

THẠ HỮU VĂN ĐÀN – Firmament JULY 2025.

Lời Giới thiệu:

Dear Friend and Reader,

Long-term memory clings like a barnacle to the mind, consciousness, or brain, I don't know which, but gustation and olfaction appear to cling just as tenaciously to long-term memory as barnacles, and allow this French novelist to produce 1.5 million words of adorable reminiscences of the past, and the humanist Nguyễn Bào Hưng to comment with profound thoughts of his own, having benefited as student from his professor at Sorbonne, who happened to be an expert on this writer. The Vietnamese language sure is a curious invention. It takes a lowly number such as one or three, and combine it with other words to form everyday idiomatic expressions of incomparable color and wit. We owe it to this one-of-a-kind researcher Nguyễn Ngọc Hà and her unbounded scholarship to bring them to light. You know Hoàng-Tâm Hilton as a Zen meditation guru, but did you read her collection of actionable tips and applicable quotations for those in their golden years? You'll be glad to heed what she brought to you. What's seven years compared to 50? A fraction, but to Yên Sơn it's might as well be a lifetime. His comparatively short stint of the former VN Air Force is an obsession he can't live down. This time he describes the Apocalypse. Engineers are such a protean category of beings! Take Nguyễn Giự Hùng, for instance. He delves into the minute detail of the classical examination regime of old Vietnam (a sequel), travels to the must-see Perfume temple (another sequel), and fools around with a literally tongue-in-saliva licking stamp society. Or the intrepid philologist Nguyễn Văn Ưu who eats language theoretic controversy for lunch every time. However, this time he approaches etymology in a noncontroversial way. Or Phí Minh

Tâm—you have to gently slap him on the wrist before he admits it—is a dyed-in-the-wool lover of Chinese poetry, particularly that in the famed Tang period. If a picture is a thousand words, then what is a graph? It’s mouthwatering frosting on a scrumptious cake. Physicist turned computer application developer in chief Trương Thiệu Hùng proposes to train you in the art and science of developing graphs for all purposes. So hurry, no, fly to his tutorial before somebody beats you to it.

The ecologist Thái Công Tụng worries about pollution in air, water and soil as well as sustainable development. He shows that development and ecology are intertwined. He digs deep into the river system in North Vietnam to point out environmental issues to address before it is too late. Scholar Nguyễn Cẩm Xuyên depicts the resurgence of the game of Zen parallel sentences written in Chinese characters on paper, which offer endless entertainment value, all depending on brush strokes. This time the topic is “bamboo.”

Move over Dean Koontz, Steven King, Dan Brown. Here comes Nguyễn Tuấn Huy. Our newly-minted suspense writer is offering the second episode of Black Society involving a female character. It’s quite compelling read. Cao My Nhân is being mysterious in claiming somebody she knew was over 100 years old and sand in the desert is indecipherable ! The master psychodrama Linh Vang is back to mystify us with a trip back to the old home. Sigh! As an incorrigible romantic, Kim Oanh’s life is a string of Valentines. Out West Phương Hoa was having a ball with an award event for the Overseas Youth, which is quite a spectacle to behold. And from Melbourne, Võ Thị Như Mai sent a cornucopia of short gems of bite-sized prose, each with its own irresistible charm.

Up in Parnassus, Nguyễn Ngọc Hà reminds me of Verlaine. Both wrote in French. I love the rains in both. Verlaine’s rain is hauntingly melancholy without an iota of relief while Hà’s is unabashedly philosophical. Hers is a deep sense of rejection,

of life's treachery and indifference while her heart aches with compassion for lonely souls. Võ Thị Như Mai lavishes us with rich poems from The Rhythm of Vietnam. Kim Oanh is nothing but unrelenting love, all-season love, crazily tender love. Cao My Nhân is lost in lost love and inconsolable. Return to Phan Khâm is a journey of futility. The spirit of Valentine has made Phương Hoa a captive with a heart full of compassion. The long-absent Khuất Duy Tường did it again, this time with translation into polished French of two of the most beloved poems of a late poet-philosopher who was also his teacher. I am speechless in witnessing so much beauty in such a confined space.

Moliere's comedy-ballet The Middle-Class Gentleman, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme is sympathetic with this incorrigible social climber who meant no harm. No doubt the ballet would be a relief though invisible to the reader. The play ends with this installment.

In Letters from Vincennes space, Thomas Le is a lost soul in the maze which is the infamous triad of mind, consciousness, and brain. As a stroke survivor. he will never give up pursuing an understanding of the trio. In the Critical Thinking section he tries to understand human stupidity, by way of persuasion, manipulation and propaganda.

Firmament thrives when widely read and shared with pride. It's your brainchild, contributors and readers alike. So, spread it far and wide. Good reading! ■

Thomas D. Le, Editor, April 2025