

reputation within the country's national literary history solidified. Nguyễn Huy Thiệp has also attracted sustained attention from Vietnamese studies scholars, and he has appeared repeatedly in the pages of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*. The inaugural issue of the journal featured an extended interview with the writer, and it has since published essays by Nguyễn Ngọc and Doan Cam Thi that examine different aspects of his life and work.¹ In this issue, we publish original translations of four testaments about Nguyễn Huy Thiệp that appeared in the Vietnamese language press and social media following his passing. The first is the formal eulogy delivered at his funeral by Nguyễn Quang Thiều, a well-known poet and chairman of the Vietnam National Writers' Association. The second piece was written by the novelist Uông Triều, while the third was derived from an interview conducted by Thiên Điều with the progressive literary critic Vương Trí Nhàn. The final piece was written by Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's close colleague, comrade, and confidante Phạm Thị Hoài, one of a tiny handful of trail-blazing writers who together with Nguyễn Huy Thiệp pioneered the first great movement of post-revolutionary Vietnamese literature.

NGUYỄN QUANG THIỀU

Translated by Anthony Morreale

Eulogy Read at the Funeral of the Writer Nguyễn Huy Thiệp

At 4:45 on the evening of March 20, 2021, the eighth day of the second month in the year of the buffalo, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp drew his final breath and departed his home for the eternal beyond. News of his passing, condolences, mourning, and reflections on his place in the national canon spread over both official and social media. The size of the response alone speaks to the deep impression he made on the social and literary life of this country.

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp was born in Thái Nguyên in 1950. His ancestral hometown was Hà Nội. His youth was spent fleeing with his family across the hinterlands of Thái Nguyên, Phú Thọ, and Vĩnh Phúc. He majored in

history at Hà Nội National University of Education and then taught for more than ten years in the northern mountains. He returned thereafter to Hà Nội, where he took his first steps down the path toward becoming an author.

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp came late to literature. But when “The Winds of Hua Tát” and his other short stories appeared, it was as if a typhoon bearing his name had suddenly swelled, and with great gusts, convulsed the jungle of Vietnamese literary life. Since 1975, no other author has so profoundly reshaped both the form and spirit of Vietnamese prose. Even today he straddles the throne, ruling over the contemporary Vietnamese short story.

One could say that his prose was bare, bare to the point of cruelty, but this was the bareness of one who dared to stare directly at truth and invoke it by name.

One could say that his prose was rage, rage buttressing an inferno, but this was the rage of righteousness confronted with human decadence and deception.

One could say that his prose was pain, pain to the point of horror, but this was the suffering of love for one’s fellow man.

The beauty of his works was that of a scalpel: glimmering, precise, and painful. His blade excised the tumors hidden in men’s souls. The pain was so great that we thought we couldn’t take it. But we recovered, and we grew.

Only by suffering at the limit of human endurance could Nguyễn Huy Thiệp write stories so laden with shivering, stinging cold. The shivering, stinging cold was the clearest warning of good sense. It is possible that, back then, melodramatic laments and vain consolations were a pointless romantic conceit for an author thinking and speaking about his fellows.

Reading his stories evoked terror. Readers panicked because they realized that these dark spaces, full of savagery, were nested somewhere inside themselves. But from this realization, readers could awaken to their actions and resurrect their humanity. It was precisely for this reason that Nguyễn Huy Thiệp once said, “The most difficult thing to achieve is neither wealth nor intelligence, but morality. The author is one who seeks a righteous path for the people.”

This was his manifesto on the duty of the author. And without hesitation, he traveled that path from the moment he first grasped the writer’s

pen, to the moment he finally departed from this earthly life. He never changed course, despite the path being full of thorns, challenges, and countless temptations. He was severe with people because he loved them. He opposed debauchery to protect humanity.

But in short stories like “The Winds of Hua Tát,” “Salt of the Forest,” “Flow on Dear River,” and “The Water Nymph,” there is a broad current, with a bard-like spirit, casting resplendent beauty over the pitiable vicissitudes of fate. This majestic current confronted readers with warmth, affection, and their own dream of finding beauty in every circumstance. He brought a truly new and distinct tone to contemporary Vietnamese prose. His writing employed a sophisticated and strange language. It was haunting and mysterious.

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp lived a taciturn and humble life. He silently faced criticism, as well as envy, provocation, and even threats. He would sink deep into the crowd. He shrank, as though he were withdrawing from sight. But from that place his gaze would dart outward, piercing life itself, grasping it, dissecting it, condemning it, so that it could finally be loved.

For his writings, he was awarded the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2007 and the Italian Premio Nonino in 2008. But the largest award he received for his work was his readership. They rewarded him with their hearts.

We speak about him now that he is no longer in the earthly realm, not to respect and praise him, because such notions are absent from eternity. His manuscripts will be his only testament, protecting him amid the boundless chaos. Rather, we speak about him now to speak to ourselves, about the political commitment, conscience, and courage of an author.

*And now attend to gales resound
Through mountaintops and Hua Tát woods.
Near furious gurgling river's flow,
Return, relentless, past pitch night to sea.
Over fields, yearning dolorous twilight,
A cloud called Nguyễn Huy Thiệp
Lets shower freedom flickering shine,*

*In booming thunder which on horizon sounds.
 In boxy, blurred and somber homes, your characters
 Kneel, candles lit and prayers pronounced.
 You've entered homes in gusty night,
 For agony and affection, a mangled heart your prize.
 Now leave serene, oh gallant Nguyễn Huy Thiệp,
 Verse, your sword, shimmering with morning gleam,
 The fields offering incense of primal spring,
 Your every footprint bearing glyphs to being.*

Adieu dear author, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp.

U Ô N G T R I È U

Translated by Ryan Nelson and Khánh Hòa Lê

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp: The Solitary Volcano

I know that as many people hate Nguyễn Huy Thiệp as love him. Why do so many people hate Nguyễn Huy Thiệp? Is it because they personally dislike him, his cranky demeanor, his fierce, straightforward writing style? Or because they are jealous of his talent as a writer?

I read Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's short stories long before I met him. As a child, I read them in *Văn Nghệ* [Literary Arts] newspaper. Later, when taking my first steps down the writer's path, I reread them quite a few times. Here is one special thing about Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's short stories: they are not boring when you reread them. The experience of rereading is almost as pleasurable as the first reading. After more than ten years, I reread Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's short stories and realized with surprise that they aged very little. I make this claim having reread many highly acclaimed contemporary Vietnamese works. When I reread Lê Lựu's novel *A Time Far Past*, I did not have nearly the same emotional reaction to the story.