framework" from the original novel "Pon and Viginì," so on that basis, he inserted cultural and contextual elements, etc., helping Life and Death with Love to become a novel with bold Southern characteristics, reflecting the land and people

of the South, more broadly, reflecting the Vietnamese soul at that time and widely being accepted by readers and is still valid today.

In terms of composition, *Life and Death with Love* is a lively and complete "derivative" version, bringing the Western plot closer to domestic readers while retaining the core ideology of the author—pseudo: towards nature, upholding humanity and love.

Finally, the literary comparison is an approach with certain advantages. Through it, readers can see each work's unique features more clearly, particularly the unique feature of the novel *Life and Death with Love*, so that we can evaluate adaptations more fairly.

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