

THE LITERARY NATURE OF “HÁT XẨM”

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Abstract in English [280 words, limit 300 words]

To address the literary values of Hát Xẩm, first and foremost, one needs to know that Hát Xẩm is a form of folk music performance which came into being in the lower Red River delta, in northern Vietnam, a long time ago, and became popular around the beginning of the XXth Century. The most distinct feature of this folk singing form is that it was a way to make a living by visually impaired music artists. Thus, their performance contributes greatly into the literary nature and values of Hát Xẩm. For example, musical instruments are parts of the arts at certain points in the performance, or improvisations according to the talents of the artists. Each style and each form are meant to express a different feeling or a different story.

Hát Xẩm also incorporates different “languages” into the literary arts. Besides the singing and the music “languages,” the body language of the artists is part of the literary characteristics of Hát Xẩm.

These different literary sublanguages of Hát Xẩm can be studied thoroughly: (1) the improvisation. A Hát Xẩm song can be changed at each performance. (2) ingenious and rustic. A Hát Xẩm song can talk about things that are considered gross and taboo’ed, but it does not leave the audience with a feeling of foul. (3) satiric, comical. The artists usually adds a gesture or manner of singing to emphasize or lighten the topics, (4) internalized/personalized. The lyrics is always changed and improved thanks to this feature. Even though some of Hát Xẩm songs have authors, but one can be sure that nine out of ten, the fine literary nature of Hát Xẩm comes from the folk art treasures.

Từ khóa: Hát Xẩm, literary features, instruments, mannerism, internalization.

Short Biography:

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Born, Trần Văn Tiên. Pen names: Thông Biện tiên sinh, Mạc Lê. Writer, poet, literature translator, literary researcher. The author of about 17 volumes, including poetry, poetic epics, short stories, novels, notes, critics, plays, screen plays. The founder and head of Văn Uyên “Literary Garden” and Văn Uyên Publishing House, 1987 to 1997/

Translator of William Faulkner, Oscar Wilde, Pablo Neruda, Garcia Lorca, v.v.

He got glaucoma, and lost total vision in 2017. He continues to write by recording on a cassette tape and retyped by his wife.

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