



## The Autonomization of French and Vietnamese Literature: Comparing Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912-1939)



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### [ *Abstract* ]

This paper compares the French Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and the Vietnamese Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912-1939), and explores transformations of their aesthetic experiences that led to the autonomization of French literary field in the nineteenth century and Vietnamese in the early twentieth century. Inspired from the term “archive” coined by Michel Foucault, this article argues that Flaubert, in abandoning the bourgeois tastes, contested realism and built his own writing ideology and style, which is called subjective realism. On the other hand, it also argues that Vũ Trọng Phụng, through the popular report genre, he gained success and evolved his own novel writing style, aptly called the realism of speech. It is ostensible that the transformation in the two authors' writing style and aesthetic experience was derived from the way they distanced themselves from their contemporaries' common tastes while making use of free indirect speeches, all with the aim of granting readers the autonomy of reading.

**Keywords:** Gustave Flaubert, Vũ Trọng Phụng, literary field, autonomy

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## I . Introduction

In his essay "Fantasia of the Library" (1967), Michel Foucault suggests that a writer's writing is formed "in a fundamental relationship" of pre-existing records, especially books across times and spaces. He coined the term "archive" to refer to the world of texts and associated knowledge, in dynamic and complex arrangements that actualize the writing of the text and reading (Foucault: collective 1983: 107). Foucault's term of "archive" suggests the possibility of a comparison model that interweaves or parallels books and authors that are geographically, chronologically, and historically unrelated to each other in order to understand the formation and transformation of aesthetic subjectivity of a time. Thus, the article aims to go beyond the literary comparison of the influences which one can see elsewhere in Tôn-Thất Thanh-Vân (2011) or Lại Nguyên Ân (2014) on the original writing of Vũ Trọng Phụng. Inspired by Foucault's idea, this paper compares two authors, the French Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and the Vietnamese Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912-1939), examining transformations of their aesthetic experiences that led to the autonomization of the French literary field in the nineteenth century and the Vietnamese literary field in the early twentieth century. By disengaging certain historical connections between these two authors, the metropolitan and the colonial, respectively of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this article narrates the social contexts out of which two authors' aesthetic styles and experiences transformed. This article argues that Flaubert, in abandoning the bourgeois tastes, contested realism pervasive during his time, with the aim of building his own writing ideology and style, subjective realism. It also argues that Vũ Trọng Phụng, through the popular report genre, he gained success and evolved his own novel writing style, aptly called the realism of speech. It is ostensible that the transformation in the two authors' writing style and aesthetic experience were derived from the way they distanced themselves from their contemporaries' common tastes while making use of free indirect speeches, all in the aim of granting readers the autonomy of reading.

The term "autonomy" is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu

(1920-2001), referring to the state of the French literary field in the second half of the 19th century, where the writer took advantage of the freedom of creation at the basis of the liberation of markets and institutions. By “literary field,” Bourdieu means that French Literature was modernized due to its internal transformations, independent from external economic or political demands (Bourdieu 1984: 113-121). Accordingly, French writers were freed from the economic and political benefits associated with their works, in order to exclusively focus on creating literary values. In this pivotal moment turn towards modernity, Flaubert marked the presence of the French literary field through three elements. There is the emergence of the public, distanciation, and generic characteristics. A question then arises: how did this model of autonomy potentially exist in other societies' spaces, especially in the colonies, which did not have the material conditions? The comparison of Flaubert and Vu Trong Phung, two authors belonging to two different literary fields, potentially reveals the modernization of the Vietnamese literary field during the colonial period. Such modernizing process can be reconstructed through virtual crossings of literary experiences among the two authors who experienced different historical, political, and cultural contexts.

## **II . New Readership of Bourgeois Societies**

It is the emergence of the bourgeoisie that allowed the expansion of the culture industry. Newspapers and soap operas (*feuilletons*) were read by everyone, from the common people to the bourgeoisie, from ministerial offices to the court, and evidently “Industrialism has penetrated literature after transforming the press”<sup>1</sup> (Cassagne 1979: 115). This led to the fact that public taste was decided by industrialists and soap operas churned out narratives full of cliché to the point that “we have become accustomed to measuring the value according to the profit that 'they [popular works] have brought back” (Cassagne 1979: 95). According to Bourdieu, “development of the press is one indication among others of an unprecedented

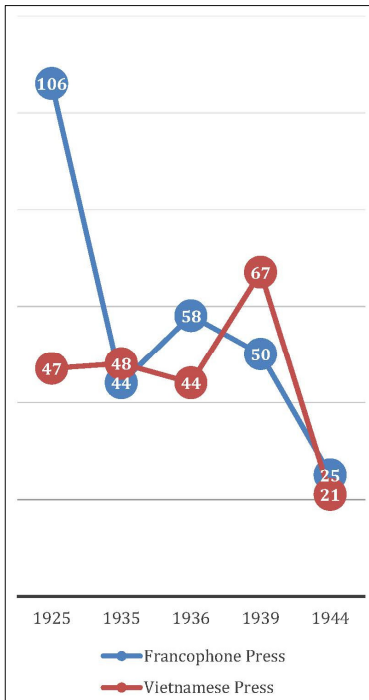
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<sup>1</sup> All quotes in this article are translated by the author from French or Vietnamese sources.

expansion of the market for cultural goods” (Bourdieu 1998: 95). This development took place owing to the arrival in Paris of a very large population of young people, with an education which is “until then more closely reserved for the nobility or the Parisian bourgeoisie” (Bourdieu 1998: 95). In fact, under the Second Empire, the enrollment in secondary education continued to grow from 90,000 in 1850 to 150,000 in 1875, which constituted a “proletarian intelligentsia.” Surrounded by romantic triumph, newcomers liked to write for press the most. For Bourdieu, this context played the main role in “the process of empowering the literary and artistic fields and of correlatively transforming the relationship between the world of art and literature and the world of politics” (Bourdieu 1998: 97).

Fifty years later, on the other side of the world, the emergence of the Vietnamese press contributed to the modernizing of Vietnamese society in general and literary field in particular. The French colonial authorities founded an educational system to legitimize their idea of colonization and to ward off Chinese influence on contemporary Vietnamese society and culture. Franco-indigenous education, considered to be roughly modeled on the French model, consisted of primary and secondary education. The language taught was Vietnamese. The number of schoolchildren was very low for the first decades. In 1906, there were only 3000 pupils in 19 establishments in Tonkin (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 54). After the promulgation of the General Regulations of Public Education in 1917, the University of Hà Nội was founded, although it was only conceived as a vocational school rather than an institution of higher education. Despite all elements concerned, public education, in which *quốc ngữ* is taught, also developed strongly. At the same time, colonial Vietnam experienced the development of the publishing industry. In 1925, the Imprimerie d’Extrême Orient released 80,000 reading books for the Children’s Course (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 56). By 1929, the number of scholarly publications reached three million, and the following year it was nearly five million. After three educational reforms during the first two decades made by the colonial administration, 15 to 20% of children aged 6 to 12 were sent to school (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 67). This figure is significant, given that during the 1920s the figure was

only 5% lower. “Franco-indigenous education was mainly provided in urban centers, whereas the countryside remained isolated: there were only 2,815 primary schools in Tonkin for around 10,000 villages” (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 68). Although the official statistics for the 1938-1939 school year appeared to be unimpressive, it is undeniable that Franco-indigenous education had changed the face of urban society, causing the adoption of a certain modern way of life. That led to the fact that the modernization of Vietnamese life took place without clashes or conflicts, and in that process, reading the press played an important role.



The Press became an essential tool for the modernization of the country for intellectuals. The colonial authorities, aware of the role of the press, promulgated the Decree of 1899 to limit freedom of expression in Vietnamese. Thus, if the Vietnamese press did not benefit from the French Press Law of 1881, the French press in Indochina can be published easily "without prior authorization or deposit" (article 4). In addition, as added to article 6 of the Law, "the manager must be French," and the Vietnamese press must be severely censored. As a result, there was an imbalance in the readership of the Vietnamese press and French press. According to Huỳnh Văn Tông in *Báo chí Việt Nam, từ khởi thủy đến*

*1945 (Vietnamese press, from the origin until 1945)* (Huỳnh Văn Tông 2016: 378), there were 1300 press, in which 780 presses in French, 490 in Vietnamese and the rest in Chinese, Khmer and Laotian. During the first two decades, the press in French was always higher than that in Vietnamese. However, there was an important change in the 1930s. It was the collapse of the French-language press and

the rise, albeit slightly, of the Vietnamese press to such an extent that the French press was sometimes lower than Vietnamese, as depicted in the following graphic (Phan and Truong 2017: pp. 216-217).

There were different political, economic, or sociological reasons that explain these paradoxical movements, but we will limit ourselves to examining the press in Vietnamese. It is, first of all, the Movement of the Popular Front which favored the expansion of the press in Vietnamese in Indochina. Censorship of the press was significantly reduced. This political reason seemed to constitute a perspective of partially "normal life" in the colonial situation. In another paper, I have shown that the Vietnamese society at this time was francized to such an extent that Parisian bourgeois standards were part of colonial life (Phùng 2020b: 589-610). Bourgeois life made intellectuals forget, although temporarily, the colonized condition. Thus, life seems to be normalized despite the dominant presence of colonial authorities. In addition, as a result of French-Vietnamese school system, the number of young intellectuals increased, which led to the expansion of the public sphere in which journalism became a promising profession. Although the public sphere existed mostly in urban areas, its expansion prepared for the independent existence of the press in Vietnamese. It was increasingly received by various readers, creating more and more profits. Specifically, city dwellers' interest, including that of the bourgeoisie, tended towards the novel genre, especially roman feuilleton. *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* (Saturday Novel), *Phong Hóa* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (Modern Times) formed the important columns literary presses of this period, those having been able to act autonomously due to their vast readership. An important group, whose name explicitly showed the will of its participants: *Tự lực văn đoàn*, Autonomous Literary Group, held a dominant pole in the literary field (Phùng 2020a: 131-200). Another dominant organization is the Tân Dân (New People). It had its own publishing house managed by Vũ Đình Long. As it was strong in commercial publications, this house became a great force in the book market since 1925. Vũ Đình Long managed some important literary magazines and periodicals such as *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy*, which

published the most popular works by the most important authors of the time including Nguyễn Công Hoan, Ngô Tất Tố, Lê Tràng Kiều, and especially Vũ Trọng Phụng. Here, we can speak about Tự lực văn đoàn and Tân Dân as dominant poles in the literary field. The partial normalization of life prepared the modernization of the literature in the colonial condition.

Despite the differences between Hanoi and Paris in terms of geography and history, these two cities shared common points in education and media. Specifically, the newspaper was the primary medium of communication between producers of culture and consumers as much in the Metropole as in the colony. It produced a new type of artists by providing them with new customers, who actively participated, little to their knowledge, in establishing the culture market.

### III. Distantiations

In Bonaparte's Second Empire, money increasingly played a role in the links between actants, writers, and readers, through the press. At the request of the emerging bourgeois public, literary production offered the ideal subjects, including morality literatures celebrating marriage, the good administration of the patrimony, and the honorable raising of children. Their presence was established with the emergence of the market. Pleasures and easy entertainment, especially in theater, "created the expansion of commercial art, which was directly subjected to the expectations of the public" (Bourdieu 1998: 123). In fact, during the last years of the July Monarchy, the literary field shifted towards social art and socialist ideas (Bourdieu 1998: 102). Writers such as François Ponsard (1814-1867) and Emile Augier (1820-1889) demonstrated bourgeois vices in their works, namely *Honor and Money (l'Honneur et l'Argent)*, *The Golden Belt (La Ceinture dorée)* and *Maitre Guérin*. They indisputably condemned art for art's sake. C. Baudelaire (1821-1867) was violently opposed to the bourgeois school of "knights of common sense" led by E. Augier, who coined the watchword: "Moralize!" Moralize!".

Meanwhile, advocates of art for the sake of art such as Baudelaire, Flaubert, Théodore Banville (1823-1891), Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), Auguste Félix Villiers (1834-1900), and Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894) engaged in works opposing enslavement to power and the market. They led the establishment of *anomie*, which prepared the course towards the autonomy of the literary field constituted by the proponents of pure literature (Bourdieu 1998: 110). This collective enterprise named Baudelaire as the main character who then became the founding figure, *nomothète*. This poet defied the established literary order by implementing the provocative French Academy, questioning the existing structures (Bourdieu 1998: 108). This is an example of the break with the bourgeois society of the time exercised by the avant-garde poet. Baudelaire was a victim of what he himself named the symbolic revolution, where people “are face to face with a worn-out society—worse than worn out—stupid and greedy, having horror only for fiction and love only for the possession” (Bourdieu 1998: 112). Regarding Flaubert, despite the commercial success of the publication of *Madame Bovary* in 1857 in book form, he only gained 300 francs from Michel Lévy’s publishing house. Flaubert shouted about this affair: “We are *luxury workers*. Yet no one is rich enough to pay us. When you want to earn money with your pen, you have to do journalism, feuilleton, or theater...I don't see the connection between a five-franc piece and an idea. You have to love Art for Art itself; otherwise, the least-paid job is better” (Bourdieu 1998: 83). By refusing the market, Flaubert marked the distance, like Baudelaire, from the bourgeoisie as well as from contemporary realist artists. If Baudelaire “established for the first time the break between commercial edition and avant-garde edition” (Bourdieu 1998: 117) to affirm the independence of the writer, Flaubert was defined in and by the whole series of double negations of both romanticism and realism. Art for art’s sake then was at par with the disenchanting view of the social and political world. However, we must recognize the commonalities between art for art’s sake and social art in the novel type, realism, a type of novel that also attacked the bourgeoisie and above all invoking the impersonal neutrality of science. This explains why the prosecutor in Flaubert trial, Ernest Pinard, denounced “realistic painting” in his novel



about provincial adultery. His lawyer had to admit it. The line was uncertain between the provocative one, like art for art as avant-garde, and its contestants like realism. The difference lay precisely in the fact that art for art's sake was a *position to be made* (position à faire) after the putsch in 1851. This position, in process of being autonomous, would be established in the literary field after the trials of Flaubert and Baudelaire. Against the useful art which included bourgeois art and even realist art, art for art's sake refused the positions established by their two arts. This is what Bourdieu calls "double breaks" (doubles ruptures). In a letter to Edma Roger des Genettes, Flaubert wrote: "They believe I am in love with reality, while I hate it. Because it is in hatred of realism that I undertook this novel. But I still hate the false ideality, which we are all fooled by these days" (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 135). Flaubert and Baudelaire wanted to keep the distance from all dominant artist tastes of the bourgeoisie of their time.

Take Flaubert as a typical case of how the French writers distanced themselves from the bourgeoisie. For Flaubert the bourgeoisie, in blouse or frock coat dress, could not produce literary works. Flaubert and his group thought that in order to master art and literature, they must free themselves from the demand of the market. For them, the work of art is invaluable, since it had no commercial value. Such a thought was totally foreign to economic logic that was dominating contemporary literary lives. Flaubert was aware of the freedom from the market when he wrote to his girlfriend, Louise Colet: "When you are not addressing the crowd, it is just that the crowd does not pay you. This is a political economy. However, I maintain that a work of art worthy of the name and made with a conscience is priceless, having no commercial value, and cannot be afforded. In Conclusion, if the artist has no income, he must starve! We find that the writer, who no longer receives a pension from the grown-ups, is much freer, and nobler. His whole social nobility now consists of being the equal of a grocer" (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 139). Flaubert explicitly indicated the condition of "luxury workers" of a writer is to such an extent that "no one is rich enough to pay".

Along with Baudelaire, his peer (pair) Flaubert participated in

what Bourdieu addressed as "the truly uneconomic economic universe," a world where artists are economically poor (and therefore dominated) but symbolically rich (and therefore dominant) in the literary field (Bourdieu 1998: 140). In this world, authors like Leconte de Lisle, a French poet of the Parnassian movement, considered immediate success to be even "intellectual inferiority", because that success came from the general public whose reading was only driven by the market. For Flaubert and his group, artists should lose in the economic realm in the short term in order to triumph in the symbolic realm in the long term. It's the idea about the upside-down business world (l'économie à l'envers). This is why, in the literary field of 19th century in France, heirs were more ready to leave the market logic, being absent in the bourgeois economy to be among the avant-garde. Likewise, money inherited from the big bourgeois, as in the case of Flaubert, freed him from market orders by giving him the freedom to follow his own choices in search of pure art. He "came into the world with some heritage, something which is absolutely essential for anyone who wants to make art" (Bourdieu 1998: 143).

In Vietnam, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vũ Trọng Phụng was widely appreciated for his press reporting, but not for his literary works (Vũ Ngọc Phan 1943: 133) This is not a misclassification, but rather a contemporary view of the structure of the literary field at the time. In fact, Vũ Trọng Phụng was named by his companions "King of the Report Genre in Tonkin." This title acknowledged his meaningful contribution to the process of autonomizing the press with his publications of the report *Cạm bẫy người* (Man Trape, 1933) in Đời Nay Press, *Kỹ nghệ lấy tây* (Techniques to Marry Westerners, 1936) in Phương Đông Press, *Com thầy com cô* (Household Servants, 1937) and *Lục sì* (Look see, 1937) in Minh Phương Press. These reports were later printed in book format. The subjects of these reports were mostly about the lower class. *Cạm bẫy người* discovers the traps set to deceive gamblers who indulged in chance. *Kỹ nghệ lấy Tây* describes, humorously and satirically, what was called a "new profession" in the colony: the job of getting married to foreigners, legionaries or civilians. *Com thầy com cô* narrates an adventure of the narrator "I" in the milieu of

housekeepers, assistants, servants in bourgeois families in a town. Lastly, *Lục sì* depicts the world of prostitution of Hà Nội.

The flowering of the report genre in the Vietnamese colony was mainly inspired by the development of that genre in cosmopolitan France. In fact, in between the two World Wars, the press became dominant and popular with the unforeseen development of commercial presses like the *Petit Parisien* and *Le Soir*. In 1937, *Le Petit Parisien* devoted 66% of the budget to its reporting columns (Delporte 1999: 242). Vũ Trọng Phụng often cited French reporter Albert Londres, and Louis Roubaud, a reporter for *Le Quotidien* and *Le Petit Parisien*, who wrote on the revolt of Yên Bái (*Việt Nam*, Librairie Valois, 1931). Thanks to the report, contemporary presses survived in colonial Vietnam. Vũ Trọng Phụng earned a living from his writing when it was difficult for new entrants like him to penetrate literature, and colonial presses were short-lived. Tản Đà (1889-1939), the most beloved contemporary poet, could not maintain the journal *An nam tạp chí*, and he had to work as an astrologer before his death. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936), one of the best-known Vietnamese journalists, had to go to Laos to make a fortune because when his French-language newspaper *Annam Nouveau* went bankrupt. Nguyễn Công Hoan (1903-1977), a prolific, contemporary writer, wrote a humorous but bitter short story, *Tôi chủ báo, anh chủ báo, nó chủ báo* (I am the founder of the magazine, you too, and so is he), emphasizing the very short fate of a magazine. It went from one owner to another because it was unsustainable.

It seems that Vũ Trọng Phụng's controversial association with Tự lực văn đoàn, an independent literary group, made it difficult for him to make a living as a reporter. *Cạm bẫy người*, the first report by Vũ Trọng Phụng, and *Nửa chĩnh xuân* (Half Spring), the second novel by Khái Hưng, founding member of Tự lực văn đoàn, were both reprinted by SADEP as books. They both benefited from the publicity of *Phong Hóa*, the weekly newspaper of Tự lực văn đoàn. However, Vũ Trọng Phụng's report was printed by SADEP earlier than Khái Hưng's novel. Financial resources limited dissemination (Đoàn Ánh Dương 2020: 42-53). What came out sooner had better commercial value. For Khái Hưng and Nhất Linh, who chaired

*Phong Hóa*, the report was only of documentary value. Therefore, they preferred the literary story they wrote over the report. Although Tự lực văn đoàn published a lot of reports about the lives of the lower class, its members never considered Vũ Trọng Phụng as belonging to their ranks. Tự lực văn đoàn included in the *Ngày Nay* (n° 15) review, a letter from the reader criticizing the “low subjects” of Vũ Trọng Phụng. Vũ Trọng Phụng responded, also criticizing Tự lực văn đoàn: “Let’s remind Tự lực văn đoàn of the fact that one should not insult the writing of *Lục si* (*Look see*) when one had written *Hà Nội ban đêm* (*Hà Nội by night*) and *Hà Nội lầm than* (*Miserable Hà Nội*)... Now, if you want to publicize any lesser known reporters, (members) of Tự lực văn đoàn, if *Cạm bẫy người* damaged the reputation of *Ngày Nay*, if you have to insult Vũ Trọng Phụng so that he disappears, you are free to do so”<sup>2</sup> (Cao and Nguyễn 2001: 1134).

What is more noticeable in this response is that it reveals Vũ Trọng Phụng’s choice of the report genre as a means of earning for a living, although reports at the start of the third decade of the 20th century was just a journalistic genre and was yet to be recognized as a serious literary genre in Vietnam. Vũ Trọng Phụng quickly conquered the readership of his time by his reports, soon establishing the genre as literary. Reports became made magazines sell, like what happened in France (Charles 2004: 319-320). Vũ Trọng Phụng’s report is not incorporated literary elements into facts, which distinguished him as a literary writer in the literary field of Vietnam even in the time of its autonomy. In other words, it is because of the report genre that Vũ Trọng Phụng’s reached maturity as he made radical changes in how his work is done and received by readers. As such, we can talk about the “double goals” that Vũ Trọng Phụng gained in the narrow and limited literary field in colonial Vietnam. The French “double ruptures” operated by *nomothetes* like Baudelaire and Flaubert kept their distance from the bourgeois

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<sup>2</sup> “Tiện đây, xin nhắc Tự lực văn đoàn rằng khi người ta đã viết *Hà Nội ban đêm* và *Hà Nội lầm than*, thì người ta đừng nên chửi *Lục si* [...]. Bây giờ nếu cần quảng cáo cho một nhà phóng sự nào chưa nổi tiếng trong Tự lực văn đoàn, nếu cuốn *Cạm bẫy người* mà các ông xuất bản lại hại cho báo *Ngày Nay*, nếu cần phải chửi Vũ Trọng Phụng cho tiêu xin các ông cứ tự tiện” (translated by PNK).

moral standards embodied by realism. It enabled them to value art for art's sake and veer away from commercial value. The same was not the case in the Vietnamese literary field, which was subject to political and economic limitations. It was the goal of novelists and reporters to create social art. Vũ Trọng Phụng has imbued the genre of report with literary values while making it popular. The paths towards autonomy in the literary fields are not similar.

#### IV. Free, Indirect Speech

A well-known understanding about Flaubert is that he wanted "a book about nothing" (*un livre sur rien*). It is about writing about the absolute, understood both as a necessity and as an impossibility. However, this aesthetic of emptiness seems to have to deal with the trivialities of this world given in excess. By rejecting the standards of bourgeois life, Flaubert aimed at another aesthetic, revealed in his first novel, *Madame Bovary*. This alternative standard shocked the public, who got used to both the vision of soap operas and Balzac novels. Ernest Pinard, a reader of bourgeois society who did not tolerate the aesthetic distancing of this pioneering novelist of the time, violently accused the novel as an insult to morals, as it came with the "glorification of adultery" and "moral outrage" (Jauss 1978: 630). However, as Hans-Robert Jauss argues, the novel was embodying what is "rather the unsuspected effect produced by a new art form" (Jauss 1978: 86). The novel plunged the reader into a "strange and surprising uncertainty of judgment" (Jauss 1978: 86). Gérard Genette recalled Flaubert was seen as speaking "the language of the other" (Genette 1972: 19). The lawyer M<sup>e</sup> A. Sénard, a contemporary reader, clarified the freedom in the language of Flaubert's novel : "What did M. Flaubert do? [...] *He simply copied*"<sup>3</sup> what must be in the mind of priest about the Emma (Flaubert 1951: 674).

Here, the lawyer drew attention to a phenomenon peculiar to

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<sup>3</sup> « Que fait M. Flaubert ? Il a mis dans la bouche du prêtre, en réunissant les deux parties, ce qui doit être dans sa pensée du malade. *Il a copié purement et simplement*, etc.» Translated by us.

Flaubert: the borrowing of the word. This borrowing constitutes the ambivalence of discourse in his novel to such an extent that the "old" reader easily confuses this voice with the voices of the narration. Mikhail Bakhtine (1895-1975) called the borrowing words of actors for authors' speech as "discourse of others." By "discourse of others" (discours d'autrui), he means "the linguistic patterns (direct speech, indirect speech, free indirect speech), the modifications of these patterns and the variants of these modifications, which we meet in the language, serve to transmit the utterances of others and the integration of these enunciations, as emanating from others, in a coherent monologue context" (Bakhtine 1977: 160). It allows, if not fusion, at least a very strong interpenetration of the auctorial view and the actorial perspective. It leaves room for readers to make sense of. Leaving the reader the freedom to choose and decipher the "white gaps," free indirect discourse becomes "the lazy machine" (Eco, 1985: 29). Flaubert replaced direct speech with indirect speech in order to put the former in the latter, to "transport oneself into the characters" (Gothot-Mersch: 1983: 201). By reporting the characters' words, he apparently wanted to induce inertia, repetition and a vision of a stuck, frozen world in his novel. In addition, the free indirect speech offers the character the right to pronounce, constituting the *insular vision*. The first sight of Madame Arnoux by Frédéric in the boat to Paris (*Education sentimentale*) clearly manifests this technique. Represented by the mature staff in capital letters, *Elle* [She], for the first time for Madame Arnoux, this pronoun deeply marks the maturity of Flaubertian writing. This poetics of *insular vision*, described by Isabelle Daunais, is used to gradually describe the characters (Daunais: 1993: 104-112). They are no longer initially definitive characters, as given, like the Balzacian characters, in the total vision of auctorial discourse, but appear gradually. Their appearance is always progressive because of Flaubert's use of speech of others. This type of speech becomes a brake, slowing down the discovery of the character. Taking shape on the horizon of Balzacian realism, this vision constitutes what Michel Raimond calls "subjective realism" (Raimond: 1983: 93-102). It is in his memory that Flaubert subtitled the work *Mœurs de province*, referring to the nomenclature of *La Comédie humaine*. He "debalzaciated" the

contemporary novel, providing a completely partial, subjective vision of a character, no longer of the author. More precisely, the author's words, according to Victor Brombert, are situated between the character's perspective and the author's vision. The romantic vision is by him but no longer belongs to him.

If the Flaubertian narrator refuses responsibility by borrowing the other's word, Vũ Trọng Phụng's narrator enters the diegesis to discuss directly with the characters. In his novels, it is interesting that one can easily find the homogeneous speeches given by the different characters. This homogeneity is more impressive because it incorporates romantic dialogues, articles, and declarations, and controversies. We can relate Vũ Trọng Phụng's critical words to statements by his characters to such an extent that we find no hiatus:

(1) There are laughable things, coming solely from physiology, since the period of crisis, that is inevitable to no one! Oh, fortunately, this period is limited! (2) During this century, it is the science that counts, it is the truth that is important, although there are disgusting, filthy things which only the ignorant like the managers of prostitutes pretend to be puerile when speaking about. (3) One risk is being exterminated by being ignorant thus"<sup>4</sup>.

This paragraph, sounding like a scientific discourse, is quoted from different sources. It is not quite homogeneous, because it is a montage made up of different words about sex. The first enunciation is by doctor Trục Ngôn in *Số Đô* (*Dumb Luck*, Vũ Trọng Phụng 2014: 295); the second launched by Vũ Trọng Phụng himself, taken from his controversy with Tự lực văn đoàn (Cao and Nguyễn 2001: 1119); the third is by the narrator in the novel *Làm đĩ* (*Prostitute*, Vũ Trọng Phụng 1939: 94), another novel by Vũ Trọng Phụng, justifying the controversial subject of "dâm hay không dâm" (Is sex a perversion?).

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<sup>4</sup> "(1) Kể ra có nhiều sự đáng tức cười, song le chỉ tại một nguyên cơ sinh lý, vì rằng cái thời kỳ khủng hoảng kia, than ôi, không mấy ai tránh khỏi, và may sao chỉ có hạn. (2) Thế kỷ này phải trọng khoa học, trọng sự thật, mặc dầu có khi nó uế tạp, góm ghê, chỉ có những đồ vô học thức thì mới bướng bỉnh bằng cái tính e thẹn của những quân bồi sấm. (3) Không biết rằng cứ ý ra cũng đã đủ dẫn đến một chỗ giết chúng". Translated by us.

This paragraph apparently provokes controversies, given that sex was classified as taboo in traditional and bourgeois societies as well as in literature in the colony. Vũ Trọng Phụng, pro-Science and a follower of Freud and psychoanalysis, uses science to talk about sex. As a result, some characters of Vũ Trọng Phụng, who pronounce psychoanalysis in the name of scientific discourse, would be considered as his spokesperson. Nonetheless, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, characters in a novel by Flaubert published posthumously in 1881 "who copies a kind of critical encyclopedia into a farce"; they become copiers of all the scientific ideas in vogue and deliver them to anyone at any time in a humorous way. In romantic circumstances, these words become grotesque buffoons. Hence, it is possible that these statements are also presented in the serious speeches by the writer himself. Behind this heterogeneity of the enunciators emerges the underlying movements of the renewed vision of the world, and therefore of the deferred romantic representation. "It is about the change of the enunciator in the novel by Vũ Trọng Phụng. " (Phùng 2013: 70).

In fact, before Vũ Trọng Phụng, the novel's enunciator usually coincided with the novelistic narrator, who is omnipresent and ready to present to the readership the vanishing lines of diegetic meaning, to justify choices, and to illuminate the implicit meanings. The novelists of that time followed this traditional line, which was acceptable to all readers. Their voice was dominant in all romantic speeches to such an extent that the omnipresent narrator holds supreme credit. It is due to the hierarchy of voices that between the enunciator and the listener—that is, between the narrator and the reader—there is no obstacle to interpretation. Each speaker has its own responsibility; each voice has its own credit. This habit changed with the novels by Vũ Trọng Phụng. There, while the narrator is always omnipresent in the novel, his voice does not completely coincide with that of the author. His position is clearly different from that of the novelist. Besides identifiable rhetorical techniques that tease or make people laugh, the words of the novelist Vũ Trọng Phụng do not dominate the others. They stand on an equal footing, one next to each other. Likewise, value of the novel's words does not lie in the relationship between the signifier and the signified,



but the reciprocal relationship between the context and the enunciator.

We can observe all these renovations in the path of Xuân Tóc Đỏ, the main character in *Số đỏ*. In the eyes of the other characters, he suddenly becomes a herald of social reformation after an unexpected intervention from the civilian, although he literally repeats as a parrot only what he has just learned from another character, named Mr. Văn Minh (Civilizer). In this way, Xuân Tóc Đỏ's speech, in turn, although insignificant, has contextualized its own value thanks to his new position taken in the society of the francized nouveau riche, against whom Vũ Trọng Phụng hates. There is no personality in the individual discourse of the characters. Anyone has the right to make such a speech. Therefore, interpretation of the speeches depends not on the internal structure, but a lot *on the external structure, the context*. Statements of the characters, full of the neologisms in vogue about "Frenchify" (Âu hóa), are nonsense. They are communicative, but so much worn out that participants do not actually understand each other. In the absence of context, all statements are meaningless. It is the context that completely determines the meaning of the statement, even unbeknownst to all participants. Hence the interpretation of the statement constitutes the surprising effects of the external situation, the context. Another example is the satirical poem improvised by Xuân Tóc Đỏ. Taking up a versified drug advertisement from the street vendor, his former profession, Xuân Tóc Đỏ literally recites it in front of his amorous opponent, who is quite struck by his extraordinary literary talent. Here, the situation contextualizes the drug advertisement unbeknownst to the protagonist so that it becomes a satirical poem by excellence, and thus makes the traveling merchant Xuân Tóc Đỏ a talented poet of humor. In his novel, when the advertisement becomes a satirical poem, reason turns to absurdity. The absurd is everywhere in Vũ Trọng Phụng's novel.

As the narrator's speech is not superior to or more important than the others, he could borrow the speech of others to tell the story, narrating the situations. Hence, the idea of discourse by others is introduced. We could quote by chance the example which

is the incipit of the chapter “Hạnh phúc của một tang gia” [Happiness of a grieving family]: “Ba hôm sau ông cụ già ấy chết **thật!**” [After three days, this old man died **truly** – literal translation] (Vũ Trọng Phụng 2014: 223). Although this sentence contains no rhetorical means, the reader of Vũ Trọng Phụng certainly does not resist thinking of black humor, which consists in the use of the objective “thật!” (truly) at the end of the speech. As this word does not refer to any reality, it rather works grammatically. However, its use implies rather a project of enunciation. The enunciator assumes an impact implicitly expected by the interlocutors (Hoàng Phê 1990: 959). If we remove this interjection, which is untranslatable, we do not change any real meaning, but we remove this nuance. On the other hand, by keeping this word, we have a speech of another delivered by the narrator. The latter could be a character in the mass of the humorous universe of Vũ Trọng Phụng, who awaits the death of the old man to share his legacy. Otherwise, the narrator has “taken over” another character, who is part of the grieving situation. The narrative then incites a virtuality, thanks to a double speaker, a narrator and character. In this context, the narrator only fulfills the function of speaking loudly the desire of the children of the grieving family that wants the death of the old man. A sentence loaded with a speaker, however, concerns two enunciators. The responsibility for the utterance, therefore, does not belong to anyone. The interjectory word then constitutes a free indirect discourse that is ambiguous. This discourse oscillates between indefinite spaces to such an extent that we fail to condemn the speaker of this utterance, which should contain the joy of all children in the face of the pending mourning. It is about their happiness in the face of the old man's death. The reader himself, while reading, is undoubtedly one of the diegetic voices and he is equal to the other characters. He also becomes a diegetic enunciator of Vũ Trọng Phụng. There are then multiple ways of reading a speech, depending on the diversity of readers’ of points of view.

This free indirect discourse can be found in Vũ Trọng Phụng's other novels. This type of speech makes him unique from other novelists of the time. In other words, it is Vũ Trọng Phụng who distanced himself from the aesthetic standards that had been

established for the bourgeoisie. Such refusal is explicit in his novels. "The enunciator of Vũ Trọng Phụng should disappear in favor of the presence of the speaker" (Phùng 2013: 75). His novels examine another reality of language in modern society. They demonstrate that the flowering of the report genre in the press contributed to modernizing Vietnamese novels. Given such development in the published report of his time, the success of Vũ Trọng Phụng apparently did not only come from his observations of reality, but also from his way of observing it. It is the representations of the reports that are of equal importance as in France (cf. Delporte 1999: 242). In his reports, the narrator does not directly observe the facts; instead, he narrates them faithfully. As an "information carrier" (Cao and Nguyễn 2001: 1117),<sup>5</sup> Vũ Trọng Phụng's narrator is responsible for accurately relating what is said by other characters. The absence of the dominant voice attaches to the partial writing in Vũ Trọng Phụng's report. This writing favors the multiplicity of interpretation. This reporter, following the lines of French reporters like Albert Londres, shows his awareness of the partial vision in the modern world, where "there is never any newspaper, says Vũ Trọng Phụng during the polemic on perversion, which can provide answers for everyone" (Cao and Nguyễn 2001: 1117). If the authors of Tự lực văn đoàn, from the 1933-36, abstained from publicly declaring the function of literature, their journals, *Phong Hóa* and then *Ngày Nay*, make visible voices of the public that tend to be in favor of morality in the "Opening Readers Letters" Section. The editors of the journals then borrowed voices of readers to develop moral values that they wanted to promote for their polemic against other groups. Noticeably, this way of borrowing from the readers voices suggests the mission of Tự lực văn đoàn in constructing moral and aesthetic standards for the whole Vietnamese society at that time. Given that main clientele of their journals came from the emerging bourgeoisie, Tự lực văn đoàn wanted to protect established aesthetic standards against the so-called suitors, of whom Vũ Trọng Phụng is a herald. These established norms consolidate the hierarchy of diegetic voices,

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<sup>5</sup> This comes from open letter of Vũ Trọng Phụng addressed to a reader of *Tường lai* magazine: "bốn phận của tôi chỉ là thông báo cho mọi người biết chứ không phải lo sợ rằng cái việc làm phận sự ấy lợi hại cho ai" [my mission is to inform only; I do not care if my information is good or bad for anyone].

associated with the social and aesthetic hierarchies. All were in the aim of attacking the way of promoting democratic voices or the freedom of speech in works of Vũ Trọng Phụng, whom they addressed as the suitor of the contemporary aesthetic and social orders. Vũ Trọng Phụng's realistic writing, both in report and in novel, refers to the words of others more than to facts. His realism of speech is attached to the speech of others. Vũ Trọng Phụng apparently wanted to insist on fidelity to the function of the conveyor of information that is far away from the social goal, which would be interesting but difficult to be verified, therefore indefinable. Voices in Vũ Trọng Phụng's novels distance themselves from others, such as those of Tự lực văn đoàn's, by creating new aesthetic criteria for the equality of words in the novel. The specialty of his writing, as seen in the case of Vũ Trọng Phụng, then lies in work, or, to borrow Foucault's terms, lies "within the archive" of records (books, journals, and many other genres) that might still or no longer exist in the society. This new aesthetic reinvention gained the favor of the literary market, bringing Vũ Trọng Phụng both economic and literary benefits.

## V. Conclusion

By borrowing the words of the other in their narration, Flaubert and Vũ Trọng Phụng created the discourse of others. This new writing disoriented the readers of their times. This is distantiation from the usual literary norms. However, the ways they distanced themselves from the dominating standards of their time are different. Flaubert's realism is subjective, whereas Vũ Trọng Phụng's realism is attached to the function of speech. Both realism is faithful, not to exterior reality, but to the reality seen or said by others in novel. They are independent of external demands in favor of the modernity of story representations. These independences are part of the autonomy of the literary field.

The parallel reading of these two French and Vietnamese authors, from two different eras and two different social situations, evokes unforeseen meanings and contexts. Vũ Trọng Phụng is both

a “genuine luxury worker” and a commercial writer. At the same time, he works to earn a living by writing and to gain a position in the literary field in a partially autonomized northern Vietnam. Thanks to his achievement, the modernization of the Vietnamese literary field was accelerated. The Vietnamese writer claimed the social goal of this art work by invoking the technique of the discourse of others, which make him unique and advanced from other contemporaries. Meanwhile, in the different context of the Empire a half a century before, Flaubert followed a path of conquering the autonomy of the literary field through its double ruptures. This “luxury [French] worker” showed an upside-down economy, rejecting the laws of the market and bourgeois morality. Being a bourgeois heir, he could afford to follow arts for the art’s sake in order to take a high position in the symbolic pole of the literary field. He then distanced himself from the contemporary horizon of expectation by his free indirect discourse. The renovations of both authors are all original to such an extent that it is not certain to talk about the influences of the French writer exerting on Vietnamese, to decipher the links between the great bourgeois of the Empire and the small bourgeois in the colony. It is through the process of constructing their positions of their times that each writer contributed to the consolidation of the autonomy of the literary field of their respective societies.

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