

**LIFE VIGNETTES OF ITALIANS AND VIETNAMESE OR A LITERARY AND
REGIONAL STUDY CONTRASTIVE APPROACH TO ALBERTO MORAVIA'S AND
NGUYEN HUY THIEP'S STORIES**

Nguyen Văn Chien, Ph.D.

Hanoi University, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

E-mail: nvchien2307@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.59849/iscapltmt.2024.205>

Abstract. As the masters of short stories both Alberto Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep have revealed a lot of common characteristics in finding out the circumstances full of surprises in human life that aim at creating the general, accurate and incisive images of mental nature, lifestyle and conception of life expressed by people in Italia and Vietnam. Both of the writers have done a fascinating mosaic by means of attractive plots, distinguishing speech types for population of different social classes, the solid and compact disposition, the system of typical characters uncovering the Italian and Vietnamese faculty of perceiving the existence. The stories selected and analysed in this writing are able to prove the creative literary and regional study concepts that are exposed masterfully. Although these concepts seem to be workaday, they disclose high philosophical ideas that could help their readers interrogate themselves and reflect upon life of theirs and of others.

The strength in the creative works by Alberto Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep has escaped from ordinary words owing to the composed thoughts which stimulate the association of readers so that they can be aware of not only the common senses in their life but also the things causing them to lose their way. However, the romantic perception hidden in sneaking feelings and reasons of Italians and Vietnamese reveals itself behind these story – lines, that are imbued with vitality.

Keywords: vignettes, conflicts, Italia, Vietnam, family, women, messages, artistic thinking, identification, hypocrisy

**İtalyanların və vyetnamlıların həyat vinyetləri: Alberto Moravia və Nguyen Huy Thiepin
hekayələrinin ədəbi və regional təhlili və müqayisəli yanaşma**

Nguyen Van Chien

Ph.D, Hanoi Universiteti, Vyetnam Sosialist Respublikası

E-mail: nvchien2307@gmail.com

Xülasə. Qısa hekayə ustaları kimi həm Alberto Moravia, həm də Nguyen Huy Thiep insan həyatında gözlənilməz hallar dolu şəraitləri üzə çıxarmaqda çoxlu ortaqlıq xüsusiyyətləri ortaya qoyurlar. Bunun məqsədi isə İtaliya və Vyetnam insanların düşüncə tərzini, həyat tərzini və həyata baxışlarını əks etdirən ümumi, dəqiq və dərin psixoloji obrazlar yaratmaqdır. Hər iki yazıçı cəlbədicili sətirlər, müxtəlif sosial təbəqələrə mənsub insanlara xas nitq tipləri, güclü və yığcam quruluş, eləcə də İtalyan və Vyetnam xalqının varlığı dərk etmə qabiliyyətini üzə çıxaran tipik obrazlar sistemi vasitəsilə maraqlı bir mozaika yaradıblar. Bu məqalədə seçilmiş və təhlil edilmiş hekayələr həm bədii yaradıcılıq, həm də regional tədqiqat baxımından yüksək səviyyədə ifadə olunmuş konsepsiyaları göstərir. Bu konsepsiyalar sadəcə görünməz də, oxuculara özlərini sorğulamağa, həyatları və başqalarının həyatı üzərində düşünməyə yardım edə biləcək yüksək fəlsəfi ideyaları ortaya çıxarmağa kömək edir. Alberto Moravia və Nguyen Huy Thiep-in bədii yaradıcılığının gücü, oxucuda assosiasiyalar oyadan düşünülmüş ifadələr sayəsində adi sözlərdən kənara çıxmağı bacarır. Bu yanaşma oxuculara təkcə həyatlarında rastlaşdıqları ümumi anlayışları deyil, həm də öz yollarını itirmələrinə səbəb olan

amilləri dərk etməyə imkan verir. Bununla belə, hekayə xətlərinin arxasında gizlənmiş romantik duyğular və italyanlarla vyetnamlıların dərin düşüncələrindəki səbəblər, həmin hekayələrin həyatiliklə dolu olmasına səbəb olur.

Açar sözlər: vinyetlər, ziddiyyətlər, İtaliya, Vyetnam, ailə, qadınlar, mesajlar, bədii təfəkkür, identifikasiya, ikiüzlülük

1. A feature of life and literature of A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep

A. Alberto Moravia (1907–1990) – Italian writer – real name Alberto Pincherle and born in Rome, his homeland has been associated with his life and writing career through many characters and situations of life. He hated the fascist regime, not only because his two brothers – Carlo and Nello Rosselli, the leaders of the anti-fascist resistance movement *Giustizia e Libertà* – were murdered by Benito Mussolini's regime in France, but mainly because of his patriotic consciousness and the reason of a freedom-loving intellectual. He was fond of literature from a young age, and among his favorite writers were Balzac, Proust, Moliere, Rabelais, Defoe, Stendhal, Cervantes, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Goldoni, Manzoni, Verga, Steinbeck, Sartre, Canetti, Beckett, Durrell, Vittorini, Camus, among them three Russian writers: Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Nikolai Gogol. In 1929 he published his first novel, *Gli indifferenti* (*The Time of Indifference*), an analysis of the moral decay of a middle-class mother and her two sons. The suffocation and lurking dangers, the prohibition, censorship and surveillance of the Fascist regime led him to develop surrealist and allegorical writing, which probably improved his literary style. He had to take refuge in the United States, teaching Italian literature, writing under a pseudonym. His exile in the early 1940s with his wife in Fondi, near Ciociaria, inspired him to write *La Ciociara* (*The Woman of Ciociara*), published in 1958. After the liberation of Rome, he returned there and collaborated with many creative intellectuals to found several newspapers and literary magazines. It was during this time that he became famous for works such as *La Romana* (*The Roman Woman*, 1947), *Disubbidienza* (*Disobedience*, 1948), *L'Amore Coniugale e altri racconti* (*Conjugal Love and Other Stories*, 1949) and *Il Conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1951).

Moravia hated the fascist regime and this attitude was expressed in the more than thirty books he published during his lifetime. Throughout his 40 years of writing, he has never deviated from his ideals, morals, and even the genres he has used to convey his creative and moral messages. Every theme in his works reflects the world in which he lives. He hopes for changes in this world and believes that people can achieve them by understanding and dealing with the issues he raises in his writings.

It can be seen that the themes in his stories encompass the aridity of morality, the hypocrisy of contemporary people, and the inability of people to find happiness in practical things such as love and marriage.

His writing style is not polished, melodious, the words used are simple, everyday but arranged according to a very skillful and concise syntax trick. In his writing, we often see internal monologues accompanied by subtle psychological observations.

Moravia is similar to Nguyen Huy Thiep in that both of them wandered around and finally settled in the capital. Nguyen Huy Thiep was born in 1950 in Thanh Tri, Hanoi. From childhood to adulthood, he lived in many places such as Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Vinh Phuc... The works that made him famous are short stories written to describe historical issues, literature, fairy tales, legends, and daily life in the city and countryside. The atmosphere of the Northern Delta is clearly evident in his stories. Nguyen Huy Thiep's unique perspective on life in his writings makes many readers feel horrified, uncomfortable to the point of "nausea", but the number of people who find it enlightening to see this life more clearly is larger. Perhaps, in this aspect, Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep are both similar and different.

Moravia once stated that the novelist extracts his own ideology from the themes underlying his own experience and not from cultural and religious traditions, that is, from the current history that is passing and not the history that has passed. (www.logosjournal.com/issue_7.1/peterson.htm). It is this ideology that has created the methodological and theoretical foundation for his unique discoveries about the Italian people and Italian society at the time he lived and also in the future. That idea can also be applied to Nguyen Huy Thiep's works, because the reality of life in the time when Vietnamese writers are living is portrayed by him very accurately and delicately, truly depicting the nature of the thinking and life of Vietnamese people, not only in his time but also in the past and will continue to the future if there are no personal and community institutions to correct the negative aspects. However, the creative reality of the two writers proves that they are a continuation, and what is revealed on the page is their contemporary identity in their own unique way.

2. Some slices of exploring the lives of Italian and Vietnamese people through the stories of A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep

The aspects of life are very diverse in the metaphors of the two writers A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep. However, within the framework of this article, it is only possible to present a few features, which, in the author's humble opinion, are fundamental in the analysis of human life through literature by the two authors.

2.1. The mental pain of conflict: people - family - life

Moravia's short story "Thunder and Lightning" is simple in plot and characters, but that simplicity creates an unexpected transformation thanks to the situation revealing the unique features of Italian society. The wife was so upset that she got angry with her husband because he lived peacefully in a "man in the street" family, passing by in what she considered a trivial existence between wealth and a silent multi-generational family with a flat lifestyle without interesting nuances. And what annoyed her most was that her "mediocre" husband was not at all like a gentleman or a heroic man, for example, he was not an Alain Delon with a violent personality, moving through luxury hotels from Paris to New York to Rio de Janeiro, not a brave gangster. She exclaimed in frustration, "...are we living? No, sir, we are not living, we are just existing...". She was so fed up with life that she no longer respected her husband's piety, and that of his family members, when she said, "...but I don't believe in God, not at all, do you understand?". In her anger, she poured out all the resentment that had accumulated over the years because she was poor and fell into a rich family. That status made her unable to understand the terms and financial issues that her husband's family often spoke, making her consider that language as a "dialect" used to cover up capital, so that she could not understand and then steal their wealth. But then, the storm took over when she almost ran out of things to say, and her husband could not control his anger and slapped her straight in the face. The thunder and lightning where her husband was forced her to run outside. In the park where she stopped, someone left a newspaper behind. When she picked it up, she accidentally saw... a photo of her husband with two columns reporting on his crimes such as robbery, murder, accomplices related to drugs, prostitution... Then his interview answer with the last sentence made her hear her husband's voice: "You just want to joke. I don't know anything. We are from an honest family." So she got into a real headache.

This entire short story by A. Moravia is a discourse conveying the message of modern Italian life with a clear explicit meaning about two people in a well-off family with different worlds of existence leading to a conflict like "the last straw". But the profound hidden meaning makes the reader ponder to draw their own conclusions from the plot. Those hidden meanings are as realistic as slices of life of middle-class and upper-class Italians. First of all, her husband is a mafioso, that is, a member of the Mafia. At the time when A. Moravia wrote this story, there were no ten commandments of Mafia members, so he was still guilty of prostitution, but all his actions and attitudes showed that

he was a true member of this organization. Obviously, the Mafia reality infiltrates many families. They secretly live and operate with very clever covers.

Another implication drawn from the story is that a woman of the lower class in society like this wife could not stand firm with Christianity, she blasphemed God when she craved the “great man” status in her husband but was not satisfied.

Moreover, through the image of that wife, we can understand the “romantic” instinct of Italian women, they want to see the behaviors, the majestic and imposing “gentlemanly” personality traits in their husbands - their physical and spiritual support.

The characters of A. Moravia inherit and continue the tradition of thinking and acting of the Italian people. Such traits create the typical Italian temperament, at the same time it becomes unique and interacts with the Vietnamese traits of human personality molded in the operation of the times through Nguyen Huy Thiep’s stories.

The short story “Retired General” by Nguyen Huy Thiep depicts a family of an old general officer with all the activities and thoughts of its members, from the retired general’s grandparents to his biological children, daughter-in-law, uncle who is the general’s half-brother, grandchildren and people of different bloodlines, whose stories are told sympathetically by the wife of the character “I”, until they live... Nguyen Huy Thiep realistically depicts the moral degradation of people who act according to the wild instincts of foraging and fighting.

Those people are in contrast to only one person, the retired general who lived and endured quietly, and then died peacefully but with the dignity of a soldier. The tragedies of life were spoken by the general himself: “Any man with a heart is shameful. The bigger the heart, the more shameful”. A truly cruel conclusion about his own fate, a man who had been through life and death, a man who had “buried three thousand people” with his own hands without having to “cast a spell” as he said when answering the question of Mr. Bong – the general’s half-brother – about whether or not he needed to cast a spell for the death of his wife – that is, the mother of the character “I”. He was indignant because he understood the hidden conflict with everyone around him but could not resist to change.

The consequences of such conflict make people alienated from each other and family love is only superficial. Let’s listen to the confession of the character “I”: “I feel so lonely. My children are lonely too. The whole gang gambled. My father too.” Each lonely individual was bitterly affirmed in a clause ending with a full stop. Each of those small worlds had no connection to each other except the simple duty of blood!

But there is a terrible truth that Nguyen Huy Thiep revealed. It is similar to Lu Xun’s discovery in “A Madman’s Diary” when he revealed the terrible truth in Chinese society at that time through the confession of a “madman”: humans eat each other, that is, people eat human beings. In the story “A madman’s diary”, the main character exclaimed: “They eat human beings, so they may eat me”, so he looked up history books, and after reading for a long time, he found that every page had the words “Virtue and Morality”. Unable to sleep, he continued reading and kept reading “until I begin to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words – “Eat people” . And Nguyen Huy Thiep continued writing “My wife works at the maternity hospital, her job is to abort fetuses. Every day, Thuy puts the discarded fetuses in a thermos and brings them home. Mr. Co cooks them for the dogs and pigs”. The character “I” carelessly ignores it, but his father takes him to the kitchen and shows him the pot of food cooked for the pigs “in which there are tiny pieces of fetuses, and even small pink fingers”. The retired general only says this “Damn! I don’t need this wealth”. Hearing that, the character “I”’s wife blames Mr. Co “Why don’t you put them in the milling machine?”. That truth is extremely sad when the hidden meaning lurking in the structure of Nguyen Huy Thiep’s plot is who will eat the pork or the dog which is essentially digested human flesh, kneaded and nourished from “fetal fragments” and “pink little fingers” like that. Since this story was

published in the literary world, critics and literary lecturers have mostly avoided or deliberately ignored this savage image.

2.2. *Humanity is degenerated by objects and money*

The modern world with all its sophisticated and expensive devices and objects seems to bring people many conveniences that were previously unimaginable. But in a society filled with products of technological “evolution”, what will become of humans? A. Moravia himself answers that tormenting question in the short story “More beautiful than you”. A woman from a poor family but with beauty enters a rich family in a ridiculous situation when the beautiful girl, due to her weak, passive and cowardly personality, is pressured by the “very arrogant voice” that almost hypnotizes her from the man “if there was an ugly contest, he would definitely win the championship”. She lives in a magnificent building, a perfect “living machine”, even the cars are “rationality” and “effectiveness” so they are “not semi-finished products but complete products”. But the people there were “weird”, “half human, half monster”. They were ugly because they were “inhuman”, as if the creator wanted to mold them completely but could not do it for some reason. The husband invited an old friend who, according to him, was a failure in life to visit. The purpose was very subtle: to prove to the guest his success and wealth. The climax of the story was the moment after being led to admire the evidence of success in life, the host’s wife had a short conversation with the guest. After praising them with tears, she concluded with the question: “But do you know which of those objects is the most beautiful, the most wonderful?”, and in response to the hostess’s confused question, the guest said briefly: “It is you”. That comment made her realize that her status was not higher than those super modern cars, along with the argument uttered by that “failed” teacher in the school of life: “Unfortunately, the characteristic of our civilization is that the things it creates are much more beautiful than those who have the right to own and use them.” The wife felt hurt because her beautiful charm seemed to be looked down upon, so she affirmed that there were still beautiful people in the world, but the teacher continued: “They are no longer human beings but have become objects.” So her “enlightenment” was complete, it was the person with the poor profession of a teacher who opened her eyes to see that she, the beautiful wife in that “noble and noble” family, was also just an “object” just like all the other members.

The story unfolds like a real-life reportage, filled with the appeal of truth, combining the fundamentals of realism and metaphor. That alone can reveal the hidden meaning of the tragedy when materialism has driven the human nature of spiritual life and human soul out of daily life, people in that insensitive consumer society are far from their families in its true sense, they embody their values into objects to become “objects” in human form. One can hear from the plot the passionate call of A. Moravia; “Hey humanity, stop and return to human values, or it will be too late to turn back!”.

A. Moravia’s sharp slices of the life process in the 60s and 70s of the last century make not only people of that time but also people of today - the 10s of the 21st century - startled because the spiral of “objectification” of homo sapiens is still happening, sometimes even more fiercely. That truth was revealed by Nguyen Huy Thiep through the short story “No King” as a chronicle of human existence through 7 parts like 7 days of a week: Family situation – Morning – Death anniversary – Afternoon – New Year’s Day – Evening – Normal day. This is also an allegory of a complete day and a metaphor for a whole life. Mr. Kien’s family consists of six people: the father, five sons: Can, a war invalid now working as a barber, Doai, an “educational civil servant”, Khiem, a “slaughterhouse employee”, Kham, a university student, Ton, “the youngest son, mentally ill, shrunk and deformed”, and Sinh, the daughter-in-law, the eldest brother’s wife. Mrs. Nhon, Mr. Kien’s wife, has been dead for eleven years. The occupations associated with these people reflect all the thoughts and actions in society. For example, Can is the one who balances the family’s income and expenses, he cleverly increases the price of his “services” from haircuts to ear cleaning, shaving... that no customer can resist. As for

Khiem, there is not a day when he does not carve a kilo of meat, entrails... from the commercial slaughterhouse to bring home for everyone to eat, even the clever and skillful “educational civil servant” Doai “always... puts in a few pieces of meat, a few pieces of entrails...” to “...have a little protein...enough for two thousand calories...” when going to work. As for Ton, he does all kinds of nameless jobs, while working he sings the song “A ha...No king...”. The dialogues of the characters reveal the practical and realistic value scale of the community. The two most intellectuals in the family advise each other, Doai tells Kham: “His butchering job is worth ten times more than your or my university degree” because Kham informs: “I have tried to count, every year Mr. Khiem brings home two hundred and sixty sets of intestines”. Or like when on Tet holiday, Doai - an education official - receives guests who come to wish him a happy new year and tells a harmless and impolite joke, which is told by the neighbor’s son to his family: “Doai is educated but talks nonsense”. Hearing that, the neighbor sums it up concisely and deeply: “Chaos”. The same intellectual Doai comments to his siblings: “Having a talent for business is really nice, but talents like literature, art, etc. are all useless”. And the “young intellectual” Kham, who was pushed away by Sinh when he rushed to kiss his sister-in-law, immediately says firmly: “I told you in advance, I will definitely sleep with Sinh once”. Then Mr. Kien died of illness, on the hundredth day of his death anniversary, Doai proposed to raise a glass and said: “...Life is a monkey but wonderful...”. At that time, Sinh was pregnant, although as confirmed, Doai had told Sinh directly about her husband: “...Old Can is both stupid and cowardly, and weak, the doctor said he was cold-blooded, married Sinh for two years but had no children”. In response to Doai’s question: “So do you feel miserable on normal days?”, Sinh replied: “Suffering. Very humiliating. Both painful and bitter. But very loving”. Then seven moments like that repeated with joy and sadness because right at that moment a postman came to report that their uncle had just died, but Doai told them to continue to be happy and called all the members of the memorial banquet “generals”. Indeed, the lyrics of the song by Mr. Ton still softly resound: “no king” has determined the implicit meaning of the slice of urban life (and also in the countryside) in Vietnam when “leaking from the roof down”, the state of no discipline and no law is respected, then there is no longer any moral value to serve as a pillar for people’s thoughts, actions and words.

2.3. Women are not weak to be trampled

If we continue to examine the following short stories of the two writers A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep, we may not be able to stop the process of discovering hidden meanings through images, languages and explicit situations about all phenomena of human life in a European country and an Asian country. But it can be seen that any work of the two writers touches a certain life force flowing in the stream of human life. However, what leaves the reader to think is not necessarily the tragedy and misery that manifests from the decline of morality, philosophy of life and the mechanism of respecting the law... but the optimism of the lesson of life: knowing how to become pure, like repenting every week to become more kind after confessing one’s sins.

It can be seen that the two short stories “Egyptian Queen” by A. Moravia and “Flow, My River” by Nguyen Huy Thiep are very close in motif and idea, which shows the similarity in the artistic thinking of the two writers in two distant lands.

The woman in the story “Egyptian Queen” gets married and lives a life without any worries, except that her husband is not outstanding and everything is peaceful, similar to the description of life in the story “Thunder and Lightning”. The couple talks and the old husband is told by his wife about a young woman who wants to escape from dependence and express “her will, independence, enjoyment of surprises, desire for life...” And such life traits in women are defined by the wife as “a unique artificiality” in her relationship with men, while she affirms that “no sister...is a liar, a fake traitor, unfaithful, dishonest...”. That was the core of the story she told her husband about a beautiful young woman she knew who, “because of her excessive arrogance, her infatuation with not wanting

to be dependent, her desire for power, her demand for freedom, her love of adventure, in short, her thirst for life, fell into a most unbelievable situation.”

The husband was very curious to know what happened to the beautiful young woman – his wife’s friend – afterwards. She said that an old rich man had been chasing and pursuing her for several years, and finally “she became his mistress on the condition that after each meeting, he would give her a certain amount of money”. Another attractive factor made the husband impatient. She continued that all that money was given to another young man whom she loved. And that money would be used for “terrorist groups”. That young man also loved her, but she firmly rejected his feelings, so their relationship was “completely innocent”. There is a very interesting and mysterious statement that the husband does not understand the reason for what he said: “And to wash away the hatred of being dependent, they made up so-called “unbelievable stories” when he explained and clarified the wife’s thesis that the only and real dependence of women in the husband’s family is “the roof”, the material reality.

After that conversation, she dressed neatly, in the “style” of the fashionable people and drove off. She was a beauty, many people said she looked like an Ancient Greek queen, and she herself loved her beauty so much that she “could not help but kiss her reflection in the mirror”.

The story she told her husband turned out to be true about what she was doing with a rich old man and a young man. She drove to the luxurious villa with the rich old man for an hour and a half. Then she drove away and put the “big heavy envelope” in her pocket. When they arrived at the meeting place, a girl signaled to stop the car and talked to her. She gave her the envelope of money and went home. Before dinner, the couple sat on the balcony in the quiet summer darkness and talked about women again. They returned to the story of her girlfriend who had two men, one rich but old, the other poor but young. She lived with the first one to have money to “support the second one’s political career materially,” but she had no sexual relations with the second one. Then she continued to tell the new detail, the final detail about how at the meeting place, the man did not come but he sent a girl – probably his new girlfriend – to collect the money. And she affirmed that “The girlfriend... faced with that change, lost her previous mental balance”, and she had to “seriously reconsider the new situation before deciding how to act in the future”. Little did the husband know that the details and thoughts of the girl in the story she told him were her own autobiography, her own confession!

A. Moravia has proven a thesis that has become a true motif about the wisdom of women everywhere and at all times. Vietnamese people often recite the proverb “Men are shallow like a well, women are deep like a betel box” and believe that it is necessary to understand the opposite to be true to the meaning (implied meaning) of this conclusion that women are often shallow and men are inherently wise. But perhaps our ancestors did not say that, because the worlds are important for men to despise women, so the language needs to say that, but “meaning beyond words” so the implication is not as many people think. The woman in A. Moravia’s story has two lives; daily with her husband and also daily with her own world, a world filled with romance, enthusiasm, danger and as her husband affirmed, to “wash away the hatred of being dependent”. And she is superior to her husband not only in the ability to control her husband but also in the will to serve a way of life, a philosophy of life that works for the community.

In the short story “Flow, my river” by Nguyen Huy Thiep, it tells about the fishermen of the Catholic parish with the truths and falsehoods of life that happen every day along with many obscure and noble legends. The main character is a “young green head” who is passionately eager to learn about life around him and enthusiastically goes fishing with the skilled fishermen in his hometown. Then there was a carelessness that almost caused him to drown if a woman had not saved him. That was Ms. Tham, a poor woman who ran a ferry across the river. However, the twists and turns of life pushed him to become a city man with a wife and children, “a large group of children”. Suddenly he

had the opportunity to return to the village around March because at that time the kapok flowers “were bright red and restless”. Although many “youthful dreams (have) given way to many practical needs”, the man who used to be told by a woman about “once upon a time, in Jerusalem there was a *human being* ...” was still “indescribably moved” when he asked an old woman about “Ms. Tham the boat woman”. The man who was deeply attached to his hometown “burst into tears” when he learned that Ms. Tham was no longer alive when the old woman said: “Do you know Tham’s family? No one has ever asked about Tham’s family for so many years... Tham drowned twenty years ago!”. Like a knife cutting into the heart of the “young green-haired” man who did not drown thanks to his savior, Ms. Tham, when the old woman continued: “Damn! Tham saved countless people in this river... Yet in the end, he drowned without anyone saving him...”. At that moment, the man suddenly saw a paradox when he thought “my life now is so meaningless”.

Ms. Tham - that simple but profound and extremely brave woman was the embodiment of *the human being* (who else but Christ) in Jerusalem as in the stories she told to the boy who is now a grown man with a full urban material life.

The two women in two different lands, far from each other in the stories of A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep both have two lives. One for the reason to exist, and one for the duty of Homo sapiens with a noble mind and a heart that lives for others. The wisdom of those two people transcends the triviality of the mortal body to live for the arrogant ideal of caring for their fellow human beings without any calculation. The woman in the Italian city is as beautiful as the “Egyptian Queen”, living in silk and luxury houses, driving a very modern car. But that perfection cannot be compared to sacrificing everything for true love attached to a specific person who is serving a political ideal. She considered that second life to be real. And Ms. Tham in “Flow, my river” considered ferry trips to be a joy, but saving people from the cruel death of the waves was as joyful and simple as rowing to take people across the river. “To live by profession, to die by profession” (as the Bible quotation “To live by the sword and die by the sword”), and her death was like the sacrifice of Danko, who ripped his heart out of his chest to shine light to save many people in the tribe from dying in the dark forests and swamps, but no one cared about his death when they were happy to continue living, something the Russian writer M. Gorky told in the story “Old Woman Izergin”.

Another hidden meaning in both stories of the two Italian and Vietnamese writers is that women are not dull in everyday life because of the matter of food, clothing, and money as people think (an example is the above proverb). They hide in their minds and hearts the throbbing of passionate love for humanity, for a specific person. But they keep it secret only for themselves, and they live as if there are two people in one body. That is to say, they are extremely romantic, the shallow intelligence of men who are often complacent with money, education, status... perhaps obscures everything, making it difficult for them to easily recognize such profound truths.

Both A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep have become thinkers and philosophers in the way they identify, analyze life and build images in their works. The above comments are just a small part of the iceberg of ideas that can be extracted from the stories that the two men - A. Moravia and Nguyen Huy Thiep - wrote about people, objects and the human world.

References

1. Alberto, M.. The Bank of Love. – Hanoi: Literature Publishing House, 1986.
2. Cottrell, Jane E. Alberto Moravia. – New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974.
3. Dego, G. Moravia (Writers and Critics Series). – Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966.
4. <http://authorscalendar.info/moravia.htm>
5. <http://www.ianthomson.info/blog/alberto-moravia-25-years-on-who-reads-him-now/>
6. <https://www.enotes.com/topics/alberto-moravia/critical-essays/moravia-alberto-1907>
7. Nguyen, H.T. Short Stories. – Ho Chi Minh City: Youth Publishing House, 2003.

8. Selected Stories of Lu Hsun. – Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972.
9. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century. 1st Edition by Sorrel Kerbel (Editor). – Oxford: Routledge, 2003.
10. Whitfield, J.H. A Short History of Italian Literature. – London: Cassell, 1962.