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The Aesthetic World of Võ Đăng Khoa's *Flying Camel* Short Stories

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the short story collection *Flying Camel* by Võ Đăng Khoa in order to elucidate the distinctive features of the artistic world constructed by this emerging voice in contemporary Vietnamese prose. The study approaches the text through interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, including memory studies, trauma studies, psychoanalytic criticism, and Eco-criticism. At the methodological level, it employs close textual analysis and interpretive reading to investigate how literature reflects the transformations of social life and the psychological conditions of individuals in the modern context. The findings suggest that *Flying Camel* constructs what may be described as an "aesthetics of memory and trauma," in which familial relationships are explored through profound psychological depth, revealing latent wounds and the mental defense mechanisms that shape human experience in contemporary life. Many stories portray fractures within family structures while simultaneously reflecting broader social changes, such as labor migration and intergenerational tensions. At the same time, the symbolic imagery embedded in the narratives evokes reflections on ecological crisis and the disruption of human ecology. From an aesthetic perspective, the collection is distinguished by a rhythmic and highly visual narrative language that integrates realist, fantastic, and parodic modes of representation. Through this stylistic synthesis, the stories articulate a distinctly modern sensibility, one that captures the psychological complexities and existential uncertainties of individuals confronting the rapid transformations of contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: Võ Đăng Khoa; *Flying Camel*; contemporary Vietnamese prose; memory and trauma; psychoanalysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Within the trajectory of contemporary Vietnamese prose, one can discern the emergence of a younger generation of writers striving to construct distinctive literary voices-voices that both inherit tradition and boldly open up new sensibilities of the present era. For these writers, literature is no longer merely a medium for illustrating life; rather, it becomes a pathway into the deeper structures of spirituality and memory, into unconscious impulses and the enigmatic configurations of human existence. Within this evolving current, the appearance of Võ Đăng Khoa with the short-story collection *Flying Camel* (2023) marks the arrival of a singular voice: youthful yet seasoned, gentle in tone yet capable of penetrating the most subtle fissures of the human psyche. His prose appears simple at the level of language, yet it constantly harbors hidden layers-dense strata of memory and the unconscious. Though still relatively young, Võ Đăng Khoa has already shaped a distinctive authorial identity: that of a writer concerned not only with storytelling but also with the intricate structures of interiority, and with the fragile and contradictory nature of human beings both in the process of maturation and amid the transformations of contemporary society.

Flying Camel (2023) is a highly symbolic collection of short stories written from a bifurcated sensibility. On the one hand, it remains deeply rooted in the rural lifeworld of Southern Vietnam, where land, water, wind, and the everyday rhythms of communal life still preserve the breath of enduring tradition. On the other hand, it bears the imprint of urbanization and the accelerating forces of globalization, through which emotional, spiritual, and mnemonic values are gradually fragmented. It is precisely within this tension-between tradition and modernity, consciousness and the unconscious, memory and forgetting-that Võ Đăng Khoa's prose unfolds a multilayered world, where every object carries a double significance: it is at once itself and a symbolic reflection of deeper social and psychological structures. This collection may thus be regarded as an important milestone in Võ Đăng Khoa's creative trajectory. Comprising ten short stories, the work was awarded the **Young Author Prize** by the Vietnam Writers' Association in 2024.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs close reading and textual analysis as its primary methodological approach in examining the short story collection *Flying Camel* (*Lạc đà bay*) by Võ Đăng Khoa. Close reading enables a detailed investigation of narrative structures, symbolic motifs, characterization, and stylistic features across the stories in the collection. Through careful interpretation of narrative voice, imagery, and recurring thematic patterns, the study seeks to uncover the aesthetic and conceptual frameworks that shape the author's literary world.

In addition to textual analysis, the research adopts an interdisciplinary analytical framework that integrates theoretical insights from memory studies, trauma studies, psychoanalytic criticism, and eco-criticism. This interdisciplinary approach allows the study to move beyond purely formal analysis and situate the literary text within broader psychological, cultural, and ecological contexts. Concepts from memory studies help illuminate how the narratives reconstruct fragments of personal and familial memory, while trauma studies provide tools for interpreting the subtle representation of emotional wounds and psychological ruptures embedded in everyday life. Psychoanalytic perspectives, originating from the works of Sigmund Freud and later developments in literary theory, are applied to examine unconscious impulses, emotional ambivalence, and defense mechanisms manifested in the relationships between characters. Meanwhile, ecocritical perspectives help interpret environmental imagery and symbolic representations of ecological imbalance that appear in several stories.

Through the combination of close textual reading and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, this methodological approach seeks to provide a comprehensive interpretation of *Flying Camel*, highlighting the ways in which the collection articulates a distinctive aesthetic of memory, trauma, and modern sensibility within contemporary Vietnamese literature.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Initial critical responses to the short-story collection *Flying Camel* have largely focused on acknowledging the author's keen observation of rural life in Southern Vietnam and his sensitivity to the fragile destinies of ordinary individuals in contemporary society. These commentaries frequently emphasize the experiential materials drawn from the Mekong Delta, the plain and unadorned narrative voice, and the ways in which the author portrays the transformations of rural life in the context of urbanization and labor migration. Representative discussions include Tô Sa's "*Flying Camel*: A Gen Z Author Narrates the Inner Landscapes of Drifting Lives" (2023); Phan Đức Lộc's "Young Writer Võ Đăng Khoa: What Do We See When We Look at the Characters?" (2023); Phạm Tuấn's "In the Riverine Region, Someone Suddenly Sees a '*Flying Camel*'" (2024); Quỳnh Yên's "Võ Đăng Khoa: Writing from a Love for the Homeland" (2024); Tuấn Duy's "Võ Đăng Khoa: Everyone Has a Place in the Literary Fields of the Mekong Delta" (2024); Quế Chi's "Flying Camel: Humanity Across Different Landscapes" (2024); and Đinh Lê Vũ's "*Flying Camel* by Võ Đăng Khoa: Adrift in Human Destinies" (2025). Nevertheless, most of these studies remain at the level of introduction or impressionistic commentary and have yet to undertake a systematic analysis of the aesthetic structures and symbolic layers that constitute the artistic world of the collection.

In Vietnam, studies on cultural memory-such as Phạm Minh Quân's *Cultural Consciousness and the Space of Memory in the Novel "Hư thực": An Anthropological Approach* (2025), Võ Nguyễn Bích Duyên's *Memory and Literature: Symbiosis and Creation* (2023), and Nguyễn Thu Giang's *Memory Studies from a Cultural Perspective* (2025)-have contributed to clarifying the shift in literary discourse from epic narratives toward those centered on private experience, individual memory, and collective memory. At the same time, psychoanalytic approaches to literary studies have been developed through works such as Hồ Thế Hà's *A Psychoanalytic Approach to Vietnamese Short Stories after 1975* (2008), Hồ Thế Hà and Nguyễn Thành's *Psychoanalysis and Literature* (2014), Đỗ Lai Thúy's *The Poetics of Desire* (2009), as well as the studies on narratology and poetics by Trần Đình Sử. These contributions have highlighted the psychological depth and the unconscious structures embedded within literary texts.

Alongside these approaches, eco-criticism has emerged over the past decade as a significant orientation in Vietnamese literary studies. Several works have laid important foundations for this perspective, including *Human Beings and Nature in Vietnamese Prose after 1975* (Trần Thị Ánh Nguyệt and Lê Lưu Oanh, 2016), *Dry Forests, Exhausted Streams, Toxic Seas… and Literature* (Nguyễn Thị Tịnh Thy, 2017), *eco-criticism and Southern Vietnamese Prose* (edited by Bùi Thanh Truyền, 2018), as well as studies such as Đào Thúy Nguyên's *Ecological Sensibility in Contemporary Vietnamese Ethnic Minority Prose* (2016) and *Vietnamese Literature and the Ecological Question* (edited by Nguyễn Đăng Điệp, 2019). These works have opened up possibilities for reading literature through the lens of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, while also prompting reflections on cultural memory and ecological responsibility in the modern context.

Against this background, the present article seeks to contribute a new interpretive perspective by approaching *Flying Camel* through an interdisciplinary framework that brings together psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and eco-criticism. In doing so, the study aims not only to clarify the aesthetic characteristics of Võ Đăng Khoa's prose but also to help identify emerging modes of expression in contemporary Vietnamese literature.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. The Poetics of Defamiliarization and the System of Socio-Ecological Symbols in *Flying Camel*

From the very title of the collection, readers can already discern the author's inclination toward the defamiliarization of the artistic world. Võ Đăng Khoa demonstrates a capacity for constructing absurd images and situations that seem to emerge from dreamlike states - configurations that simultaneously evoke the contours of magical realism and the sensibility of psychoanalytic imagination. The "flight" of the camel, the "blooming" of the earth, the transformations of human beings under invisible impulses-all appear to arise from the depths of the unconscious, where repressed desires, collective anxieties, and suppressed memories continually threaten to resurface. In this regard, one may perceive an affinity between Võ Đăng Khoa and the global tradition of magical realism-from Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges to Alejo Carpentier - yet his writing simultaneously bears the distinctive cultural sediment of Southern Vietnam, shaped by layers of folklore, belief systems, legends, and even local spiritualities.

In many of the stories, Võ Đăng Khoa structures the artistic space through fragmented temporal layers that resemble distorted personal memories, or a non-linear stream of consciousness. Characters frequently exist in a bifurcated state: at once lucid observers and participants swept into uncertain currents of recollection; grounded in reality yet simultaneously submerged in the shadowed depths of their inner lives. The use of stream-of-consciousness narration in several stories functions not merely as a narrative technique but also as a means of articulating psychological gaps-those unspoken segments of life that remain unsaid, a defining feature of prose influenced by psychoanalytic orientations. Sentences are broken by unusual rhythms; images accumulate in compressed sequences; associations emerge abruptly, following not the logic of rationality but that of memory. Consequently, Võ Đăng Khoa's short stories appear both supple and precarious, constantly generating an aesthetic sense of unease.

Symbolism constitutes one of the most prominent aesthetic values of *Flying Camel*. In this collection, every image is elevated into a field of associations, where symbols do not merely serve artistic intentions but also open multiple avenues of reflection on human existence, community, society, ecology, and ontology. The short story *Flying Camel* itself offers a striking example of this symbolic capacity. The image of the "flying camel" is not simply a product of hallucination or dream. The narrative does not rely solely on magical elements in the manner associated with García Márquez; it also carries a parodic dimension reminiscent of what Mikhail Bakhtin described as parodic stylization in literary discourse. According to Võ Đăng Khoa's interpretation, the flying camel emerges as a "solution" devised by humanity in the context of climate change. As the planet becomes excessively arid, camels grow beyond their natural limits, and the act of making them "fly" becomes a method for regulating their population. In other words, the magical element here does not serve as an escape from reality; rather, it accentuates the absurdity of contemporary reality itself. When human efforts to save the planet often follow a logic of excess, extremity, and even grotesque exaggeration, the magical thus becomes a mirror reflecting the surrealization of real life. At the same time, parody quietly operates beneath the surface: the naive or ineffective ways in which humans construct environmental solutions-sometimes inadvertently generating new consequences - are precisely what parodic literature seeks to expose. In this sense, Võ Đăng Khoa articulates a narrative voice that is at once humorous, coolly detached, and cautionary, transforming the image of the "flying camel" from a mere play of imagination into a sharp metaphor for our era - an age defined by climate change, ecological insecurity, and an overabundance of technological solutions that may ultimately rescue no one.

A similar symbolic strategy appears in the short story *The Earth in Bloom (Đất nở)*, where Võ Đăng Khoa constructs a richly polysemous image that opens multiple layers of interpretation beyond the immediate narrative surface. On the level of natural ecology, the phenomenon of the "earth blooming" directly evokes unstable geological movements-expansion, cracking, subsidence, and landslides that have become increasingly familiar in the context of global climate change. For a country such as Vietnam, characterized by dense river networks and fragile alluvial terrains, the image of the "earth blooming" is not merely a geological datum but also a warning of the disruption of ecological balance after years of excessive human intervention. Võ Đăng Khoa employs this image as a paradoxical movement of nature. The earth appears to swell and expand, yet in reality it reveals exhaustion, fissure, and instability - a planetary body wounded by cumulative strain.

However, the power of this symbol does not remain confined to the natural plane. At a deeper level, "the earth in bloom" becomes a metaphor for the condition of human ecology - for the shifts, distances, and fractures emerging in relationships between individuals. As the narrative describes: "The row of houses across the street suddenly seemed infinitely distant; a few scattered houses rose up like in a primordial age, while only the smooth glass and walls reminded one of the suffocating streets of the present." (Vo, Đ. K. 2023, p.34). The earth expands, yet the human heart contracts; the ground splitting into separate patches mirrors the severing of familial bonds that no one manages to mend in time.

The image of children celebrating the Lunar New Year abroad, leaving behind a house suspended in the quiet anticipation of aging parents, does not merely depict a social reality; it also reveals a subtle sense of loss spreading throughout modern life.

On the surface, such phenomena may be interpreted as signs of a new lifestyle, new aspirations for experience, and the rhythms of global integration. Yet from a symbolic perspective, Võ Đăng Khoa exposes a profound void - a hollow space where the relational values that once nurtured the spiritual life of Vietnamese communities are gradually eroding, much like the fragile soil beneath their feet.

Consequently, the "blooming earth" in the story does not signify a benevolent expansion granted by nature. On the contrary, it functions as an alarm signal indicating a disjunction between material development and emotional stability, between the accelerated tempo of modern life and the communal foundations of feeling. The image of the expanding earth can thus be read as a paradox structured like a tragedy: the land grows wider, yet human hearts become narrower; the land reserve appears to increase, yet shared space is in fact fragmented. The Lunar New Year - traditionally the moment of reunion-becomes evidence of dispersion. Here, Võ Đăng Khoa articulates a quiet sigh imbued with humanistic concern: society is moving forward rapidly, while the values that once anchored human relationships are gradually receding.

At the symbolic substratum, "the earth in bloom" evokes social loneliness, the erosion of collective memory, and the melancholy of a generation witnessing the fracture of the traditional family even amid material prosperity. In other words, Võ Đăng Khoa successfully deploys a strategy of socio-ecological symbolism, harmonizing a realistic perspective with a deeply humanistic sensibility. The "expansion" of the earth thus becomes a dual movement: a movement of matter and a movement of collective emotion; a geographical transformation and a cultural transformation; a sign of increasing pressure within the natural environment and, simultaneously, a sign of diminishing spiritual cohesion. By interweaving these two layers of meaning, Võ Đăng Khoa not only reflects reality but also issues a warning about a comprehensive crisis-one in which both natural ecology and human ecology are fracturing at the same time.

4.2. Family as a Structure of Memory and Trauma in *Flying Camel*

Another striking aspect of *Flying Camel* lies in the way Võ Đăng Khoa constructs an aesthetics of memory and trauma, whose central manifestation is embedded within the structure of the multi-generational family. Within this framework, each individual-despite bearing the outward calm of rural life - harbors within themselves unnamed fractures. For Võ Đăng Khoa, the family is neither a static institution nor a harmonious foundation in the traditional sense often assumed in earlier literature. In *Flying Camel*, the family becomes a prolonged field of trauma, where memory functions like a layer of sediment that cannot be erased, and where relationships that appear stable are continually disintegrated by subtle, opposing forces.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the short story *Watching the Water (Nhìn nước)*, where the narrator's stream of recollection opens onto a somber inner landscape: the melancholy marriage of the parents, the mother's desperate suicide by drowning, and the father's failure to distribute affection equally among his children. The episode involving little Xuyên-the child born from the father's relationship with the aunt - falling into the water, accompanied by the line "Water is inherently fair and generous; it refuses nothing and can embrace everything without discrimination," (Vo, Đ. K. 2023, p.13) creates a moment charged with fatalistic resonance, as if nature were restoring the balance that human beings had disrupted. Water-simultaneously a symbol of purification and punishment - emerges as an implicit emotional agent guiding the narrative, intensifying the distance between the father and the elder child. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this represents the repetition of trauma: a child burdened with the painful memory of a mother's death is cast into a similar tragedy, thereby generating an inescapable cycle of guilt, loss, and estrangement.

The short story *Against the Current (Ngược dòng)* further expands this aesthetics of trauma, this time focusing on the psychological inheritance of violence within the family. The young woman Bén grows up in a household where the father embodies the familiar figure of the rural man trapped in alcoholism: beating his wife, smashing household objects, and instilling constant fear among family members. She believes that leaving her family behind will bring liberation, that love and marriage will open a new chapter in her life. Yet on her wedding day she discovers her husband drunk, sprawled on the wooden floor - an exact replication of the image of her father. That moment is not merely one of disappointment; it marks the painful realization that individuals often carry with them the shadows of their own families, reproducing the very patterns they once despised. Through a restrained yet incisive narrative style, Võ Đăng Khoa exposes a difficult truth faced by many rural families today: trauma within the family does not end with a single generation. Rather, it persists, permeates deeply, and silently reappears through the unconscious behaviors of individuals.

In *Under the Tiled Roof (Dưới mái ngói)*, Võ Đăng Khoa shifts his focus to more subtle conflicts-fractures that are not overtly dramatic yet remain haunting in the long term within the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Here, the tragedy does not erupt through arguments or explicit confrontation; rather, it resides in the mother-in-law's persistent sense of dissatisfaction and the daughter-in-law's care performed largely out of obligation. One of the most psychologically resonant moments occurs when the daughter-in-law does not step forward to embrace her mother-in-law on the latter's final night. This

seemingly simple action acquires significant symbolic value, reflecting the author's method of exploring the quiet but persistent impulses within familial relationships. The daughter-in-law attends to her mother-in-law out of duty and social propriety, yet genuine affection is absent. This reveals a bifurcated emotional structure -simultaneously attached and distant, compliant yet resentful - characteristic of many kinship relations in Vietnamese cultural life. When the mother-in-law longs for a gesture of intimacy but is met instead with silence, the moment becomes the embodiment of repressed emotional drives: fatigue, insecurity, suppressed resentment, and long-accumulated unconscious pressures that remain unspoken. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this episode represents not merely an act of avoidance but a manifestation of a complex defense mechanism, in which dutiful compliance conceals latent dissatisfaction, while the refusal of intimacy indirectly expresses unresolved internal conflicts.

The following morning, when the daughter-in-law learns of her mother-in-law's passing, she stands motionless, overwhelmed by a mixture of sorrow, self-reproach, and regret. This moment marks the emergence of guilt and a divided awareness, simultaneously revealing the deep psychological residues accumulated through family relationships. Through such details, Võ Đăng Khoa depicts the family as a space in which trauma operates silently - where seemingly minor actions may trigger enduring psychological reverberations and profoundly shape the inner development of characters. In this way, the author not only reflects social reality but also performs a kind of psychological dissection, demonstrating literature's capacity to construct complex and enduring emotional experiences within the inner lives of fictional figures.

These three stories, along with many others in *Flying Camel*, reveal how Võ Đăng Khoa probes the micro-traumas embedded within contemporary Vietnamese families: the lack of communication, the repetition of pain across generations, the quiet fractures within blood relations, and the emotional voids for which no one possesses adequate language. He writes about familiar themes but through a renewed perspective: the family is no longer an unquestioned refuge but rather a space of spiritual trauma, where individuals are at once victims and unconscious transmitters of that trauma to others. Through this approach, Võ Đăng Khoa places the family at the center of modern sensibility, where literature does not merely depict external reality but delves into the hidden movements of the psyche, dissecting the deepest complexes of the postmodern individual searching for a sense of self.

Thus, reading *Flying Camel*, one encounters an artistic space that is at once familiar and estranging. It is familiar in its rural settings - fields, tiled houses, rivers thick with silt - yet strange in its coldly lucid gaze at those aspects often concealed behind the moral façade of family life. Võ Đăng Khoa does not write through direct realist description. Instead, he favors a restrained mode of narration - sparing in words yet abundant in silences - suggesting more than he explicitly states, leaving behind lingering echoes that invite readers into reflection.

It is important to emphasize that Võ Đăng Khoa does not approach the family merely as a social theme; rather, he treats it as a psychological structure. In his fictional world, the family is not only the place where human beings are born but also the matrix that determines how they love, fear, suffer, and ultimately grow. Children in his stories often become the central figures of vulnerability - figures who perceive the world through smoke-tinted eyes, haunted by fears whose origins they cannot fully grasp: "I could only sit there quietly, clasping my head between my bony knees, not daring to cry aloud" *(The Mirror*) (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.103). These same children, once grown, often repeat the unconscious behaviors of their parents, caught within a psychological vortex from which escape appears almost impossible.

4.3. Human Predicament and the Paradoxes of Life in *Flying Camel*

Another salient dimension of *Flying Camel* lies in the way Võ Đăng Khoa penetrates the vortex of human destiny, where seemingly minor lives contain stories that open onto broader reflections on prejudice, inequality, labor migration, and the gradual erosion of the very idea of happiness. In the short story At the *Edge of the Sandbank (Cuối bãi)*, the character Diện - a woman who has previously been married - becomes the focal point of tensions between tradition and personal aspiration. Diện is older than Phước, a fact sufficient for Phước's mother to oppose their relationship, even though in that desolate and quiet village, Diện is the only person with whom Phước can converse. Their love is obstructed not by personal mistakes or dramatic conflicts but by the static prejudices of rural life, where differences in age or the stigma of having "already been married once and unable to bear children" become criteria for measuring a woman's worth. The narrative therefore carries a tone of quiet melancholy. The village truly "comes alive" only during the Lunar New Year, when migrant workers return from industrial zones such as Bình Dương and Ho Chi Minh City. Diện's small drink stall at the end of the sandbank becomes a modest stage where laborers display their hard-earned savings and pieces of gold jewelry as a means of affirming their self-worth. Within a few brief pages, Võ Đăng Khoa constructs a bitterly realistic portrait of migrant labor. These workers leave their hometowns in search of a better life, only to gain fleeting pride in modest material tokens, while the countryside itself remains desolate, aging, and devoid of vitality. Diện's decision to leave for factory work after the New Year, accompanied quietly by Phước, opens an ending that is at once ambiguous and sorrowful. Where will their future lead them? Will love be strong enough to overcome social prejudice? Or will they, like so many

others, be swept into the endless vortex of survival? The author offers no answer, for it is precisely this lack of resolution that defines human destiny: the enduring uncertainty of choices that possess no definitive solution.

If *At the Edge of the Sandbank (Cuối bãi)* exposes the sorrow of social prejudice and migration, the story *Following the Flock (Theo bầy)* reveals another layer of human vulnerability - the wandering existence and rootless fate of itinerant duck-herding families. These individuals drift from place to place, living among flooded fields and alluvial sandbanks, carrying the same precariousness as the flocks they herd. Võ Đăng Khoa brings to light a social reality seldom addressed in literature: within such communities, women are often bound to a nearly predetermined fate - subjected to violence, dependency, and objectification. This reality is expressed in the remark of Aunt Còn: "Out of ten duck herders, nine are just like that." Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.87). The character Bảy Chó, a brutal and abusive man, is merely an extreme manifestation of a broader structure of normalized violence. The woman who remains with him does not stay out of love but out of a profound sense of inferiority: she sees herself as "a barren duck, unable to lay even a single egg for life." (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.91). This sense of inadequacy compels her to accept violence as an inevitable component of her fate. The line "The white ducks and the dyed ducks are clearly different. How could she run after his flock and pretend it was a mistake?" (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.90) becomes a powerful metaphor for the boundaries of destiny. Each person is born into a different "flock," into a different set of circumstances, and not everyone possesses the freedom to cross those boundaries in pursuit of happiness. The symbol of the duck flock - an image deeply rooted in the cultural landscape of Southern Vietnam - thus transforms under Võ Đăng Khoa's pen into a mirror reflecting human tragedy. Like ducks marked and classified from the moment they hatch, individuals carry with them the coded imprint of fate, a destiny that appears almost impossible to alter.

The short story *Casting the Bait (Thả mồi)* continues this line of reflection through a family tragedy imbued with philosophical depth. An elderly schoolteacher, who has lived a life of strict moral discipline, finds himself trapped within an incomplete and conflicted love for his wayward son. The son, driven by greed, falls into wrongdoing. The father, however - who fully understands the virtues of patience and moral integrity - remains utterly soft-hearted toward him. The tragedy of the story does not lie primarily in the son's moral downfall, but rather in an unspoken question: who is truly at fault? The father cannot repair the "leaking places of the house," just as he cannot mend the fractures of fate itself. The son, caught in the turbulent currents of modern life, may not yet have matured enough to understand the difference between patience and recklessness. Võ Đăng Khoa situates his characters within a moral labyrinth where no absolute right or wrong exists, and where the tension between affection and responsibility inevitably leads to unforeseen consequences. Casting the Bait, therefore, functions as a metaphor for human existence: we cast the bait of hope onto the waters of destiny, yet we can never know what will take the hook. The lesson suggested by Võ Đăng Khoa is not delivered through explicit moralizing but through the quiet resonance of pain - that human beings are sometimes powerless to save those they love from the destinies they have chosen for themselves. Such helplessness, rather than guilt or severity, becomes the deepest tragedy of human life.

Viewed as a whole, stories such as *At the Edge of the Bank (Cuối bãi)*, *Following the Flock (Theo bầy)*, and *Casting the Bait (Thả mồi)* demonstrate that Võ Đăng Khoa expands his artistic world beyond themes of environment, ecology, and family to reach the deeper strata of the human condition: loneliness within prejudice, quiet endurance within labor, uncertainty at the crossroads of life, and the failure of reason before the force of love. The human condition in Võ Đăng Khoa's fiction is not embodied in grand tragedies but in the weary oscillation of small lives - people without a voice, without real choices, and sometimes even without dreams. From this perspective, *Flying Camel* possesses a quiet yet enduring humanistic quality. Literature here is not merely a mirror reflecting reality but also a small light that enables readers to perceive those lives that remain obscured beneath the shadows of modern existence. Within this space, the hidden corners of human destiny are discovered and rendered with naturalness and compassion. Contemporary literature thus opens new possibilities of reception - new horizons of belief and hope within the unfolding narrative of human life. Võ Đăng Khoa appears to grasp this dynamic intuitively in his writing, shaping his characters with subtlety from the outset. To recognize the paradoxes and injustices of fate, in this sense, is also to approach the very essence of life itself - an endeavor that a young writer like Võ Đăng Khoa has already begun to pursue with remarkable sensitivity.

4.4. Postmodern Sensibility and the Poetics of the Short Story in *Flying Camel*

The postmodern signal in *Flying Camel* does not manifest primarily through the disruption of narrative structure but rather through the dismantling of illusions: the illusion of the intact family *(Watching the Water, Under the Tiled Roof, At the Edge of the Bank)*, the illusion of enduring love *(Leaving Bình Đa, Following the Flock)*, the illusion that human beings can control nature *(Flying Camel, The Earth in Bloom)*, and the illusion that rationality ultimately guides human life *(Against the Current, Casting the Bait, The Mirror)*. The short stories in the collection resemble fragments of life - non-linear, incomplete, and not arranged according to a fixed thematic logic. Instead, they unfold through an open, multidirectional structure that invites reflection. This narrative

orientation resonates closely with the theoretical propositions of Jean François Lyotard regarding the "end of grand narratives" and the ascendancy of petits récits - small, fragmented stories grounded in individual experience. If *Flying Camel* is read as a psychological and social tableau, one encounters the convergence of multiple emotional strata: ecological anxiety, the unease brought about by urbanization, fractures within the family, the wounds of memory, and a pervasive uncertainty about the future. The deployment of magical and parodic elements is not merely a stylistic device for novelty but a means of opening up a field of collective haunting. Many of Võ Đăng Khoa's stories subtly evoke the spirit of existential philosophy, with its questioning of the meaning of life, of human presence, and of the cost one must pay to exist within a world of relentless transformation. Yet unlike the often bleak tonality associated with certain existentialist writers, his prose retains a gentler register, punctuated by fleeting moments of illumination - fragile rays of light that nevertheless persist as possibilities of redemption. The narratives in the collection rarely revolve around dramatic events. Instead, they resemble psychological cross-sections, presented through the perspective of young characters - children not yet mature enough to comprehend the world in its entirety, yet sensitive enough to perceive the fractures unfolding around them. In these stories, childhood is not depicted as a purely innocent or radiant domain, as it often appears in other literary representations. Rather, it emerges as a landscape both beautiful and shadowed, where spiritual wounds remain concealed beneath an outward layer of innocence, and where every game, every memory, carries the latent possibility of trauma.

From the standpoint of short-story poetics, Võ Đăng Khoa demonstrates remarkable subtlety in his integration of social realism with symbolic elements of the fantastic. The fantastic here does not function as an escape from reality; rather, it becomes an aesthetic strategy through which characters confront their fears and shield a wounded sense of self. One might surmise that the discipline of the author's professional life has cultivated in him a certain composure - a reflective gaze and a patient attentiveness necessary for perceiving the nuances of existence. There is a sense that Võ Đăng Khoa holds in his hands a delicate scale, carefully measuring and blending the proportions of the real and the surreal in his vision of life. His is a gaze trained to observe from both shores of reality. For this reason, his narrative stance often appears calm and balanced. He resists the temptation to lean entirely toward either side, recognizing that in lived reality each perspective carries its own validity. In this sense, *Flying Camel* becomes a literary space where the unconscious is clothed in form and language, where the inner world is projected outward as aesthetic symbols, and where the hidden dimensions of human experience attempt to narrate themselves through oblique and artfully mediated pathways.

Another noteworthy aspect of the collection is its rhythmically charged and highly visual narrative language. Võ Đăng Khoa's prose possesses an internal cadence in which long and short sentences interweave: at times soaring like a symphonic surge of associations, at other times brief and incisive like a sudden cut. For instance: "The nights were as long as days that had already died" *(Watching the Water)* (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.12). Or: "The earth simply let human beings be, continuing to grow at will. Without hesitation, secrecy, or restraint, it displayed itself beneath the sun. The old man next door said that in all his life he had never seen the earth give birth like this, and now he worried whether his future grave would still lie in the right place." *(The Earth in Bloom)*. (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.31). His language is rich in visual suggestiveness, evoking color, light, and contour. Consider the description: "Father carved the shape of his own body into something as rough and jagged as possible, as if casting himself into a lifeless statue radiating coldness from deep within the stone." *(Watching the Water)*. (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.12). Or another passage: "Diện watched those who had left their homeland with envy. She felt as though the light covering their bodies made her own hands drier, darker, and rougher with calluses. It was as if, each year they returned, they grew brighter, while Diện herself darkened with a denser shade." *(At the Edge of the Bank)* (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, p.18). In *Flying Camel*, landscapes are not merely described; they seem to be painted with delicate brushstrokes, vibrating with emotional resonance. Võ Đăng Khoa possesses a distinctive ability to render emotional states through evocative imagery - images that are often simultaneously beautiful and abrasive. His sentences sometimes appear short and sharp, condensed with intensity; at other times they extend fluidly like streams of consciousness. This stylistic oscillation creates a unique emotional rhythm for each story, enabling readers not only to follow the narrative but also to sense the subtle movements of the characters' inner worlds. In many passages, Võ Đăng Khoa's language approaches the register of poetry - concise, musical, and punctuated by silences. Consider lines such as: "No matter how much the earth gives birth, it remains earth; when human beings reflect too much, they begin to lose their humanity," or "I do not know where the earth will take me before drawing me deep into its core" *(The Earth in Bloom)* (Vo, Đ. K, 2023, pp.36-37). It is precisely these moments of silence that allow readers to pause and reflect, to recognize that the story resides not only in what is narrated but also in those experiences that language itself can never fully articulate.

V. DISCUSSION

Through the issues examined above, this study contributes to expanding the possibilities for applying interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to the study of contemporary Vietnamese prose. The integration of memory studies, trauma studies,

psychoanalysis, and eco-criticism is not merely a matter of theoretical application; it also demonstrates the compatibility of these approaches when reading literary texts shaped by post-rural and post-traditional lifeworlds. In this regard, the study affirms that contemporary young Vietnamese prose can serve as a legitimate object for theoretical interpretations that have often been developed within Western contexts.

At the same time, the article proposes and clarifies the notion of an "aesthetics of memory and trauma" as a viable interpretive approach to contemporary prose. Within this framework, memory is understood not merely as narrative material but as an aesthetic structure that shapes the organization of the text. Trauma, likewise, functions not only as thematic content but also as a narrative principle, manifesting itself through fragmentation, repetition, and silence. Such a conceptualization contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on trauma literature in the context of Vietnamese writing, where traumatic experiences often appear in micro-level, familial, and everyday forms, rather than in the form of large-scale historical catastrophes. Furthermore, the study contributes to a reconceptualization of the family as a psychological–discursive structure, rather than solely a social or moral institution. Through the analysis of several stories, the family emerges as a "field of intergenerational trauma," where patterns of behavior, emotional responses, and psychological wounds are transmitted and reenacted across generations. This perspective expands the study of family representation in Vietnamese literature from a predominantly social-realist framework toward a psycho-cultural orientation. By examining symbolic configurations in the stories, the article also advances a mode of literary reading grounded in an integrated ecological - humanistic perspective, in which environmental crisis and the crisis of human relationships are understood as two aspects of the same process. Such an approach broadens the scope of eco-criticism beyond the domain of nature toward the analysis of social ecology and emotional ecology.

Finally, the study contributes on the level of poetics by identifying the interplay of defamiliarization, magical elements, parody, and rhythmically rich narrative language as characteristic expressive strategies of young contemporary prose. On this basis, the article suggests the possibility of developing a theoretical framework for a "poetics of modern sensibility" in Vietnamese literature - one in which literary texts do not merely reflect reality but actively reorganize lived experience through emotional and symbolic structures. Taken as a whole, the significance of the study lies not only in the application of existing theories but also in the effort to adapt, localize, and connect these theoretical frameworks with the specific realities of Vietnamese literature, thereby opening new avenues for the study of contemporary prose.

VI. CONCLUSION

The stories of Võ Đăng Khoa revolve around the lives of people in the Mekong Delta, yet his writing increasingly demonstrates a conscious effort to delve deeper than the narrative modes commonly associated with earlier generations of writers. His work reveals additional dimensions of human existence - dimensions that often appear so ordinary that they seem hardly worthy of reflection or literary representation. What emerges is a keenly observant eye, a sharp mode of thinking, and a certain confidence in approaching subjects that are not necessarily new, yet renewing them by inscribing his own distinctive marks upon them. Such an endeavor requires constant reading, attentive observation, and continuous self-reflection in order to step beyond the shadow of previous literary generations. In several stories, Võ Đăng Khoa's narratives occasionally appear somewhat diffuse, as if the author were eager to incorporate too many elements into a single text. Yet upon closer consideration, these narrative fragments resemble clusters of water hyacinths drifting across the waterways of the southern provinces: each patch seems separate, even repetitive, but in fact carries its own small blossoms. The effect is not one of criticism but rather of familiarity and warmth. His stories thus resemble strands of floating hyacinths gliding along the rivers of the Mekong Delta - unhurried, quiet, and suffused with a lingering melancholy. With *Flying Camel*, Võ Đăng Khoa has arguably created a distinctive mark for the new generation of Vietnamese writers. His narrative voice bears the qualities of water itself - supple in movement yet capable of cutting deeply into the very marrow. The waters of the delta may appear familiar, even ancient, yet each flood season brings fresh sediment from upstream, enriching the currents with new layers of alluvium. For this reason, reading Võ Đăng Khoa evokes both a sense of familiarity and a renewed appreciation of the cultural flavor of the Mekong Delta, while simultaneously satisfying the aesthetic expectations of contemporary literary readers.

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