



Photo Sóng Việt Đàm Giang

## **Hàn Mặc Tử: The Period of Suffering (1936-1938)**

**by Thomas D. Le**

### **Hàn Mặc Tử's Life (1912-1940)**

Born Nguyễn Trọng Trí on 22 September 1912 at Đồng Hới, Quảng Bình Province, Hàn Mặc Tử (a pen name he adopted later in his literary career) descended from a Phạm clan native of Thanh Hoá, who had taken refuge from persecution in Huế, Thừa Thiên Province. Here the patriarch Phạm Bội changed his surname to Nguyễn and had a son named Nguyễn Văn Toàn, who married Nguyễn Thị Duy, daughter of a renowned physician under the reign of King Tự Đức. Together the couple had eight children, of whom Nguyễn Trọng Trí was the fourth.

As a Customs official, Nguyễn Văn Toàn took his family with him to the many localities where he was stationed until his death at Huế in 1926. Thus during his father's career Hàn received his elementary education in towns with names like Sa Kỳ, Qui Nhơn, and Bồng Sơn. After his father's death Hàn's mother settled down in Qui Nhơn. In 1928 he attended Pellerin High School in Huế, but had to return to Qui Nhơn in 1930. Back home he started writing poetry, mainly in the traditional Đường (T'ang) style and soon mastered his craft so thoroughly he won first prize in a local poetry competition. His Đường style poems, written under the pseudonym Phong Trần at a tender age, caught the attention of the respected scholar-patriot Phan Bội Châu, who started a literary relationship with Hàn as an equal.

Hàn's first love in 1932, when he was employed by the Land Survey Office, was Hoàng Thị Kim Cúc, a native of Huế, who became better known as Hoàng Cúc.

In 1935, heeding the clarion call to adventure and opportunity, Hàn Mặc Tử left Qui Nhơn for Saigon to join its burgeoning newspaper publishing industry. Dailies, weeklies, magazines, and periodicals of all stripes appeared and reappeared vying for readership. Accounts varied about his success in this effervescent and vibrant city. However, it is known that after a brief period he found work as a proofreader at and contributed to the literary section of the *Saigon* daily. To supplement his income, he had to write for several newspapers.



*Hàn Mặc Tử*

While working in Saigon Hàn fell in love with Mộng Cầm, his greatest love and a native of Quảng Ngãi, who at the time resided in Phan Thiết. Almost weekly he commuted to spend time with her on one of the most scenic beaches and coastal plains in Central Vietnam. This is probably the happiest time of his life. But it was not to last.

In mid-1936, having realized that he had come down with some sort of unknown skin problem, Hàn Mặc Tử left Saigon to return to his home in Qui Nhơn for treatment. Staying away from Mộng Cầm, he later found out she had deserted him upon hearing of his disease. Here he underwent ill-considered

treatment by herbal doctors, who prescribed snake venom. Story has it that since at first he felt better, he took overdoses of the poison in hopes of hastening the cure so he could return to work in Saigon. But they only contributed to his disintegration. It is during this very difficult period that, barely twenty-four years old and in the prime of youth, the poet faced his mortality instead of life. Later diagnosed as leprosy, this fearful but not fatal illness sent him into isolation both for treatment and for the protection of others who might come in contact with him. A faithful cousin, Phạm Hành, was given the tasks of bringing him food and running errands right up to his death on 11 November 1940. Though Hàn continued to receive local friends and a female admirer, Mai Đình, who, after reading his poetry, receiving his first collection *Gái Quê* (Rural Girls), and falling in love with the poet, brought him sporadic but selfless help and companionship in 1939, he spent most of his time writing, reading, and corresponding with other friends while mulling over the fragility of his own life.

### **The Period of Suffering (1936-1938)**

The Period of Suffering was nevertheless a very productive one. Though his disease deprived him of all hope for a normal life, instead of falling into inertia or self-pity, he used his prodigious imagination, artistry, and will to survive to compose some of the most memorable verse in Vietnamese literature. Much of his legacy was fashioned while he suffered the most from his physical condition and let his genius and mind take him where they would. And take him they did, into the realms of the unconscious, the dream, and the phantasma, from which bizarre images and fantastic associations; feelings of despair, love, hope, fear, anger; and strange thoughts emerged side by side in a surreal world not always governed by reason, logic, or nature's laws.

During the last phase of his life, called the Period of Reconciliation (1938-1940), two events occurred that thrust into Hàn's life two women whom he had never met. In 1938, the poet Bích Khê in a visit to Hàn in Qui Nhơn mentioned that his own sister Ngọc Sương loved Hàn's poetry, hoping thereby to bring some relief to his loneliness during sequestration. Hàn was moved enough to write: “*I write the word Ngọc on the banana leaf/Sương lives in the wind-swept moon palace/My love never jells no matter how stirred up/I feel angry and bite my lips.*” Early in 1940, a writer-friend Trần Thanh Địch tried to alleviate his pain and suffering by writing him love letters and claiming they were coming from an unidentified admirer, Trần Thương Thương (the name of Trần's own niece). In reality, being only twelve at the time, Thương Thương never was an admirer. Yet the ruse lifted Hàn's spirit sufficiently to help him come to terms with his then incurable illness, reconcile with his fate, and gain some inner peace. As a result, in just six months, he created sunnier works, *Cắm Châu Duyên* (Brocade and Pearl, formerly called *Thương Thương*), in which appear two plays *Duyên Kỳ Ngộ* (Marvelous Encounter, 1939) and *Quần Tiên Hội* (Assembly of Immortals, 1940). These last oeuvres were characterized by visions of the marvelous and other-worldly fancy. To Hàn, the Thương Thương of his dream represented love, platonic and pure. These last works are the crowning achievement of the Period of Reconciliation (1938-1940).

His poetry in the suffering stage is the cry of a desperate and hypersensitive soul, who from the bottom of the precipice of physical agony tries to claw its way back toward the rim, where the light of life shines. Hemmed in and gradually destroyed by physical decay and mental anguish, Hàn nevertheless held fast to the last remaining thread of existence. His women had gradually drifted away, Hoàng Cúc, Mộng Cầm, Mai Đình, including the imaginary admirers Ngọc Sương and Thương Thương.

Hàn tells us how with his creative mind he was living life with utmost intensity while reaching paroxysms of torment. “I have lived furiously and completely, with all my heart, my lungs, my blood, my tears, my soul. I have experienced to the utmost the emotion of love. I have felt joy, sorrow, anger up to the limit of death.” And, “When my pen has absorbed powerful and lofty thoughts, conveyed through waves from my mind, I then spread on a clean sheet of paper feelings that are red hot, overflowing with fragrance.” Elsewhere, he says, “I make poetry? That is I press a note, pluck a string, shake a ray of light. In short, I am powerless! I am seduced, I betray everything that my heart, my blood, and my soul hold as their secret. That is, I have lost my mind, I have become insane. She [my pain, author's addition] beats me so hard, I burst into tears, moans, howls.” This creative mind in anguish and distress finds its outlet in poetry, “crazy” poetry, as some say. One is tempted to think of Baudelaire, whom Hàn read and knew well. But he owed nothing to the French poet and disagreed with him on the notion of art. Neither did he owe anything to André Breton, the surrealist mastermind. Hàn's style is unique, his visions and thoughts shaped by his personal struggle with a dreaded disease, which to the Catholic Francis (name given him at baptism) Hàn must have meant Purgatory, to which he was condemned before reconciliation with God at death.

Hàn's artistic creativity goes through an evolutionary process that allows for classification of his works into periods. The first part of his life is known as the Period of Tranquility, which lasts until the onset of leprosy in 1936. Starting out at age fourteen as a traditionalist he wrote poems in the Đường (T'ang) style under the pseudonym Phong Trần. Masterfully wrought by his sure-handed command of the style, his poems were so much appreciated by the revered scholar-patriot Phan Bội Châu, who at first had no idea who he was, that the scholar wrote responses to his poems. This cross-generational relationship tells us much about the budding genius, who, though taken away prematurely, was to

bequeath an unprecedented poetic legacy. He was such a virtuoso that one of his poems of this period still stands unique in structure and ingenuity. It could be read in six different ways: normally, forward from left to right and top to bottom; inversely, backward from right to left and top to bottom; normally with the first two words truncated; inversely with the first two words truncated; normally with the last two words truncated; inversely with the last two words truncated. All readings make sense while retaining the prescribed balance and rhyme scheme. Barring monosyllabicity wedded to the rigid Đường style, it is impossible to replicate this feat in any other way. Although it is possible to offer six different renditions of the poem, I will for now not attempt a translation for fear of emasculating its spirit. Here it is, all of its eight original heptameters :

*Hoa cười nguyệt rọi cửa lòng gương  
 Lạ cảnh buồn tham nợ vẫn vương  
 Tha thướt liễu in hồ gợn bóng  
 Hững hờ mai thoảng gió đưa hương  
 Xa người nhớ cảnh tình lai láng  
 Vắng bạn ngàn thơ rượu bẽ bàng  
 Qua lại yển ngàn dâu ủ lá  
 Hoa dàn sẵn có để bên tường*

In the remaining stages of the evolution of his art, we see it maturing but never declining. As a young man, Hàn passed through a period of romantic musings that crystallized in his first published work *Gái Quê* (Rural Girls, 1936). His romantic bent, however, surfaces now and again throughout his career. Then came his disease, isolation, and pain and torment. Described in this writing at some depth, this period seals his fame for posterity. We can feel the intensity of his excruciating pain and torture in the poems conveyed through extreme expressions. His grotesque visions, strong emotions, outlandish images, and bizarre associations never fail to shock, horrify, or charm. It is in this style that symbolist and surrealist elements make their most powerful impact. Finally in the last phase, when his physical condition deteriorated beyond recovery, he reached a reconciliation with fate, regained with resignation a measure of serenity, and found sufficient peace to fashion his swan song. This stage is dominated by escape from this world to a cheerier and more fanciful realm of existence. He left his last play unfinished.

In the present selection, we focus on the works produced during the Period of Suffering, which are referred to as crazy poetry. We must tread with caution about this characterization, however. This poetry, instead of being insane and devoid of sense, is sometimes quite realistic and shocking, but also goes beyond the normal domain of reality to reach the province of the impossible where incompatible and incongruous elements come together in ways that baffle, mystify, and intrigue as well as run chills down our spines. These elements, i.e., his thoughts, images, and associations, which are disjointed, piled on willy-nilly, jostled, and bent tenaciously on claiming our sanity or understanding, are cooked up under pressure by a tortured body, an anguished mind, a yearning soul, a lustful heart, and a runaway poetic sensibility. Hàn's artistry thus bears his unique hallmark. In reading these extreme expressions of strong feelings and weird associations, we feel entranced and carried away into a parallel universe where Han's visions might just actually exist. We tend to think they exist in his mind! It is this parallel universe that holds the secret of his poetry's power and impact. For some ineffable reason, we feel drawn to his poignant dream world by its bewitchingly fictional (or extrasensory?) quality. Though we may be at times frightened by its excesses,

we like to explore the nooks and crannies of Hàn's mind as it uncovers itself quaintly, uncannily, horridly, and frightfully.

The first three poems show Hàn as the romantic poet, endowed with a bold and engaging imagination that animates a young man still full of virile and at times lustful energy. Later pieces lead the reader to another world altogether. This is the extraordinary world of the mysterious, the fantastic, and the surreal. When Hàn is not the symbolist or the surrealist, he is charmingly romantic. Even when his thoughts border on the phantasmal, his feelings are humanly touching, profound and genuine.

### Bẽn Lẽn

Trăng nằm sóng soài trên cành liễu,  
Đợi gió đông về để lả lơi,  
Hoa lá ngây tình không muốn động.  
Lòng em hồi hộp, chị Hằng ơi !

Trong khóm vi lau rào rạt mãi...  
Tiếng lòng ai nói? Sao im đi?  
Ô kia, bóng nguyệt trần truồng tắm  
Lộ cái khuôn vàng dưới đáy khe.

Vô tình để gió hôn lên má,  
Bẽn lẽn làm sao lúc nửa đêm,  
Em sợ lang quân em biết được,  
Nghĩ ngờ tới cái tiết trinh em.

Hàn Mặc Tử

### Đà Lạt trăng mờ

Đây phút thiêng liêng đã khởi đầu  
Trời mơ trong cảnh thực huyền mơ!  
Trăng sao đắm đuối trong sương nhạt  
Như đón từ xa một ý thơ.

Ai hãy làm thinh chớ nói nhiều,  
Để nghe dưới đáy nước hồ reo,  
Để nghe tơ liễu rung trong gió,  
Và để xem người giải nghĩa yêu.

Hàng thông lấp loáng đứng trong im

### Bashful

Upon the willow branch there sprawls the moon  
Waiting to flirt with rushing wintry wind.  
Entranced, flowers and leaves lie in a swoon.  
Within, my heart flutters, O Sister Moon!

Among the reeds rustling without letup  
Whose heart's voices rise up? Then why die  
down?  
Behold! Moonlight lies naked in her bath;  
Her gold figure reflects upon the riverbed.

Unguarded I let wind kiss on the cheek,  
Then feel ashamed amidst the midnight gloom,  
Afraid my man might catch me in the act  
And then just might question my chastity.

Translated by Thomas D, Le  
29 February 2008

### Dalat in Dim Moon

The sacred moment has now arrived,  
Dreamy sky over a dreamy landscape!  
The moon and stars enshrouded in light mist  
To welcome home a distant poetic thought.

Pray be silent and say few words.  
Just listen to the lake bed's outbursts,  
To the lithe willow's shiver in the wind,  
And to discourses on meanings of love.

The shimmering pines stand in deep silence,

Cành lá in như đã lặng chìm.  
Hư thực làm sao phân biệt được!  
Sông Ngân hà nổi giữa màn đêm.

Cả trời say nhuộm một màu trắng,  
Và cả lòng tôi chẳng nói rằng.  
Không một tiếng gì nghe động chạm,  
Dẫu là tiếng vỡ của sao băng...

### Mùa xuân chín

Trong làn nắng ửng: khói mơ tan,  
Đôi mái nhà tranh lấm tấm vàng.  
Sột soạt gió trêu tà áo biếc,  
Trên giàn thiên lý. Bóng xuân sang.

Sóng cỏ xanh tươi gợn tới trời.  
Bao cô thôn nữ hát trên đồi.  
Ngày mai trong đám xuân xanh ấy,  
Có kẻ theo chồng bỏ cuộc chơi.

Tiếng ca vẳng vèo lưng chừng núi,  
Hồn hển như lời của nước mây,  
Thầm thì với ai ngồi dưới trúc  
Nghe ra ý vị và thơ ngây.

Khách xa gặp lúc mùa xuân chín,  
Lòng trí băng khuâng sực nhớ làng:  
“Chị ấy năm nay còn gánh thóc  
Dọc bờ sông trắng nắng chang chang?”

Their limbs and leaves dissolved in void.  
Can the real and unreal be told apart  
With Milky Way lighting up the night sky?

The tipsy sky is dyed a moonlight tint.  
My whole heart speaks not a single word.  
Utter silence reigns in a quiet world,  
Not even the  
swish of a  
shooting star.

Translated by  
Thomas D. Le  
29 February  
2008



### Ripe Springtime

The ruddy sun disperses all the smoke;  
A few thatch huts bask in the sun-splashed gold.  
Rustling the wind flirts with the azure cloak,  
Upon the vine trellis springtime unfolds.

The lush grass waves flee to the horizon.  
Groups of farm girls sing lays upon the hills.  
Morrow some of this crowd of nubile maids  
Follow their men leaving behind their plays.

The songs hang round the mountain sides,  
Panting just like the breath of clouds.  
Under the thick bamboo someone whispers  
Words full of wit and innocence.

The visitor chances upon the ripe springtime,  
His tender heart turns sudden on the village life:  
“This year, is that fair maiden still carrying rice  
Along the white riverbank in the burning sun?”

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
2 March 2008

## The Moon as the Ultimate Motif

The single most important motif in Hàn Mặc Tử's verse is the moon. It occupies about a third of the poems written during the Period of Suffering, in which he lived in fear of his disease and isolated himself. But the world of sequestration, largely one of pain and torment, gives him visions of imaginary existences.

The moon becomes to him more than a romantic figure capable of exciting love and lust. It is a protean creature of his febrile imagination that he cherishes, plays with, sleeps with, swallows in, drinks in, spits out, prays for, is drunk with. The moon is white, yellow, bright, dull, all-present. It is dry, fragrant, diaphanous, flirtatious. The moon morphs into water, is a beauty, becomes Han himself or his beloved, and gets entangled in the trees. As a human, the moon enjoys or suffers all the emotions a human has. The moon has substance, essence, and existence. But it can also have no substance. And most of all the moon possesses all of the above attributes at the same time, an ability that sets Han's moon apart from the moon of other poets.

Contrary to what one might think of a young man afflicted by an intractable illness, Hàn is far from being defeated. His moon poems and all the other weird poems of the Period of Suffering testify to a poet in full control of his creative élan. Nowhere can one see a trace of morbidity or self-pity in his arresting verse. With verve and abandon, Hàn seems to thrive on shocking images and wild associations. He cavorts with the moon, everywhere it can be seen, in the sky, on the forest floor, in the trees, in the river, in a pool. He hugs, chases, challenges, and threatens the moon. He gets drunk with moon as the moon liquefies and collects in a pool. In short, to Hàn, the moon is not some distant, unreachable beauty queen, but an almost flesh-and-blood girl with substance that is in constant flux. The moon's changing shape fits the poet's changing mood and inspiration just fine.

Hàn goes with the moon where no others dare to tread. His bold images made from sense-data of various senses challenge our imagination and leave us mystified. Yet we let him lead us into his bizarre world without protest, for somehow we trust his brain on fire to know what it is creating and to what limits his creations can go. We approve of the liberty he takes with the moon, just as he knows when taking such liberties that his creations live in a universe of their own.

<p><b>Anh điên</b></p> <p>Tặng Thúc Tề</p> <p>Anh nằm ngoài sự thực Em ngồi trong chiêm bao Cách xa nhau biết mấy Nhớ thương quá thì sao ? Anh nuốt phứt hàng chữ Anh cắn vỡ lời thơ Anh cắn, cắn cắn cắn</p>	<p><b>I Am Mad</b></p> <p>To Thúc Tề</p> <p>I dwell outside the truth; You sit within the dream. How far apart are we Now that we're in love so? This line of words I swallow, And bite open the verse, And I bite, bite, bite, bite</p>
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Hơi thở đứt làm tư!

Hàn Mặc Tử

### Trăng vàng trăng ngọc

Trăng! Trăng! Trăng! Là Trăng Trăng, Trăng!  
 Ai mua Trăng tôi bán trăng cho  
 Không bán đoàn viên, ước hẹn hò  
 Bao giờ đậu trạng vinh qui đã  
 Anh lại đây tôi thối chữ thơ.  
 Không, Không, Không! Tôi chẳng bán hòn Trăng  
 Tôi giả đồ chơi anh tưởng rằng  
 Tôi nói thiệt, là anh dại quá!  
 Trăng Vàng Trăng Ngọc bán sao đang?

Trăng! Trăng! Trăng! Là Trăng Trăng, Trăng!  
 Trăng sáng trăng sáng khắp mọi nơi  
 Tôi đang cầu nguyện cho trăng tôi  
 Tôi lần cho trăng một tràng chuỗi,  
 Trăng mới là trăng của Rạng Ngời  
 Trăng! Trăng! Trăng! Là Trăng Trăng, Trăng!

### Say trăng

Ta khạc hồn ra ngoài cửa miệng  
 Cho bay lên hí hửng với ngàn khơi  
 Ở trên kia, có một người  
 Ngồi bên sông Ngân giặt lụa chơi  
 Nước hóa thành trăng, trăng ra nước  
 Lụa là ướt đầm cả trăng thơm!  
 Người trăng ăn vận toàn trăng cả  
 Gò má riêng thôi lại đỏ hờm.  
 Ta hằng đưa tay choàng trăng đã  
 Mơ trăng ta lượm tơ trăng rơi  
 Trăng vương lên cành - lên mái tóc cô ơi  
 Hãy đứng yên tôi gỡ cho rồi cô đi!  
 Thong thả cô đi...

To break my breath in four!

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
 16 February 2008

### Moon of Gold, Moon of Jade

Moon! Moon! Moon! O Moon, Moon, Moon!  
 I'll sell the moon to the first comer.  
 I'll not sell reunion or trysting date.  
 Wait till you come home with a doctor's honors,  
 Then drop by so we'll talk scholars' learning.  
 No! No! No! I will never sell the moon orb.  
 You took my joke so seriously  
 I thought you must be dull!  
 Who's so heartless as to sell the moon of jade, the  
 moon of gold?

Moon! Moon! Moon! O Moon, Moon, Moon!  
 The moon is so bright everywhere;  
 And I am praying for my moon.  
 I count the beads in prayer.  
 The new moon is the moon of glory.  
 Moon! Moon! Moon! O Moon, Moon, Moon!

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
 12 April 2008

### Drunk with Moon

I spit my soul out of my mouth  
 To let it float with mirth in the universe.  
 Up above, there is a man  
 Sitting by the Milky Way to wash his silk.  
 The water morphs into moon, and the moon into  
 water;  
 The silk is soaked through with fragrant moon!  
 The moon's body is clothed entirely in moon;  
 Only her cheeks are scarlet red.  
 Let's stretch our arms to hug the moon.  
 Dreaming of moon I glean the silks of moon.  
 The moon gets caught in the boughs, in your hair  
 too, sweet.



Trăng tan ra bọt lấy gì tôi thương?  
 Tối nay trăng ở khắp phương  
 Thấy đều nao nức khóc nường vu qui  
 Say! Say lão đảo cả trời thơ  
 Gió rít tầng cao trăng ngã giữa  
 Vỡ tan thành vũng đọng vàng khô  
 Ta nằm trong vũng trăng đêm ấy  
 Sáng dậy điên cuồng mưa máu ra.

### Ngủ với trăng

Ta không nhấp rượu  
 Mà lòng ta say  
 Vì lòng nao nức muốn  
 Ghì lấy đám mây bay  
 Té ra ta vốn làm thi sĩ  
 Khát khao trăng gió mà không hay  
 Ta đi bắt nắng ngừng, nắng reo, nắng cháy,  
 Trên sóng càn, sóng áo cô gái má đỏ hây hây  
 Ta rình nghe niềm ý băng khuâng trong gió lảng  
 Với là hơi thở nồng nàn của tuổi thơ ngây  
 Gió nâng khúc hát lên cao vút  
 Văn thơ uốn éo lách rùng mây  
 Ta hiểu ta rồi, trong một phút  
 Lời tình chơi vơi giữa sương bay  
 Tiếng vàng rơi xuống giếng  
 Trăng vàng ôm bờ ao  
 Gió vàng đang xao xuyến  
 Áo vàng bởi chị chưa chồng đã mặc đi đêm  
 Theo tôi đến suối xa miền  
 Cõi thơ, cõi mộng, cõi niềm yêu đương  
 Mây trôi lơ lửng trên dòng nước  
 Đôi tay vốc uống quên lạnh lòng  
 Ngả nghiêng đôi cao bọc trăng ngủ  
 Đầy mình lổm đổm những hào quang.

Hold it, let me untangle you and set you free!  
 Slowly you move away...  
 With moon breaking into foam what have I left to  
 love?  
 Tonight the moon is everywhere.  
 Everyone weeps for the bride who's following her  
 groom home.  
 Drunk! So drunk I upend the verse-filled sky.  
 As wind whistles from its heights; the moon tips  
 over  
 Breaking into pools yellow and dry.  
 I lie in one of those pools of moon  
 And rise insane to spurt blood in the morn.

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
 12 April 2008

### Sleep with the Moon

Though not touching a drop of wine,  
 My inner self is drunk,  
 For I am dying with desire  
 To clutch the flying clouds.  
 So I am really made to be a poet  
 Fated to thirst unknowingly for moon and wind.  
 I force the sun to stop shining, singing, burning,  
 On the waving limb, on the ruddy-cheeked girl's  
 dress.  
 I eavesdrop on the anxious wind-scattered thoughts  
 Like the hot breath of the innocent age.  
 The wind lifts up the songs skyward  
 And sends the rhyme wafting toward a forest of  
 clouds.  
 I understand myself, in just a blink,  
 Love words floating amidst the drifting mist.  
 A yellow sound falls in the well;  
 The yellow moon hugs the pond's edge;  
 The yellow wind is in turmoil;  
 The yellow dress of the unmarried girl who leaves  
 at night  
 To follow me to the distant stream,  
 To the land of poesy, of dream, of love.  
 The clouds hover above the watercourse;  
 I drink from my cupped hands oblivious to cold.

<p><b>Cô gái đồng trinh</b></p> <p><i>Ôi cho ghê quá, ôi ghê quá Cảm thấy hồn tôi ớn lạnh rồi</i></p> <p>Đêm qua trăng vướng trong cành trúc Cô lảng giềng bên chết thiệt rồi Trinh tiết vẫn còn nguyên vẹn mới Chưa hề âu yếm ở đầu môi.</p> <p>Xác cô thơm quá thơm hơn ngọc Cả một mùa xuân đã hiện hình Thinh sắc cơ hồ lưu luyến mãi Chết rồi - xiêm áo trắng như tinh.</p> <p>Có tôi đây hồn phách tôi đây Tôi nhập vào trong xác thịt này Cốt để dò xem tình ý lạ Trong lòng bí mật ả thơ ngây</p> <p>Biết rồi, biết rồi! Thôi biết cả Té ra Nàng sắp sửa yêu ta Bao nhiêu mơ ước trong tim ấy Như chưa xuân về thổ lộ ra.</p>	<p>Tottering tall hills huddle with moon in their sleep, Their bodies splashed with patches of halos.</p> <p>Translated by Thomas D. Le 12 April 2008</p> <p><b>The Virgin Girl</b></p> <p><i>Oh horror, O horror of horrors. I felt my soul aquiver already.</i></p> <p>The moon got caught in the bamboo last night. The girl next door has really died. Her virginity remaining intact, She had never been kissed on the lips, in fact.</p> <p>Her body smells so good, better than jade. The spring season has its grand entrance made. Its splendor seems to linger to eternity. In death her clothes are white as purity.</p> <p>Here I am, and here is my soul. I am entering this flesh-and-blood body whole To find out if any strange thoughts Lay hidden within this chaste girl's heart or not.</p> <p>I know, I know! I know it, see. It turned out she was going to love me; The many dreams living in her heart know How to wait for springtime to show.</p> <p>Translated by Thomas D. Le 11 April 2008</p>
<p><b>Huyền ảo</b></p> <p>(Tặng Xuân Diệu để ghi lấy một đêm trăng gặp gỡ ở đất Tràng An)</p> <p>Mới lớn lên trăng đã thẹn thò Thơm như tình ái của ni cô</p>	<p><b>Phantasmal</b></p> <p><i>To Xuân Diệu to remember that moonlight night encounter at Trang An.</i></p> <p>Shy is the moon barely at puberty, Yet has the sweet fragrance of a nun's love.</p>

<p>Gió say lướt lướt trong màu sáng Hoa với tôi đều cảm động sơ</p> <p>Đang khi màu nhiệm phủ ban đêm Có thứ gì rơi giữa khoảng im Rơi tự thượng tầng không khí xuống Tiếng vang nhẹ nhẹ dội vào tim.</p> <p>Tôi với hồn hoa vẫn nín thình Ngấm ngấm trao đổi những ân tình Để thêm ấm áp nguồn thơ tưởng Để bóng trời khuya bớt giật mình.</p> <p>Từ đầu canh một đến canh tư Tôi thấy trăng mơ biến hoá như Hương khói ở đâu ngoài xứ mộng Cứ là mỗi phút mỗi nên thơ</p> <p>Ánh trăng mỏng quá không che nổi Những vè xanh xao của mặt hồ Những nét buồn buồn tơ liễu rủ Những lời năn nỉ của hư vô.</p> <p>Không gian đầy đặc toàn trăng cả Tôi cũng trăng mà nàng cũng trăng Mỗi ảnh mỗi hình thêm phiêu diểu Nàng xa xôi quá nói nghe chẳng ?</p>	<p>Light-headed wind takes on the colors of Light. The flowers and I are touched slightly.</p> <p>Enveloped in the magic veil of night Something falls down in the hushed space From up above its stratospheric height Its faint echo bounces with my heart's pace.</p> <p>The flower's soul and I still hold our tongue; In secret we exchanged our love vows young To warm up our wellsprings of words And to calm the deep dark night's nerves.</p> <p>From the first watch to the fourth watch I saw the moon dimming as though Fragrant smoke from the land of dream Weaves lovely verse each moment slow.</p> <p>Moonlight cannot hide, for it's filmy so, The face of the lake and its pale wanness, The gloominess of the weeping willow, And the supplications of nothingness.</p> <p>All of space is filled with moonbeams. I am the moon, and she is the moon too. Each image is disembodied, meseems; She's far away, I wonder she can hear me too.</p> <p>Translated by Thomas D. Le 12 April 2008</p>
<p><b>Rướm máu</b></p> <p>Ta muốn hồn trào ra đầu ngọn bút Mỗi lời thơ đều dính não cân ta Bao nét chữ quay cuồng như máu vọt Như mê man chết điếng cả làn da.</p> <p>Cứ để ta ngất ngư trong vũng huyết Trái niềm đau trên mảnh giấy mong manh, Đừng nắm lại nguồn thơ ta đang siết Cả lòng ta trong mớ chữ rung rinh.</p> <p>Ta đã ngậm hương trăng đầy lỗ miệng</p>	<p><b>Oozing Blood</b></p> <p>I want my soul to flow onto my pen, Each word to be smeared with bits of my brain, The pen strokes to dance like jets of blood, Comatose skin insensible to pain.</p> <p>Let me wallow in my own blood, On the thin paper spread my pain. Keep not my muse in fever shut, My heart pours words shaking onto my pen.</p> <p>I hold a mouthful of moon scent</p>

Cho ngậy người mê dại đến tâm can  
Thét chòm sao hoảng rơi vào đáy giếng  
Mà muôn năm rướm máu trong không gian.

### Sầu vạn cổ

Lòng ta sầu thảm hơn mùa lạnh,  
Hơn hết u buồn của nước mây,  
Của những tình duyên thương lỡ dở,  
Của lời rên siết gió heo may.

Cho ta nhận lấy không đền đáp,  
Ỗn trọng thiên liêng xuống bởi trời,  
Bằng tiếng kêu gào say chệnh choáng,  
Bằng tim, bằng phổi nóng như sôi.

Và sóng buồn dâng ngập cả hồn,  
Lan tràn đến bến mộng tân hôn.  
Khóe cười nức nở nơi đầu miệng,  
Là nghĩa, trời ơi, nghĩa héo hon.

### Hồn là ai

Hồn là ai là ai? Tôi không biết  
Hồn theo tôi như muốn cợt chơi tôi  
Môi đầy hương tôi không dám ngậm cười  
Hồn vội mớm cho tôi bao ánh sáng  
Tôi chết giả và no nê vô hạn  
Cười như điên, sặc sụa cả mùi trăng  
Áo tôi là một thứ ngợp hơn vàng  
Hồn đã cấu, đã cào, nhai ngấu nghiến  
Thịt da tôi sừng sần và tê điếng  
Tôi đau vì rùng rợn đến vô biên  
Tôi chìm hồn xuống một vũng trăng em  
Cho trăng ngập trăng dồn lên tới ngực  
Hai chúng tôi lặng yên trong thốn thức  
Rồi bay lên cho tới một hành tinh

And feel numbness within my guts.  
My howls scare stars into the well,  
Ten thousand years staining the sky with blood.

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
13 April 2008

### Age-Old Sorrow

My heart's colder in grief than winter cold  
Sadder than all the sadness of the world,  
Of the desolation of the lovelorn  
Of the autumn wind's moans and groans.

Let me accept without finesse  
The blessings from the heaven come,  
But with clamors and drunkenness,  
With searing heart and boiling lungs.

The waves of woe submerge my soul,  
Spread to the honeymooners' dream.  
The bursts of laughter on the lips  
Nothing but, heavens!, wilted sense.

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
13 April 2008

### Who Are You, Soul?

Soul, who are you? I know you not.  
Soul followed me just so to mock.  
Lips full of scent I dared not hold my smile.  
Quickly Soul gave me a mouthful of light.  
I fainted but felt satiated,  
Laughing like crazy, smelling of moon.  
My shirt is filled with more than gold.  
Soul scratched, scraped and chewed heartily  
My flesh and skin numb and knotty.  
I agonized from limitless horror.  
I drowned Soul in the pond of moon  
That covered him up to his chest.  
We both thus lay sobbing and motionless,  
Then soared spaceward to a planet

Cùng ngã nghiêng lẫn lộn giữa muôn hình  
 Để gào thét một hơi cho rờn ốc  
 Cả thiên đường trần gian và địa ngục

Hồn là ai? Là ai? Tôi không hay  
 Dẫn hồn đi rờn rã một đêm nay  
 Hồn mê mệt lả mà tôi thì chết giấc.

### Rượt trăng

Ha ha! Ta đuổi theo trăng  
 Ta đuổi theo trăng  
 Trăng bay lả tả trên cành vàng  
 Tới đây là nơi tôi được gặp nàng  
 Rủ rê, rủ rê hai đứa tôi vào rừng hoang  
 Tôi lượm lá trắng làm chiếu trải  
 Chúng tôi kê đầu trên khối sao băng  
 Chúng tôi soi chuyện bằng hơi thở  
 Dần dần hao cỏ biển ra thơ  
 Chúng tôi lại là người của ước mơ  
 Không xác thịt chỉ là linh hồn đang mộng  
 Chao ôi! Chúng tôi rú lên vì kinh động  
 Vì trăng ghen, trăng ngã, trăng rụng xuống mình  
 hai tôi.

Hoảng lên nhưng lại cả cười  
 Tôi toan níu áo nàng thời theo trăng  
 Hô hô! Ta đuổi theo trăng! Ta đuổi theo trăng!  
 Trăng! Trăng! Trăng! Trăng!  
 Thả nàng ra, thôi thả nàng ra  
 Hãy buông nàng xuống cho ta ấm bông

Đố trăng trăng chạy đàng trời  
 Tôi rú một tiếng trăng rơi tức thì ....

Thrashing, struggling about in myriad forms  
 Ejecting our bone-chilling howls  
 Through the world, paradise and hell.

Soul, who are you? I know not what.  
 But after the night's trip with you,  
 You felt exhausted, and I fainted.

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
 17 April 2008

### Chasing the Moon

I am chasing the moon, ha ha!  
 I am chasing the moon.  
 The moon flies in scattered bits of gold.  
 It's here that I met her.  
 Together we ran off to the wild forest.  
 I picked the moon leaves for bedding.  
 We rested our heads on the masses of shooting  
 stars;  
 We lighted our talks with our breaths.  
 Gradually the grass changed to verse.  
 We are people with a dream  
 Not of the flesh but of the soul dreaming.  
 Gosh! We howled when alarmed  
 Because the jealous moon tumbled on our bodies.

Though frightened I burst out laughing.  
 I tried to grab her dress, but she followed the moon.  
 Ho ho! I am going after the moon! I'm going after  
 the moon!  
 Moon! Moon! Moon! Moon!  
 Let her go. Let her go.  
 Let her down so I can hold her.

I dare you moon to run and hide.  
 Just a roar from me and you'll fall immediately.

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
 13 April 2008

**Uống trăng**

Bóng hăng trong chén ngả nghiêng,  
 Là lời tắm mát làm duyên gợi tình.  
 Gió đùa mặt nước rung rinh,  
 Lòng ta khát tiếng chung tình từ lâu.  
 Uống đi cho đỡ khô hầu,  
 Uống đi cho bớt cái sầu miên man.  
 Có ai nuốt ánh trăng vàng,  
 Có ai nuốt cả bóng nàng tiên nga.

**Drinking the Moon**

The moon throws her shadow in the wine glass  
 To take her lascivious love-inducing bath.  
 The wind playfully ripples the water  
 Leaving my heart to thirst for love.  
 Let us drink to soothe and soften our throats,  
 Let us drink to lessen the pervasive gloom.  
 Is there one to gulp the yellow moonlight  
 Along with the reigning moon queen?

Translated by Thomas D. Le  
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