

Vietnamese Poetry

Thomas D. Le

A revolutionary literary movement that took place in the first part of the twentieth century represented a paradigm shift in Vietnamese poetry. Known as the New Poetry Movement, it was spawned mainly by contact with Western literary and poetic developments of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Vietnamese poets, eager for modernization, wasted no time to adopt French versification and prosody rules, and in the process began to sever their ties to the old classical poetic tradition. The emergence of this rebellious, energetic movement was not taken gracefully by the old guard, the Ancients, for whom centuries-old tradition was sacrosanct. For a time the war between the Ancients and the Moderns raged mercilessly with the former deriding the upstarts as clueless poetasters with little sense of art or poetry.

This whole process was sparked by an unlikely poem by the revered but renegade Confucian scholar Phan Khôi with an equally unlikely title *Tình Già* (Elderly Love). In reality, the poem was not the first to break existing prosody rules. Other poets such as Tân Đà and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh had done so for years. But Phan Khôi's 1932 poem came at an opportune time, when a generation of young modern educated men and women was thirsting for a whiff of fresh air amid the stuffy atmosphere of traditionalism. His poem was fresh on two points: the theme of ill-fated love and the unconventional verse form bordering on free verse. The language was the everyday vernacular spoken with spontaneity and simplicity. There were no allusions to Chinese myths, no concession to traditional form or substance. It was plainly the passionate language of two lovers who could not marry while young because of the tyranny of prejudice and the injustice of tradition. Twenty years later the grizzled couple by chance or by fate met again. The old flame revived in both hearts, and the couple gave free rein to their undying love in detail that would by the standards of contemporary ethics be considered risqué or taboo. Now Phan Khôi gave them voice: The lovers had nothing to hide, nothing to fear, and everything to share. It was the triumph of the heart, the glorification of the individual, and a startling departure from classical restraint and reserve. What a revolution for a middle-aged poet to pen a work of such beauty and such freshness, which is modern both in spirit and in form!

At the same time that new verse forms and stylistic techniques were introduced, new ways of expression, new ideas, and a totally new artistic tradition were being established that were to change the direction and tenor of Vietnamese poetry forever. Breaking out of the mold of traditionalism, and imbued with Western ideas, Vietnamese poets of the first four decades of the twentieth century staged their revolution with fervor and enthusiasm fueled further by a multitude of thematic orientations. Emotions, ideas, and thoughts of all kinds, romantic, pedagogic, cultural, philosophic, historic, and even political, dominated the creative process, riding effortlessly and spontaneously on novel stylistic and prosodic forms. Today's Vietnamese poetry owes its characteristics and power to the seminal works of these pioneers, whose signal contribution to the shaping of the country's literary tradition in the modern era cannot be overemphasized.

But the history of this progress is anything but smooth and uneventful..

Toward the end of 1932, the first shot across the bow was fired when a stern poem, for all its curious title *Tửu Nhập Thi Xuân* (Drunken Spring Poem), appeared in the issue No. 6 of *An Nam Tạp Chí* (The Annam Journal), in which the doyen of all poets, Tấn Đà Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu, berated the Moderns in the *Phong Hóa* (Culture) camp for their brazen impudence and irreverence, and warned them of retaliation in veiled threats. Not to be intimidated, the Moderns did not take long to pick up the gauntlet in a parallel rhyme-for-rhyme riposte that appeared in the *Phong Hóa* issue No. 28 of 30 December 1932. The acerbic poem excoriated Tấn Đà for his inebriated, smelly breath, his stubbornness, his vacillating feet, his short tongue, and his incorrigible attitude, all of which should seem to earn him institutionalization. Rarely has the Vietnamese literary arena been animated with such colorful ad hominem diatribes!

In numerous encounters spread over five years, from 1932 to 1937, the skirmishes of this war, whose stakes were no less than the hearts and minds of future generations of the lettered, extended from Saigon through the major cities of Central Vietnam to Hanoi in ringing orations that mesmerized engaged audiences at literary meetings and in caustic polemics that filled the periodicals and reviews. On 26 July 1933, a talented, daring young female poet, Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, took the podium at the Saigon *Hội Khuyến Học* (The Learning Promotion Society) to eulogize the new poetry. During its twenty-five year history, the Society had never been addressed by a woman, and the event brought out a record audience. This forum continued to be an acrimonious battleground between the two camps. For her temerity she became the target of the Ancients' vicious, vitriolic campaign. She was opposed on the same forum on 9 January 1935 by Nguyễn Văn Hanh in an unprecedented point-counterpoint debate. In Nguyễn Thị Kiêm the Ancients had found more than a match; they had gone head-to-head with an awe-inspiring and implacable foe of enormous vitality and freshness, endowed with superior oratorical virtuosity.

But it devolved on a poet from Central Vietnam to lead the fight for the Moderns. As *chef de file*, Lưu Trọng Lư went on the offensive with the publication of a novel entitled *Người Sơn Nhân* (The Highlander, June 1933) with all the zeal of a revolutionary fighting for a just cause. In a June 1934 speech delivered before the *Học Hội* (The Learning Society) in Qui Nhơn, he again defended the new poetry against its opponents' smear campaign. In numerous subsequent exchanges, he took on the towering, respected figure of Vietnamese poetry in the person of Tấn Đà Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu, a moderate but formidable adversary with an unassailable reputation. In essay after essay, Lưu Trọng Lư expounded a literary view based on novel ideas, thoughts, and sensibilities that were totally alien to the traditionalists' worldview. Tấn Đà countered that he himself had penned a poem that broke all known rules of prosody 20 years earlier, but never called it 'new'. He scoffed that if merely breaking prosodic rules qualified one as a new poet, then he would be a precursor of the 'new' movement by a comfortable margin. What Tấn Đà did not say, however, was that the poem was treating the same tired themes of the classical tradition, i.e. steeped in Chinese borrowings and allusions.

Polemicists from both camps involved all print media throughout the country. The Ancients anchored their essays and tracts on *An Nam Tạp Chí* (The Annam Journal), *Văn Học Tạp Chí* (The Literary Journal), *Công Luận* (Public Opinion), *Tiếng Dân* (Voice of the People), *Văn Học Tuần San* (The Literary Weekly), and *Tin Văn* (Literary News). Led by Tấn Đà, the Ancients numbered among their ranks such names as Vân Bằng, Động Đình, Thương Sơn, Tùng Lâm, Vũ Đình Liên, and many more. Arrayed against the Ancient stalwarts were among others Lưu Trọng Lư, Hoài Thanh, Phan Khôi, Lê Trảng Kiều, and their print media allies: *Phong Hóa* (Culture), *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (Modern Literary Women), *Tiểu Thuyết Thứ Bảy* (The Saturday Novel), *Hà Nội Báo* (Hanoi News), *Loa* (Megaphone) and *Ngày Nay* (Today).

For all its historic significance the Ancient-Modern debate did not involve all the luminaries of the Modern camp. It would be simplistic to dichotomize the literati into the old school steeped in the traditional culture of classical Confucian scholarship and the new school influenced by the Western system of thought. Many of the young educated class remained traditionalist either out of inclination or out of conviction, just as many of the older generation, either by adaptation or by absorption, had both new and old learning, and hence could be considered bicultural. In other words, there was a silent minority of uncommitted or disengaged intellectuals who stood on the sidelines while the conflict was playing itself out. Things got to a point where an exasperated Luu Trọng Lư felt compelled to urge the new generation to embrace modernity with its intellectual trappings and wean itself from the worn-out, anemic canons of an antiquated and bankrupt ideology.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the literary revolution could not be characterized as a wholesale dumping of traditional verse forms in favor of the new prosody. In fact, many new poets fashioned their works by indiscriminately using any verse forms or meters they found useful for the purpose at hand, including the traditional form. Rather the movement's distinguishing trait must be the emphasis on the individual freedom of expression, unhindered by stylistic constraints and time-worn motifs, the unfettered flowering of intimate feelings, including the anxiety and tristesse of the *Zeitgeist*, and the primacy of individuality over collectivity. The new orientation places a premium on the person as the locus of intellectual and emotional activity, and the individual as having self-worth independent of the community. It is this orientation that allows each poet to exercise his or her own genius without fear of reprisals or repression by the established social order. The Moderns did not fight only for a spiritual and intellectual emancipation but also for the demise of a culture of tyranny and irrelevance.

And so, as the wheel of progress ground on, within the decade in the 1930's of the Moderns' rise, the Ancients were fighting a hopeless rear-guard action against the mighty force of modernity. Sporadic shots of this conflict continued until 1941 with Huỳnh Thúc Kháng's insistence on the imminent demise of the New Poetry Movement. But that was mere wishful thinking. The Ancients' cause withered away in a whimper and left the scene. As a top-down revolution led by the literati, the New Poetry Movement gave full expression to the anxiety and aspirations of a new generation of educated young men and women, whose modernist influence was gradually spreading throughout society in a process of osmosis. Thus during the years immediately preceding World War II, there was no longer talk of old or new poetry. There was only poetry, Vietnamese poetry, the poetry of the people and of the nation.

In his paper on the [Modern Vietnamese Poetry Movement](#), which appears on this site, [Võ Thu Tịnh](#) discussed at length its characteristics and trends by citing copious quotations from the major poets that epitomized the movement. An unsubstantiated thesis is almost advanced there that the New Poetry Movement was the harbinger of the socio-political revolution that broke out in an armed conflict with the French for Vietnamese independence.

What binds the adherents of the New Poetry Movement is their emancipation from traditional poetic constraints, their individualism, their love of freedom to follow the direction of their genius, their anxiety, their melancholy, their hearts, their exalted loves, their dreams, their modern worldview, and, perhaps, a certain ambivalence about their consciousness of their membership in the educated elite and membership in a subjugated people. They have absorbed the spirit of the French intellectuals without enjoying the political freedom, and were thus forced to channel their creative energy in a direction that some might not have taken, if given a choice.

Although this collection starts from well-known works by the major poets in the New Poetry Movement: Xuân Diệu, Thế Lữ, Lưu Trọng Lư, Huy Cận, Chế Lan Viên, Nguyễn Bính, Huy Thông, Hàn Mặc Tử, Nguyễn Nhược Pháp as well as lesser known figures, other modern poets will in time be included regardless of their affiliations.

Thomas D. Le
27 June 2005

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[Bích Khê](#)
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[Đoàn Phú Tứ](#)
[Hàn Mặc Tử](#)
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[Hồ Dzếnh](#)
[Huy Cận](#)
[Huy Thông](#)
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[Xuân Diệu](#)

Ngô Xuân Diệu, known simply as Xuân Diệu, was born on February 2, 1916, at Tuy Phước, Bình Định Province, where his father Ngô Xuân Thọ, a schoolteacher, had married his mother Nguyễn Thị Hiệp.

For two years (1938-1940), Xuân Diệu was Huy Cận's roommate at the College of Agriculture in Hanoi, from which he received his engineering degree in agricultural science in 1943. He died on 18 December 1985.

A prolific poet, Xuân Diệu wrote some 450 poems, a large number of which had never been published. His representative works include a collection of poems in the volume *Thơ Thơ* (Poetry, Poetry, 1938), *Gửi Hương Cho Gió* (Perfume to the Wind, 1945), *Ngọn Quốc Kỳ* (The National Flag, 1945), an anthology *Tuyển Tập Xuân Diệu* (Xuân Diệu Anthology, 1983), a collection of short stories, *Phấn Thông Vàng* (The Yellow Pine Pollen, 1939), diaries, essays, and literary criticisms.

Xuân Diệu embodies the New Poetry Movement in style, if not in spirit. His poetry is imbued with emotions, intense, powerful, burning, and replete with insatiable yearning. He treats the theme of love with highly expressive images, musicality, audacious imagination, and sometimes biting bitterness. His most enduring legacy lies in the freshness of his poetic imagery, his intensely personal tone, the authenticity of his feelings that resonate among modern readers, a startling diction, and the boldness of his artistic sensibility. Without a doubt Xuân Diệu is a supremely romantic poet, whether or not juxtaposed to French or English romantics.

"Yêu tha thiết, thế vẫn còn chưa đủ ?
 "Anh tham lam, anh đòi hỏi quá nhiều
 "Anh biết rồi, em đã nói em yêu;
 "Sao vẫn muốn nhắc một lời đã cũ ?"

-- Yêu tha thiết, thế vẫn còn chưa đủ,
 Nếu em yêu mà chỉ để trong lòng;
 Không tỏ hay, yêu mền cũng là không.
 Và sắc đẹp chỉ làm bằng cảm thạc.

Anh thèm muốn vô biên và tuyệt đích,
 Em biết không ? Anh tìm kiếm em hoài.
 Sự thật ngày nay không thật đến ngày
 mai...

Thì ân ái có bao giờ lại cũ ?

Yêu tha thiết, thế vẫn còn chưa đủ,
 Phải nói yêu, trăm bận đến nghìn lần;
 Phải mặn nồng cho mãi mãi đêm xuân,
 Đem chim bướm thả trong vườn tình ái.

Em phải nói, phải nói, và phải nói

Bằng lời riêng nơi cuối mắt, đầu mày,
 Bằng nét vui, bằng vẻ thẹn, chiều say,
 Bằng đầu ngả, bằng miệng cười, tay riết
 Bằng im lặng, bằng chỉ anh có biết !

Cốt nhất là em chớ lạnh như đông,
 Chớ thản nhiên bên một kẻ cháy lòng,
 Chớ yên ổn như mặt hồ nước ngủ.
 Yêu tha thiết, thế vẫn còn chưa đủ.

Xuân Diệu

"I am deeply in love, dear, is that not
 enough?
 "How greedy you are, and demanding too!
 "You already know, for I've told you I love
 you.
 "Why insist on me repeating old stuff so
 oft?"

You love me deeply, but is that enough?
 If you are in love, but you just keep it
 inside
 And not show it, then words are empty,
 And beauty is as cold as marble.

I have an immense desire, did you know?
 And absolute, too. I'm in constant search
 of you.
 If today's truth is truth no longer
 tomorrow,
 How can, my dear, love ever be old too?

Be deeply in love, but that is still not
 enough.
 You've got to say love, hundreds, no,
 thousands of times.
 Be so loving that every night is one of
 spring,
 And birds and butterflies freed in the love
 garden.

Say it, you must say it, you must.

With words that dwell privy in your eyes
 and your brows
 With joy, bashfulness, and ecstasy at dusk,
 With head cuddling, smile on your lips,
 and grasping arms,
 With wordless intensity, what else do I
 know!

Just make sure you don't stay frigid as ice
 Or be unmoved beside one burning with
 desire,
 Nor be as placid as still water in the pond.
 Be deeply in love, but that is still not
 enough.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 5 April 2004

Xa Cách

Tặng Đỗ Đức Thu

Still Too Far Away

To Do Duc Thu

Có một bận, em ngồi xa anh quá,
 Anh bảo em ngồi xích lại gần hơn.
 Em xích gần thêm một chút: anh hờn.
 Em ngoan ngoãn xích gần thêm chút nữa
 Anh sắp giận, em mỉm cười, vội vã
 Đến kê anh, và mơn trớn: "Em đây !"
 Anh vui liền; nhưng bỗng lại buồn ngay
 Vì anh nghĩ: thế vẫn còn xa lắm.

Đôi mắt của người yêu, ôi vực thẳm !
 Ôi trời xa, vầng trán của người yêu !
 Ta thấy gì đâu sau sắc yêu kiều
 Mà ta riết giữa đôi tay thất vọng.
 Dầu tin tưởng: chung một đời, một mộng,
 Em là em; anh vẫn cứ là anh.
 Có thể nào qua Vạn lý trường thành
 Của hai vũ trụ chứa đầy bí mật.
 Thương nhớ cứ trôi theo ngày tháng mất,
 Quá khứ anh; anh không nhắc cùng em.
 -- Linh hồn ta còn u ẩn hơn đêm,
 Ta chưa thấu, nữa là ai thấu rõ.
 Kiếm mãi, nghi hoài, hay ghen bóng gió,
 Anh muốn vào dò xét giấc em mơ.
 Nhưng anh giấu em những mộng không
 ngờ,
 Cũng như em giấu những điều quá thực...

Hãy sát đôi đầu ! Hãy kê đôi ngực !
 Hãy trộn nhau đôi mái tóc ngắn dài !
 Những cánh tay ! Hãy quấn riết đôi vai !
 Hãy dâng cả tình yêu lên sóng mắt !
 Hãy khắng khít những cặp môi gắn chặt
 Cho anh nghe đôi hàm ngọc của răng;
 Trong say sưa, anh sẽ bảo em rằng:
 "Gần thêm nữa ! Thế vẫn còn xa lắm !"

Xuân Diệu

Vì Sao?

Tặng Đoàn Phú Tứ

Bữa trước, riêng hai dưới nắng đào,
 Nhìn tôi cô muốn hỏi "vì sao ?"
 Khi tôi đến kiếm trên môi đẹp
 Một thoáng cười yêu thỏa khát khao.

The other day you sat too far away from
 me
 So I asked you to move over a bit closer.
 You inched over closer, but I demurred.
 To be a good girl you inched still closer.
 As I was boiling over, in haste with a smile
 You scooted closer soothing, "Here I am!"
 I brightened up then scowled at once
 For I thought, you were still too far away.

A lover's eyes, how abyss-like they really
 are!
 O high heaven, the forehead of a lover!
 What do I see deep behind beauty's face
 That I grasped in my frustrated hands?
 Even with faith in one life, one dream,
 You are you, and I am still me.
 Is it possible to cross over the Great Wall
 Of our two universes filled with mystery?
 Though longing flows down the river of
 time
 My past, I did not share with you.
 My soul's dark recesses darker than night
 Inscrutable to me, inscrutable to all.
 Always searching, suspicious, baselessly
 jealous
 I want to inspect your mind in its dreams.
 But I keep my unexpected dreams from
 you
 Just as you keep the naked truth from me.

Let's bring our heads together, press our
 breasts!
 Let our hair short and long mingle!
 Our arms! Let them squeeze our
 shoulders!
 Let our love well up in our eyes!
 Let's close our lips with a tight seal
 So I can hear the pearls of your teeth.
 Enraptured I faint say to you,
 "Come closer! You are still too far away!"

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 10 April 2004

Why?

To Doan Phu Tu

The other day, we met in bright sunshine
 Looking at me, you wanted to ask "Why?"
 When I came there to see on your lips fine

-- Vì sao giáp mặt buổi đầu tiên,
 Tôi đã đày thân giữa xứ phiên,
 Không thể vô tình qua trước cửa,
 Biết rằng gặp gỡ đã vô duyên ?

Ai đem phân chất một mùi hương
 Hay bản cầm ca ! Tôi chỉ thương,
 Chỉ lặng chuỗi theo dòng cảm xúc,
 Như thuyền ngư phủ lạc trong sương.

Làm sao cắt nghĩa được tình yêu !
 Có nghĩa gì đâu, một buổi chiều
 Nó chiếm hồn ta bằng nắng nhạt,
 Bằng mây nhẹ, gió hiu hiu..

Cô hãy là nơi mây khóm dờ
 Dầm chân trong nước, đứng say sưa;
 Cho tôi là kẻ qua sa mạc
 Tạm lánh hè gay; -- thể cũng vừa.

Rồi một ngày mai, tôi sẽ đi.
 Vì sao, ai nữ hỏi làm chi !
 Tôi khờ khạo lắm, ngu ngơ quá,
 Chỉ biết yêu thôi, chẳng hiểu gì.

Xuân Diệu

Trương Tư Chiều

Bữa nay lạnh mặt trời đi ngủ sớm,
 Anh nhớ em, em hỏi ! Anh nhớ em.
 Không gì buồn bằng những buổi chiều êm,
 Mà ánh sáng đều hòa cùng bóng tối.
 Gió lướt thướt kéo mình qua cỏ rỗi;
 Vài miếng đêm u uất lẫn trong cành;
 Mây theo chim về dãy núi xa xanh
 Từng đoàn lớp nhịp nhàng và lặng lẽ.
 Không gian xám tưởng sắp tan thành lệ.

Thôi hết rồi ! còn chi nữa đâu em !
 Thôi hết rồi ! gió gác với trăng thềm,
 Với sương lá rụng trên đầu gân gũ.
 Thôi đã hết hồn ghen và giận dỗi.
 (Được giận hờn nhau ! Sung sướng bao
 nhiêu !)

A hint of smile that so much pleased my
 eye.

Why was it that even on the first day
 I was so soon banished to great sadness.
 Hardly had I stepped in across the way
 Than I knew right then that we'd be
 loveless.

Who would want to take a fragrance apart
 Or a piece of music! I only love
 And just follow the pulses of my heart
 Like a fisher's boat lost in misty cove.

How can one explain the meaning of love!
 And a day at dusk the meaning thereof.
 It fills my soul with pale sunlight
 With flimsy clouds and breezes slight.

You who come from the groves of coconut
 Standing deep in the water euphoric,
 Allow this man the desert passing through
 To take shelter from the torrid summer too.

I will then leave this place on the morrow.
 Why? Why would anyone much care to
 know?
 I am but a slow-witted simpleton
 Who knows only to love, understands
 none.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 9 May 2004

Lovesick Even

This cold day the sun goes to bed early.
 I miss you, dear, I miss you so.
 Nothing sadder than a still eve
 When gloam mixes with the last rays.
 The dragging wind glides o'er the tangled
 grass
 Amid snippets of night darkly hiding
 among the limbs.
 The clouds follow their birds to green
 mountains
 In flocks and rows silent in unison
 While gray skies nigh dissolve into moist
 tears.

It's over now! What's left, my dear?
 It's over now! no wind through loft nor
 moon on porch

Anh một mình, nghe tất cả buổi chiều
Vào chầm chậm ở trong hồn hiu quạnh.

Anh nhớ tiếng. Anh nhớ hình. Anh nhớ
ảnh.

Anh nhớ em, anh nhớ lắm ! Em ơi !
Anh nhớ anh của ngày tháng xa khơi,
Nhớ đôi môi đang cười ở phương trời,
Nhớ đôi mắt đang nhìn anh đắm đắm.
Em ! xích lại ! và đưa tay anh nắm !
Gió bao lần, từng trận nhớ thương đi,
-- Mà kỷ niệm ôi, còn gọi ta chi...

Xuân Diệu

With dewy leaves falling on our heads
bound.

No more jealousy or anger or spite
(What a bliss to be mad at each other!)
Now 'lone, I hear the whole even
Seeping slowly into my lonely soul.

I miss your voice, your figure, your image.
I miss you, dear, oh how I miss you, dear!
And I recall those days so far away.
I miss your lips that smiled in country far
And eyes on me that filled with passion
deep.

My dear, come close! Give me your hand!
O wind, thy gusts that brought me
memories!
O memories, what good thou call'st me
for?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
28 October 2004

Biển

Anh không xứng là biển xanh
Nhưng anh muốn em là bờ cát trắng
Bờ cát dài phẳng lặng
Soi ánh nắng pha lê...

Bờ đẹp dễ cát vàng
-- Thoai thoải hàng thông đứng --
Nhu lặng lẽ mơ màng
Suốt ngàn năm bên sóng...

Anh xin làm sóng biếc
Hôn mãi cát vàng em
Hôn thật khẽ, thật êm
Hôn êm đêm mãi mãi

Đã hôn rồi, hôn lại
Cho đến mãi muôn đời
Đến tan cả đất trời
Anh mới thôi dào dạt...

Cũng có khi ào ạt
Nhu nghiền nát bờ em
Là lúc triều yêu mến
Ngập bên cửa ngày đêm

Anh không xứng là biển xanh
Nhưng cũng xin làm bể biếc
Để hát mãi bên gành
Một tình chung không hết,

The Sea

I don't deserve to be the ocean blue
But I want thee to be the white beach sand
The sandy beach stretching calmly its hue
Under the crystal sun.

The comely beach of yellow sand
Extending to the rows of pine
So dreamily and quietly
For eons by the roaring brine.

Let me be the clear turquoise swells
That kiss ceaseless thy yellow sand
The gentle kiss that softly dwells
The quiet kiss that has no end.

I will kiss thee again, again
From here clear to eternity
Till none of this wide world remains
Before my heart can beat calmly.

There're times when I would fain surge in
As if to crush thy edges dear
It's when my billows roar passion
To drown thee in ceaseless love sheer.

I don't deserve to be the ocean blue
But want to be the turquoise sea
To sing eternal songs by thee
In endless love for dear thee true.

Để những khi bọt tung trắng xóa
 Và gió về bay tỏa nơi nơi
 Như hôn mãi ngàn năm không thỏa,
 Bởi yêu bờ lấm lấm, em ơi !

Xuân Diệu

So when the foam comes boiling white
 And wind gusts in from everywhere,
 Insatiably I'll kiss with might
 'Cause I love so thy sand edge bare.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 28 October 2004

Lời Kỹ Nữ

Khách ngồi lại cùng em trong chốc nữa;
 Vội vàng chi, trăng lạnh quá, khách ơi.
 Đêm nay rằm: yến tiệc sáng trên trời;
 Khách không ở, lòng em cô độc quá.

Khách ngồi lại cùng em ! Đây gói lả,
 Tay em đây mời khách ngả đầu say;
 Đây rượu nồng. Và hôn của em đây,
 Em cung kính đặt dưới chân hoàng tử.
 Chớ đạp hôn em !

Trăng về viễn xứ
 Đi khoan thai lên ngự đỉnh trời tròn.
 Gió theo trăng từ biển thổi qua non;
 Buồn theo gió lan xa từng thoáng rợn.
 Lòng kỹ nữ cũng sầu như biển lớn,
 Chớ để riêng em phải gập lòng em;
 Tay ái ân du khách hãy làm rềm,
 Tóc xanh tốt em xin nguyện dệt võng.
 Đây hộ hôn em triền miên trên sóng,
 Trôi phiêu lưu không vọng bến hay gành;
 Vì mình em không được quán chân anh,
 Tóc không phải những dây tình vướng víu.
 Em sợ lấm. Giá băng tràn mọi nẻo;
 Trời đầy trăng lạnh lẽo suốt xương da.
 Người giai nhân: bến đợi dưới cây già,
 Tình du khách: thuyền qua không buộc chặt.

Lời kỹ nữ đã vỡ vì nước mắt.
 Cuộc yêu đương gay gắt vị làng chơi.
 Người viễn du lòng bận nhớ xa khơi,
 Gỡ tay vương để theo lời gió nước.
 Xao xác tiếng gà. Trăng ngà lạnh buốt.
 Mát run mồ, kỹ nữ thấy sông trôi.
 Du khách đi. Du khách đã đi rồi.

Xuân Diệu
 Hà Nội 1939

The Courtesan's Words

Stay with me longer then, ye my fond
 guest.
 Why hurry ye? The moon is cold, my
 gentleman.
 It's full tonight to light up heaven's feast;
 Walk not away to leave my heart dead
 wan.

Come sit by me! This here my welcome
 knee,
 My arm a haven for your tipsy head,
 And here the strong wine, and this here my
 soul.
 With due respect, my prince, I place them
 at your feet.
 Tread not on them nor on my soul!

The moon has taken leave for its far clime
 With nonchalance in the round firmament.
 And in its wake sea wind blew to the
 heights
 Spreading sadness in waves to far-off land.
 This paramour's blues vies with the vast
 sea.
 Let me not face up to my own sore heart.
 This arm of love, use it as your own drape.
 These young tresses, I weave them into
 bed.
 Please push my painful soul onto the
 waves
 To drift aimless without harbor or cove
 Because I would not hinder your free
 steps.
 My hair is not the tangling web of love.
 I am frightened. Cold has spread
 everywhere;
 The moonlit sky with its bone-chilling
 cold.
 For the maiden: it's haven under the old
 trees;
 For her man guest: the unmoored boat is
 free to roam around.

The tear-filled words the courtesan uttered
Amid the intense love that raged during
the act.
The joy seeker that left his heart back way
yonder
Shrugged off the snarling hand after the
fact.

The rooster crowed under the moon's cold
glow,
The maid behind blurred eyes beheld the
river flow.
The guest is gone. The guest is gone
forever so.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
26 October 2004

Chiều

Tặng Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu

Hôm nay trời nhẹ lên cao,
Tôi buồn không hiểu vì sao tôi buồn...
Lá hồng rơi lặng ngõ thôn,
Sương trinh rơi kín từ nguồn yêu thương.
Phát phơ hồn của bông hường,
Trong hơi phiêu bạt còn vương má hồng.
Nghe chùng gió nhớ qua sông,
E bên lau lách thuyền không vắng bờ.
Không gian như có dây tơ,
Bước đi sẽ đứt, động hồ sẽ tiêu.
Êm êm chiều ngẩn ngơ chiều,
Lòng không sao cả, hiu hiu khổ buồn.

Xuân Diệu

Dâng

Đây chùm mong nhớ, khóm yêu đương
Đây nụ mơ mòng đợi ánh sương,
Đây lá bâng khuâng run trước gió
Đây em, cảnh thẹn lẫn cảnh thương.

Tất cả vườn anh rất đợi chờ
Bởi vì em có ngón tay thơ.

Evening

To Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu

Today the weightless clouds ascend aloft.
Joyless I am, yet know not why.
The roses' leaves fall quiet on rustic paths
While virgin dew covers the fountains of
love.
Floating about, the soul of rose wanders,
Spreading under its breath sweet love's
beauty.
It seems the wind hungers to cross the
stream,
Yet fears the reeds reveal the empty boat.
It seems the air is in a tangled web
That each step tears and each move rips.
Serene the eve lingers in dusky haze.
Though safe my heart wallows in mild soft
gloom.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
16 February 2009

Offerings

Here is a bundle of longing, a fascicle of
love;
And here the bud of dream waiting for the
foggy light;
Here too the unquiet leaves fluttering in
the wind

Đến đây em hái giùm đôi lộc,
Kéo tội lòng anh tui ước mơ.

Bước đẹp em vừa ngụ tới đây.
Chim hoa ríu rít, liễu vui vầy.
Hãy làm dáng điệu xuân ôm ấp:
Ánh sáng ban từ một nét tay.

Xuân Diệu

And here the twig of coyness with the
shoot of love.

My whole garden is in a holding mode,
For you have such a touch of poetry.
Come here to pick a pair of fortune
flowers
And save my heart from its ill-fated hope.

Your feet have hardly treaded round this
way
Than birds burst out chirping, willows
singing.
Open your arms to clasp the spring,
Then from your hand let there be light.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
16 February 2009

Đây Mùa Thu Tới

Rặng liễu đìu hiu đứng chịu tang
Tóc buồn buông xuống lệ ngàn hàng
Đây mùa thu tới mùa thu tới
Vội áo mơ phai dệt lá vàng

Hơn một loài hoa đã rụng cành
Trong vườn sắc đỏ rữa màu xanh
Những luồng run rẩy rung rinh lá
Đôi nhánh khô gầy sương mỏng manh

Thỉnh thoảng nàng trắng tự ngần ngơ
Non xa khởi sự nhạt sương mờ
Đã nghe rét mướt luồn trong gió
Đã văng người sang những chuyến đò

Mây vẫn từng không, chim bay đi
Khí trời u uất hận chia ly
Ít nhiều thiếu nữ buồn không nói
Tựa cửa nhìn xa nghĩ ngợi gì.

(Tập *Thơ Thơ*, 1938)

Xuân Diệu

Here Comes Autumn

The grieving willows droop in deep
mourning,
Their sad hair streaming like teardrops
falling.
Here comes autumn, here comes the
autumn cold
In its faded mantle woven with leaves of
gold.

Various blossoms have fallen off their
branch
Amidst a garden where the red mingles
with blue.
The trembling breath of breeze shakes the
leaves and
A few shriveled limbs like fragile bones in
somber hue.

At times the moon appears with all her
puzzled look.
And on the far side mountains start to veil
with fog.
I hear the bitter cold stirring the wind,
But see no boats making their cross-stream
run.

High in the cloudy sky the birds flee on
While the leaden air broods o'er the
parting.
A few sad girls against the door lean in
silence
Looking pensively into the distance.

(From *Poetry Poetry*, 1938)Translated by Thomas D. Le
16 February 2009**Nguyệt Cầm**

Trăng nhập vào dây cung nguyệt lạnh
Trăng thương, trăng nhớ, hồi trăng ngân!
Đàn buồn, đàn lặng, ôi đàn chậm!
Mỗi giọt rơi tàn như lệ ngân.

Mây vắng trời trong đêm thủy tinh
Lung linh bóng sáng bỗng rung mình
Vì nghe nương tử trong câu hát
Đã chết đêm rằm theo nước xanh.

Thu lạnh càng thêm nguyệt tỏ ngời,
Đàn ghê như nước, lạnh trời ơi ...
Long lanh tiếng sỏi vang vang hận
Trăng nhớ Tâm Dương, nhạc nhớ người ...

Bốn bề ánh nhạc: biên pha lê
Chiếc đảo hồn tôi rộn bốn bề ...
Sương bạc làm thính, khuya nín thở
Nghe sâu âm nhạc đến sao Khuê.

Xuân Diệu

The Moon Lute

The moon entered the lute's tune cold
The moon of love. Oh, moon of old!
The lute's sad voice ends in a plaintive
note
As each teardrop is like a bell that tolls.

The cloudless sky makes a crystal clear
night.
I shudder at such a shimmering light,
And hear the belle in her song die
While full moon shines on the blue stream.

Cold autumn grows colder in the clear
moonlight
The lute is like the frightful water; oh so
cold;
Glittering, a vengeful cry lifts its voice.
As moon misses Tam Duong, music
misses the belle.

From four corners the music's light shines
on the crystal sea
In midst of which my island soul struggles
about.
As silver dew holds its tongue, the night
holds its breath,
While a melancholy tune reaches up to the
Khue star.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
22 February 2009**Ta Muốn Ôm**

Cả sự sống mới bắt đầu môn môn;
Ta muốn riết mây đưa và gió lượn,
Ta muốn say cánh bướm với tình yêu,
Ta muốn thâu trong một cái hôn nhiều
Và non nước, và cây và cỏ rạng,
Cho chênh choáng mùi thơm, cho đã đầy
ánh sáng,
Cho no nê thanh sắc của thời tươi;
-- Hỡi xuân hồng, ta muốn cắn vào ngươi!

I Want to Grasp The

Life has just begun to burst forth.
I want to seize the clouds and wind,
Drunk with love on butterfly wings.
I want to embrace in an ardent kiss
The mountains, streams, trees, and bright
grass
To delight in this world of perfume and
light,
To satiate my soul with the prime of life.
O, vermeil spring! I want to bite into thee!

Xuân Diệu

Translated by Thomas D. Le
22 February 2009**Tình Trai**

Tôi nhớ Rimbaud với Verlaine
Hai chàng thi sĩ choáng hơi men
Say thơ xa lạ, mê tình bạn
Khinh rẽ khuôn mòn, bỏ lối quen

Những bước song song xéo dẫm trường
Đôi hồn tươi đậm ngát hoa hương
Họ đi, tay yếu trong tay mạnh
Nghe hát ân tình giữa gió sương

Kể chi chuyện trước với ngày sau
Quên gió môi son với áo màu
Thây kệ thiên đường và địa ngục
Không hề mặc cả, họ yêu nhau

Xuân Diệu

Boys' Love

I still remember Rimbaud and Verlaine,
The two besotted men of poetry
Drunk with exotic verse and with passion,
Defying worn paths and old ways.

They walked in lock step on their way,
Their souls steeped in the fragrant air;
Weak in strong their arms enlaced fore'er;
In all weather, singing their love song gay.

Nothing matters, future or past,
Who wears makeup or colored dress.
Who cares about heaven or hell?
They are simply in love; that's swell.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
22 February 2009**Return to Featured Authors****Huy Cận**

Cù Huy Cận was born into a scholar family on 31 May 1919, in the village of An Phú, Huong Son District, Ha Tinh Province. After his graduation from high school at Huế, he undertook studies at the College of Agriculture on Hang Than Street, Hanoi, where he was Xuân Diệu's roommate. In 1943 he graduated with an engineering degree in agricultural science.

From 1945 until the war broke out with the French, he held a vice minister's, then a minister's post in charge of cultural affairs and the arts.

Huy Cận started to write poetry as far back as 1934, and published his works in 1936. Among his major poems are *Lửa Thiêng* (Sacred Fire, 1940), *Kính Cầu Tự* (Prayers, 1942), *Vũ Trụ Ca* (The Song of the Universe, 1942-43, not published), *Trời Mỗi Ngày Lại Sáng* (The Sun Rises Each Day, 1958), *Đất Nở Hoa* (The Blooming Earth, 1960), *Bài Thơ Cuộc Đời* (The Poem of Life, 1963), *Những Năm Sáu Muoi* (The Sixties, 1968), *Cô Gái Mèo* (The Meo Maiden, 1972), *Chiến Trường Gần Chiến Trường Xa* (Battles Near and Far, 1973), *Ngày Hàng Sống, Ngày Hàng Thơ* (A Day of Life, a Day of Poetry, 1975), *Ngôi Nhà Giữa Nắng* (The Sun-Washed House, 1978).

One of the most distinguished poets of the New Poetry Movement, Huy Cận shows a tendency toward social and philosophical issues. His poetry is tinged with a *Weltschmerz*, at once pervasive and gloomy, perhaps reflecting the angst of his times during one of the most destructive wars mankind has ever known, and the prospect of another looming on the not too distant horizon.

Ngâm Ngùi**Huy Cận**

Nắng chia nửa bãi chiều rồi
 Vườn hoang trinh nữ, xếp đôi lá rầu
 Sợ buồn, con nhện giăng mau
 Em ơi! Hãy ngủ... anh hầu quạt đây !

Lòng anh mở với quạt này
 Trăm con chim mộng về bay đầu giường
 Ngủ đi em, mộng bình thường !
 Ru em sẵn tiếng, thùy dương mấy bờ;

Cây dài bóng xế ngân ngơ
 Hồn em đã chín mấy mùa thương đau ?
 Tay anh, em hãy tựa đầu,
 Cho anh nghe nặng, trái sầu rụng rơi...

Huy Cận

Chagrin

*Dans la pénombre du moment
 crépusculaire
 La mimosa s'est fermée dans le vierge
 jardin,
 Et l'araignée tisse son fil hâtif dans l'air.
 Dors, ma belle; j'ai cet éventail dans ma
 main.*

*Mon coeur comme cet éventail est tout
 ouvert
 Pour inviter les oiseaux du rêve au chevet.
 Dors, m'amour, et fais de beaux rêves qui
 te sont chers.
 Et cette douce berceuse je te la chanterai.*

*Comme les arbres étendent leurs ombres
 flétries,
 Combien de temps a-t-il souffert, ton
 amour tendre ?
 Repose ta tête dans mon sein, ma belle
 chérie,
 Le fruit du chagrin dans mon coeur,
 puissé-je l'entendre.*

*Traduit par Thomas D. Le
 29 December 2002*

Áo Trắng

Áo trắng đơn sơ, mộng trắng trong,
 Hôm xưa em đến, mắt như lòng.

Sorrowful

As the late sun declines in its twilight,
 The virgin's garden mimosa shuts down,
 The spider spins a quick twine in last light.
 My dear, this fan will keep you in sleep
 sound.

My heart is open like this fan, sweetheart,
 For the dream birds to flock round your
 bedside.
 Dream your sweet dreams, my dear, in
 your loved heart,
 And hear my tender song of love aside.

The trees their long shadows in sunset
 cast,
 How long have your heart ached in painful
 love?
 My dear, put your head on my shoulder
 fast,
 Let me hear sorrow's fruit fall in my love.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 28 December 2002

The White Tunic

The simple white tunic of dreamy purity
 In which you came to me with heart and

Nở bừng ánh sáng . Em đi đến,
Gót ngọc dồn hương, bước tỏa hồng.

Em đẹp bàn tay ngón ngón thon,
Em duyên đôi má nắng hoe tròn.
Em lừa gió biếc vào trong tóc
Thổi lại phòng anh cả núi non.

Em nói, anh nghe tiếng lẫn lời,
Hồn em anh thở ở trong hơi.
Nắng thơ dệt sáng trên tà áo,
Lá nhỏ mừng vui phát cửa ngoài.

Đôi lúa thần tiên suốt cả ngày,
Em ban hạnh phúc chứa đầy tay.
Dịu dàng áo trắng trong như suối
Tỏa phát đôi hồn cánh mộng bay.

Huy Cận

soul
Showered with light along your path of old
Your feet of jade, a red smell's rarity.

Your lovely long lithe tapering fingers
Vied with your graceful rounded sun-
kissed cheeks.
You crammed the azure wind into your
hair
And blew into my room mountains of air.

Your voice I heard as sound and word;
Your soul I breathed with every breath.
My Muse wove verse of light on your
white dress
While little leaves outdoors with joy
fluttered.

We both enjoyed ourselves all through the
day
You gave me bliss in generous armloads.
Your white spring-clear tunic's soft gentle
sway
Sent our souls to their heavenly abode.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
2 February 2009

[Return to Featured Authors](#)

Lưu Trọng Lư

Born on June 6, 1912 at Cao La Ha, Bo Trach District, Quang Binh Province, Lưu Trọng Lư came from a scholarly mandarin family. He attended the Quoc Hoc High School in Huế, then left for Hanoi, where he continued his education in private schools. Eventually he dropped out for a career in journalism writing poetry and literary pieces.

Founder of the *Ngân Sơn Tùng Thu* (The Silver Mountain Literary Gazette) at Huế in the years 1933-1934, he became after 1954 Head of the Theater Division of the Ministry of Culture and Secretary General of the Theater Society of Vietnam.

His representative works are the poems: *Tiếng Thu* (The Sound of Autumn, 1939), *Người Con Gái Sông Gianh* (The Young Woman from Gianh River, 1966), *Từ Đất Này* (From this Land, 1971), *Tuổi Hai Mươi* (Age Twenty, a drama, 1973).

Despite the fact that he is the most ardent advocate of the New Poetry, his own works generate a different impression. His poetry is still very much an echo of the old melody, but is very emotionally personal, evocative and genuine.

The critics Hoài Thanh and Hoài Chân judged many of his poems to be lacking in poetic quality, in the sense that they are not artistic enough, but to be mere intimate musings that cause our own hearts to vibrate in harmonic resonance.

Tiếng Thu

Luu Trọng Lư

Em không nghe mùa thu
Dưới trăng mờ thẫn thức ?
Em không nghe rạo rục
Hình ảnh kẻ chinh phu
Trong lòng người cô phụ ?

Em không nghe rùng thu,
Lá thu kêu xào xạc,
Con nai vàng ngơ ngác
Đạp trên lá vàng khô ?

Luu Trọng Lư

Les sons d'automne

*Entends-tu donc les sons d'automne
Qui sanglotent sous la terne lune ?
Entends-tu les frémissements
Pour l'image du guerrier
Du coeur de sa femme isolée ?*

*Entends-tu la forêt d'automne
Dont les feuilles en tombant frissonnent
Parmi des chevreuils étonnés
Qui foulent les feuilles délaissées ?*

*Traduit par Thomas D. Le
11 April 2004*

The Sound of Autumn

Did you hear this season of fall
Sobbing in the dimming moonlight?
Did you hear at all the stirrings
For the image of the war knight
Of his lonely wife's strained heartstrings?

The woods of autumn, did you hear
Shaking off their susurrous sheaves
Amidst the startled tawny deer
Treading on the dead yellow leaves?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
11 April 2004

Trăng Lên

Vùng trăng lên mái tóc mây,
Một hồn thu tạnh, mơ say hương nồng.
Mắt em là một dòng sông
Thuyền ta bơi lặng trong dòng mắt em.

Luu Trọng Lư

Moonrise

The night orb rises o'er your silky locks
My soul's drunk with your scent of fall in
ecstasy
Your eyes are such a steady stream
In which my boat swims quietly.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
1 November 2004

Một Chút Tình

Chưa biết tên nàng, biết tuổi nàng,
Mà sâu trong dạ đã mang mang.
Tình yêu như bóng giăng hiu quạnh,
Lạnh lẽo đêm trường, giải gió sương.

Ta chỉ xin em một chút tình,
Cho lòng thắm lại với ngày xanh.

A Little Love

I do not know your age or name.
Why's it my heart is in turmoil?
This lonely love does so embroil
Through long cold nights my soul in
flame.

Sao em quên cả khi chào đón,
Tình ái, chiều xuân, đến trước màn ?

Rộn rã cười vang một góc lầu,
Ngày thơ em đã biết gì đâu !
Đêm khuya trăng động trong cây lá,
Vò vó ta xe máy đoạn sầu.

Lác đác ngày xuân rụng trước thềm,
Lạnh lùng ta rời bước chân em,
Âm thầm áp mỗi xa xa... vọng;
Đường thế đâu tìm bóng áo xiêm ?

Đợi đến Luân hồi sẽ gặp nhau,
Cùng em nhắc lại chuyện xưa sau.
Chờ anh dưới gốc sim già nhé !
Em hái, đưa anh... đóa mộng đầu.

Lưu Trọng Lư

Khi Thu Rụng Lá

Em có bao giờ nói với anh,
Những câu tình tứ, thuở ngày xanh,
Khi thu rụng lá, bên hè vắng,
Tiếng sáo ngân nga, vắng trước màn.

Em có bao giờ nghĩ tới anh,
Khi tay vịn rù lá trên cành ?
Cười chim, cợt gió, nào đâu biết:
Chua chát lòng anh biết mấy tình ?

Lòng anh như nước hồ thu lạnh,
Quạnh quẽ đêm soi bóng nguyệt tà...
Ngày tháng anh mong chậm chậm lại,
Hững hờ em mặc tháng ngày qua...

Mùa đông đến đón ở bên sông,
Vội vã cô em đi lấy chồng,
Em có nhớ chẳng ngày hạ thắm:
Tình anh lưu luyến một bên lòng ?

Lưu Trọng Lư

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I ask of you a little love
To warm my heart as in old days.
Why ignore you the greetings of
My love offered in spring dusk haze.

Your loud laughs echoed on the loft
Throughout your youthful carefree days!
Peeking through trees the moon glowed
soft
While I wove strands of pained sadness.

In drips spring days fell on the yard.
Coldly I followed in your way
Silent and lone I pined afar.
How can I grasp you in my sway?

Let's wait awhile till our next life
When we can tell old tales again.
Just stand under the old myrtle
And pick the fruit of our first dream.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
1 November 2004

When Fall the Autumn Leaves

Have you ever whispered to me
Soft tender words of days of yore
When fall leaves dropped on lost alley,
And flute echoed beyond the door?

Have you ever thought about me
Your hand touching the leafy trees
Laughing with wind and birds merry
And my bitter love memories?

My heart is like cold lake in fall
Reflecting moon in midst of night.
I wish the days more slowly flight,
Yet mindless you care not at all.

When winter came by the river,
You hastily walked down the aisle.
Do you recall last hot summer
When my heart lingered all the while?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
1 November 2004

Đoàn Phú Tứ

Born in Hanoi on September 10, 1910, Đoàn Phú Tứ, after receiving his French Baccalaureate, took an active part in founding the *Xuan Thu Nha Tap Review* (Spring Autumn Review) in 1942, of which he became a key figure. His works were generally in drama: the plays *Chiếc Nhạn Trong Suong* (The Swallow in the Mist), *Con Chim Xanh* (The Blue Bird), *Gái Không Chồng* (The Bachelorette), *Hận Ly Tao* (Ly Tao's Spite) with a few contributions to poetry, of which the best known is *Màu Thời Gian* (The Color of Time).

Màu Thời Gian

Hoài Thanh and Hoài Chân in their *Poets of Vietnam* characterize this poem as a gem of rare elegance, subtlety and delicacy.

In his anthology of *Thi Ca Viet Nam Hien Dai* (Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry) Trần Tuấn Kiệt commented that Đoàn Phú Tứ by this poem transported readers to a misty, mysterious, and frozen past, where the king in his royal court enjoyed multiple love with his concubines, who were dealt a harsh fate of seeing their fresh youth on the verge of rapidly fleeing to an end. The poet shines a light on the despair of one such courtesan in the inexorable grips of a king. A life in its time, which too fades into oblivion.

The Chinese references occur principally in the fourth stanza, and only tangentially in the second, where the name Tan Phi, an imaginary personage, recalls the age of the love relationship. In the second stanza the old love is tacitly given a new revival at least in memory with the assertion that the thousand-year-old past is no longer buried in a cold crypt since the poet is offering his mistress the time color of that love, a symbolism for the erstwhile relationship that is the dominant theme of the poem.

In the fourth stanza, the reference in the first two lines is to the story of Duong Qui Phi, a courtesan whom King Duong Minh Hoang had banished from his palace, who sent him a lock of her hair through a messenger as a discreet reminder of her faithfulness. The last two lines allude to the story of a courtesan, Lady Ly, who on her deathbed refused to let King Han Vu De see her emaciated face for fear of destroying his love of her forever.

Reprising the theme of the color of time, Trần Tuấn Kiệt quoted a version of the eight verse in the third stanza as:

Màu thời gian tím ngắt
The color of time is a stark purple

while Hoài Thanh-Hoài Chan's version is:

Màu thời gian tím ngắt
The color of time is a dark purple

The latter writers argued that given the overall tone and the poet's language and style, the second variant is more likely. They contended that a dark purple connotes a gentler love than the harsher nuance implied by a stark color. I tend to agree.

The time of their love is not the normal blue, but rather the dark purple that was the poet's mistress's favorite hue.

To me, the poem is a novel blend of new and old, in which the allusions to old Chinese stories is not much more than a nostalgic or indirect way of revisiting a long-ago love, which the poet now wants to resuscitate.

The poet's theme of time interwoven with the theme of love and the intermingling of the color with the odor of time form an ensemble of poetic imagery which clings to the psyche with the tenacity of a barnacle, deliciously wrought and executed. This old love the poet characterizes in two associated symbols, each of which bears a significance to both his beloved and himself, the color that she loved and the mellowness or fragrance over time of their relationship.

Sớm nay tiếng chim thanh
 Trong gió xanh
 Diu vương hương ấm thoáng xuân tình.

Ngàn xưa không lạnh nữa, Tân Phi
 Ta lặng dâng nàng
 Trời mây phẳng phất nhuốm thời gian.

Màu thời gian không xanh
 Màu thời gian tím ngắt
 Hương thời gian không nồng
 Hương thời gian thanh thanh.

Tóc mây một món chiếc dao vàng
 Nghìn trùng e lệ phụng quân vương
 Trăm năm tình cũ lia không hận
 Thà nép mày hoa thiếp phụ chàng.

Duyên trăm năm đứt đoạn
 Tình muôn thuở còn hương
 Hương thời gian thanh thanh
 Màu thời gian tím ngắt.

Đoàn Phú Tứ

La couleur du temps

*Ce matin les chants clairs des oiseaux
 retentissent
 Au vent bleu
 Qui répand l'odorant parfum d'un amour
 printanier.*

*Les époques antiques ne sont plus froides,
 ma Tan Phi.
 En silence je t'offre
 Le ciel et les nuages teintés de temps.*

*La couleur du temps n'est pas bleue,
 La couleur du temps est un violet foncé.
 L'odeur du temps n'est pas forte,
 L'odeur du temps est veloutée.*

The Color of Time

This morning the clear bird call resounded
 In the blue wind
 Spreading the warm pervasive perfume of
 spring love.

The distant past is no longer frigid, Lady
 Tan Phi.
 I quietly offer you
 The clouds and sky suffused with time's
 hue.

The color of time is not blue.
 The color of time is a dark purple.
 The odor of time is not strong.
 The odor of time is ethereal.

*Elle a coupé une mèche avec un couteau
d'or
Comme modeste offrande à Sa Majesté
Royale.
Bien qu'elle quitte sans dépit leur amour
de cent ans
Elle ne pourrait le souffrir de voir sa face
cachée.*

*L'affection de cent ans est maintenant
rompue,
Pourtant notre éternel amour retient son
parfum.
L'odeur du temps est veloutée,
Et la couleur du temps un violet foncé.*

*Traduit par Thomas D. Le
5 mai 2004*

Her silky hair cleft by a golden dagger
Is offered up with modesty to the Lord
Most High.
She bears forever their old love's
extinction without spite,
And rather hides her face than disappoints
him at sight.

Though the age-old bond of devotion is
severed,
The ever-lasting love's odor lingers.
The odor of time is ethereal,
The color of time a dark purple.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
3 May 2004

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Vũ Hoàng Chương

Born on May 5, 1916, in Nam Dinh into a family that had its roots in Phu Ung Village, Hung Yen Province, Vu Hoang Chuong attended the Albert Sarraut High School in Hanoi. After graduation in 1937, he attended law school in 1938 for a year before joining the civil service as a deputy inspector with the Railway Service.

In 1941 he left the Railway Service to take up mathematics studies in Hanoi, which he quit for a teaching career in Haiphong. During this time he continuously wrote poetry and plays.

In 1954, he left for Saigon, and resumed his writing career until his death in October 1976.

Representative works include *Thơ Say* (The Poems of Drunkenness, 1940), *Mây* (The Clouds, 1943), *Lửa Từ Bi* (The Fire of Mercy, 1963), *Ta Đợi Em Từ 30 Năm* (I've been Waiting 30 Years for You, 1970), *Chúng Ta Mất Hết Chỉ Còn Nhau* (We Lost Everything Except Ourselves, 1973), and the play *Trương Chi* (1944).

Though growing up during the New Poetry Movement years, Vu Hoang Chuong harbored a nostalgia for the traditional Oriental past. Ta Ty characterized his poetry as the sighs of the mystical Orient.

Say Di Em

I found in the following poem, *Get Drunk, Baby*, a distinct modern tone. Song Viet Dam Giang quotes the poet Mong Tuyet as saying that the young Vu Hoang Chuong at the time of writing had suffered an unsuccessful love, and was given to alcohol and opium. This poem is an outcry of lovesick pain that he felt while trying to dissipate it in a bout at a night club. Yet neither the dance with the bar girl nor the wine was the remedy for his permeating sadness that rose in front of him like an immovable wall.

Say Di Em

Khúc nhạc hồng êm ái
 Điệu kèn biếc quay cuồng
 Một trời phấn hương
 Đôi người gió sương
 Đầu xanh lặn đặng, cùng xót thương càng nhớ thương
 Hoa xưa tươi, trắng xưa ngọt, gôi xưa kè, tình nay sao héo
 Hồn ngả lâu rồi nhưng chân còn dẻo,
 Lòng trót nghiêng mà bước vẫn du dương,
 Lòng nghiêng tràn hết yêu đương
 Bước chân còn nhịp. Nghê thường lẳng lơ.

Ánh đèn tha thướt
 Lung mềm, não ruột đáng tở
 Hàng chân lá lướt
 Đê mê hồn gửi cánh tay hờ.
 Âm ba gờn gợn nhỏ,
 Ánh sáng phai phai dần
 Bốn tường gương điên đảo bóng giai nhân
 Lui đôi vai, tiến đôi chân,
 Riết đôi tay, ngả đôi thân,
 Sàn gỗ trơn chập chờn như biển gió
 Không biết nữa màu xanh hay sắc đỏ,
 Hãy thêm say, còn đó rượu chờ ta !
 Cỏ chưa khô, đầu chưa nặng, mắt chưa hoa
 Tay mềm mại, bước còn chưa chuyễn choáng.
 Chưa cuối xứ Mê Ly, chưa cùng trời Phóng Đãng.
 Còn chưa say, hồn khát vẫn thèm men.

Say đi em ! Say đi em !
 Say cho lơ lả ánh đèn
 Cho cung bực ngả nghiêng, điên rồ xác thịt.
 Rượu, rượu nữa, và quên, quên hết !

Ta quá say rồi
 Sắc ngả màu trôi
 Gian phòng không đứng vững
 Có ai ghì hư ảnh sát kê môi.
 Chân rã rời
 Quay cuồng chỉ đợc nữa
 Gối mời gấn rơi
 Trong men cháy, giác quan vừa bén lửa
 Say không còn biết chi đời
 Nhưng em ơi,
 Đắt trời nghiêng ngửa
 Mà trước mắt thành Sầu chưa sụp đổ;
 Đắt trời nghiêng ngửa
 Thành Sầu không sụp đổ, em ơi !

Vũ Hoàng Chương

*A la musique rose et tendre,
 Au son bleu de la clarinette tourbillonné
 Dans le monde de poudre et de parfum
 Deux âmes tracassées
 En leur jeunesse tourmentée, leur mutuelle
 affection causant autant de peines.
 Jadis leurs fleurs furent fraîches, leur lune
 douce, leurs oreillers proches. Mais ce
 jour leur amour s'est évanoui.
 Mon âme s'effondre depuis longtemps,
 mais mes jambes sont encore flexibles.
 A mon coeur renversé mes pas retiennent
 leur souplesse.
 De mon intérieur bouleversé tout l'amour
 s'est échappé.
 Pourtant mes pas s'accordent au rythme
 séduisant des couleurs de l'arc-en-ciel.*

*Sous la lumière rêveuse
 Le torse souple, onctueusement soyeux
 Les jambes élégantes,
 En extase l'âme repose sur un bras
 indifférent.
 Les sons doux ondulent légèrement
 Tandis que la lumière s'affaiblit
 graduellement.
 Les miroirs des quatre murs reflètent
 l'image perturbée de la belle.
 Les épaules reculent, les jambes avancent.
 Les bras se pressent et les corps s'inclinent
 Sur le parquet glissant qui ondoit comme
 la mer au vent.
 On ne sait plus si c'est bleu ou si c'est
 rouge.
 Enivrons-nous plus encore, le vin nous
 attend !
 Nous ne sentons ni la gorge sèche, ni la
 tête lourde, ni les yeux brouillés.
 Nos bras sont encore souples, nos pas
 nullement vacillants.
 On n'a pas atteint le bout de l'Euphorie, ni
 la limite de la Débauche.
 Pas assez ivre, mon âme soupire après du
 vin encore.*

*Enivre-toi, enivre-toi ma choute !
 Si ivre sous la lampe séduisante
 Que la gamme se renverse, que la chair
 s'affole.
 Encore du vin, encore du vin, et oublions,
 oublions tout !*

*Je suis ivre mort
 Le coloris m'a quitté*

To the pink mellow sound of music,
 To the blue clarinet whirling sound,
 In the world of powder and perfume
 Two suffering souls
 Battered in their youth, sharing mutual
 affection and as much longing.
 Once their flowers were fresh, their moon
 was sweet, their spring bed was shared, but
 now only was faded love.
 My soul long ago had fallen, yet my feet
 are still supple.
 My heart collapsed but my steps are still
 graceful.
 From my overflowed heart love has
 vanished.
 Yet my steps are still in time to the
 provocative rainbow-colored rhythm.

By the dreaming lamplight
 Your soft bust a silky languor
 Making graceful dance steps
 Resting your ravished soul on an
 indifferent arm.
 The music pined away in soft small waves
 As the light dimmed evermore.
 The four mirrored walls flung your
 beautiful self in a tipsy lurch.
 Shoulders retreating, legs advancing
 Hands clasping, bodies leaning
 Over the parquet floor waving as the
 windswept sea.
 I no longer know if it is blue or if it is
 ruddy.
 Let's get more drunk, the wine is waiting!
 Our throats are not yet dry, our heads not
 yet heavy, our eyes not yet blurry,
 Our arms are limber still, and our steps not
 yet tottering.
 We haven't reached the end of Euphoria,
 nor the bound of Debauchery.
 Not yet drunk, our thirsty souls still crave
 more spirits.

Get drunk! Get drunk, baby!
 Drunk with the lascivious light
 Till the music wobbles, till the flesh goes
 wild.
 More wine, more wine, and forget, forget
 all!

Now dead drunk,
 My colors have gone out fading,
 The room becomes unsteady.
 Who presses the illusion to my lips?

*Dans la salle chancelante.
 Qui m'a écrasé l'illusion aux lèvres ?
 Mes jambes épuisées
 Incapables de pirouetter
 Et les genoux titubants
 Sous l'ivresse brûlante qui enflamme mes
 sens;
 Tellement ivre que tout rien n'a plus de
 sens.
 Mais ma belle,
 Bien que le monde soit bouleversé
 Devant moi la muraille de la tristesse ne
 s'est pas effondrée.
 Que le monde chancelle
 La muraille de la tristesse ne s'est pas
 écroulée, ma belle !*

*Traduit par Thomas D. Le
 6 mai 2004*

My feet are exhausted
 Unable to whirl any longer.
 My worn-out knees ready to drop
 For the red-hot liquor, now inflaming my
 senses.
 So drunk the world lost reality.
 But, O dear!
 Though heaven and earth have toppled,
 The wall of Melancholy in front still holds.
 Heaven and earth collapse,
 Yet the Melancholy wall does not tumble,
 baby!

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 2 May 2004

Vịnh tranh Gà Lợn

This short light-hearted poem that Vu Hoang Chuong wrote in 1976 recalls the traditional scenes of farming communities in Vietnam during the Tet (Lunar New Year) celebrations. It captures the lively activities of domestic animals in small farms scattered among rice paddies. During these annual festivities villagers decorate their dwellings with silk paintings of familiar farm animals. Most common among them are pigs and chickens, which are raised not only for local consumption but also for district towns' markets.

Silk and paper paintings of pigs and chickens on the farm find popularity even among urban dwellers for their depiction of peace and prosperity that are sought after during Tet for the entire coming new year. Speaking of roosters alone, Dong Ho Village in North Vietnam is well known for its exquisite woodcut prints of this species, which the French call king of the farmyard.

Vu Hoang Chuong plays a great deal with popular motifs and imagery in this rather incoherent but nevertheless charming ditty. Dipping into the treasure trove of folk wisdom, the poet makes allusion to slivers of proverbs and adages without aspiring to any particular pattern of thought.

This poem is presented to welcome the forthcoming Tet, the Year of the Rooster of 2005.

Vịnh Tranh Gà Lợn

Sáng chưa sáng hẳn, tối không đành
 Gà lợn, om sòm rồi bức tranh
 Rằng vách có tai, thơ có họa
 Biết lòng ai đỏ, mắt ai xanh
 Mắt gà huỳnh đệ bao lần quáng
 Lòng lợn âm dương một tác thành
 Cục tác nữa chi, ngừng ừ ừ
 Nghe rỗng ngâm váng khúc tân thanh.

The Pig and Rooster Painting

Deep in the dark shadows of early dawn
 Roosters and pigs bustle in their silk
 scrolls.
 As walls have ears, so verse dissolves in
 paint.
 Who has a pure heart, and who has clear
 eyes?
 How oft is the brotherly rooster blind,

Vũ Hoàng Chương

And the pig's heart sees its dream come true?
The cocks stop crowing, the pigs stop oinking,
And the dragon hums its new song to spring.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
22 January 2005

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Thế Lữ

Thế Lữ the pen name of Nguyễn Thứ Lễ (born October 1907), left school after the 10th grade to join the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (The Self-Reliant Literary Group) as well as the editorial boards of the *Phong Hóa* (Culture), *Ngày Nay* (Modern Times), and *Tinh Hoa* (Quintessence) magazines. As a notable romantic poet Thế Lữ played an important role in the New Poetry movement.

His published works include *Mấy Vần Thơ* (Miscellaneous Poems), *Vàng và Máu* (Gold and Blood), *Bên Đường Thiên Lô* (On the Thunderbolt Road), *Trăng Gió Ngàn* (The Moon in the Windy Woods), *Trại Bồ Tùng Linh* (Bo Tung Linh Camp), *Ba Hôi Kinh Dị* (The Triple Horror), *Lê Phong Phóng Viên* (Inspector Le Phong), *Gói Thuốc Lá* (The Cigarette Pack).

Cây Đàn Muôn Điệu

Tôi là người bộ hành phiêu lãng
Đường trần gian xuôi ngược để vui chơi
Tìm cảm giác hay trong tiếng khóc, câu cười,
Trong lúc gian lao, trong giờ sung sướng,
Khi phấn đấu cũng như hồi mơ tưởng.
Tôi yêu đời cùng với cảnh lầm than,
Cảnh thương tâm, ghê gớm hay dịu dàng.
Cảnh rực rỡ, ái ân hay dữ dội.

Anh dù bảo: tính tình tôi thay đổi,
Không chuyên tâm, không chủ nghĩa:
nhưng cần chi ?

Tôi chỉ là một khách tình si
Ham vẽ đẹp có muôn hình muôn thể.
Mượn giấy bút nàng Ly-Tao tôi vẽ,
Mượn cây đàn ngàn phím, tôi ca
Và đẹp u trầm, đắm đuối, hay ngây thơ,
Cũng như vẻ Đẹp cao siêu, hùng tráng
Của non nước, của thi văn tư tưởng.

Dáng yêu kiều tha thướt khách giai nhân;
Ánh tung bừng linh hoạt nắng trời xuân;
Vẻ sâu muện âm thầm ngày mưa gió;
Cảnh vĩ đại, sóng nghiêng trời, thác ngàn

The Versatile Instrument

To the whole wide world I set out on foot
Straight up and down the road of life for fun
In search of sensations in tears or in
laughters
In times of distress or in the hours of bliss,
Whether stirred to action or during
daydreams.
I love life along with its pains
In heart-rending, abhorrent, or heart-
warming situations,
In scenes of glory, affection or violence.

You said my personality is changeable
Without focus or conviction: What should
I care?
I am but a love-stricken man
In love with beauty in its myriad faces.
With the brush borrowed from Lady Ly
Tao I paint,
To the tune of the thousand-fretted
instrument I sing
Of beauty quiet and profound, passionate,
or innocent

đỏ;
 Nét mong manh, thấp thoáng cánh hoa
 bay;
 Cánh cơ hàn nơi nước đọng bùn lầy;
 Thú sáng lạn mơ hồ trong ảo mộng;
 Chí hăng hái đua ganh đời náo động;
 Tôi đều yêu, đều kiếm đều say mê.
 Tôi sẵn lòng đau vì tiếng ai bị,
 Và cảm khái bởi những lời hăng hái.
 Tôi ngợi ca với tiếng lòng phấn khởi,
 Tôi thở than cùng thiếu nữ băng khuâng,
 Tôi véo von theo tiếng sáo lung chừng,
 Tôi yên ủi với tiếng chuông huyền diệu,
 Với Nàng Thơ, tôi có đàn muôn điệu;
 Với Nàng Thơ, tôi có bút muôn màu;
 Tôi muốn làm nhà nghệ sĩ nhiệm màu:
 Lấy thanh sắc trần gian làm tài liệu.

Thế Lữ

As of beauty majestic and heroic
 Of nature, of literature or of thought.

The graceful lissome young beauty,
 The resplendent lively spring sunshine,
 The quiet melancholy of a stormy day,
 Majestic scenes, towering waves,
 thundering falls,
 Then the flight of a delicate petal,
 Grinding poverty in stagnant water,
 Delightful pleasure of living a dream,
 The ardent struggle of a spirited life,
 I love them all, seek them all with a
 passion.
 I'll readily suffer at heart-rending cries
 And act with fervor on words of zeal.
 I'll rejoice with happy voices from within
 And lament at a female heart's agony.
 I'll sing to the lingering tune of a flute
 And feel calm at the soothing sound of
 bells.
 With my muse I have a versatile lute
 With my muse I have a multi-colored
 brush.
 I want to be a magical artist
 Wielding colors and sounds as my
 medium.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 12 May 2004

Nhớ Rừng

(Lời con hổ ở vườn bách thú)

Gặm một khối căm hờn trong cũi sắt,
 Ta nằm dài, trông ngày tháng dần qua,
 Khinh lũ người kia ngạo mạn, ngẩn ngơ,
 Giương mắt bé giễu oai linh rừng thẳm
 Nay sa cơ bị nhục nhằn, tù hãm
 Để làm trò lạ mắt, thú đồ chơi
 Chịu ngang bầy cùng bọn gấu dở hơi
 Với cặp báo chuồng bên vô tư lự.

Ta mãi sống trong tình thương nỗi nhớ
 Thuở tung hoành, hống hách những ngày
 xưa.
 Nhớ cảnh sơn lâm, bóng cả, cây già
 Với tiếng gió gào ngàn, với giọng nguồn
 hét núi,
 Với khi thét khúc trường ca dữ dội
 Ta bước chân lên, đống dục, đường hoàng,
 Lượn tấm thân như sóng cuộn nhịp nhàng,
 Vờn bóng âm thầm, lá gai, cỏ sắc.

Yearning for the Jungle

(The voice of a tiger in captivity in a zoo)

In the iron cage my heart seething with
 anger,
 I lie through long slow months,
 Despising the gang of addle swaggerers
 Who through tiny eyes dare to mock the
 jungle's majesty.
 Now fallen and captive, I swallow my
 pride
 To be a curiosity, a toy,
 An equal to the despicable bears,
 To the pair of clueless leopards next door.
 I drag a life filled with longing and love
 For good old days of mighty dominion,
 In the jungle amidst huge old shade trees,
 Mighty howling winds, and thundering
 falls,
 Roaring my epic and powerful roar,
 I strutted in commanding steps sure and

Trong hang tối, mắt thần khi đã quắc
 Là khiến cho mọi vật đều im hơi.
 Ta biết ta chúa tể cả muôn loài
 Giữa chốn thảo hoa, không tên không tuổi.

Nào đâu những đêm vàng bên bờ suối,
 Ta say mồi đứng uống ánh trăng tan?
 Đâu những ngày mưa chuyển động bốn
 phương ngàn
 Ta lặng ngắm giang san ta đôi mới
 Đâu những buổi bình minh cây xanh nấng
 gọi
 Tiếng chim ca giấc ngủ ta tung bùng?
 Đâu những chiều lênh láng máu sau rừng
 Ta đợi chết mảnh mặt trời gay gắt
 Để ta chiếm lấy riêng phần bí mật?
 - Than ôi! Thời oanh liệt nay còn đâu!

Nay ta ôm niềm uất hận ngàn thâu
 Ghét những cảnh không đời nào thay đổi,
 Những cảnh sửa sang tâm thường, giả dối:
 Hoa chăm, cỏ xén, lối phẳng, cây trồng;
 Dải nước đen giả suối chẳng thông dòng
 Lẩn lút bên những mô gò thấp kém;
 Dẫm vùng lá hiến lạnh không bí hiểm
 Cũng học đòi bắt chước vẻ hoang vu
 Của chốn ngàn năm cao cả, âm u.
 Hỡi oai linh cảnh nước non hùng vĩ
 Là nơi giống hùm thiêng ta ngự trị,
 Nơi thanh thang ta vùng vẫy ngày xưa
 Nơi ta không còn được thấy bao giờ!
 Có biết chăng trong những ngày ngao ngán
 Ta đang theo giấc mộng vàng to lớn
 Để hồn ta phảng phất được gần người
 Hỡi cảnh rừng ghê gớm của ta ơi!

Thế Lữ

proud,
 My rhythmic wave-like body strong and
 stout,
 Stalking silent 'mongst brambles and sharp
 grass.
 In dark caves once I flashed my awesome
 eyes
 All life lay quiet holding its hushed breath.
 I basked in smugness, king of all creatures,
 Roaming amidst the nameless plants and
 trees.

Now where are those moonlit nights by the
 stream
 When hearty dinner done I savored the
 moonlight?
 Where are those rainstorms that shook the
 jungle domain
 When I quietly surveyed my revived
 kingdom?
 Where are those daybreaks that bathed the
 lush trees
 And birdsongs that riotously awakened
 me?
 Where the blood-red rays that drowned the
 jungle
 When I couldn't wait for the hot sun to die
 So I could seize its secret for myself.
 -- Oh, where have they all gone, those
 glory days?

I smother my deep perpetual anger
 Hating the things that never ever change,
 The spaces that were deceitfully built,
 With tended blooms, mown grass, straight
 paths, grown trees,
 A dark trickle that passed as forest streams
 Lurking 'mongst phony low-lying hillocks
 With docile foliage shorn of mystery,
 Faking so miserably the wilderness
 And its eternal life's solemnity.
 O noble proud land of majesty
 Where my valiant kind always holds firm
 sway,
 The vast realm that I used to rule over,
 Country that I will never see again!
 Did you know in my days of dark despair
 I still nurture lofty grandiose dreams
 In my soul of being in your midst again,
 O my dear old awesome jungle domain?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 19 September 2004

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Chế Lan Viên

Writing under the pen name of Che Lan Vien, Phan Ngoc Hoan took this Cham-sounding name to wrap his pain of having lost his country to the French in poetry purporting to reflect the Chams' comparable pain under Vietnamese expansion.

Born on 20 October 1920 at Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province, Phan Ngoc Hoan was educated at the Qui Nhon High School, where he obtained the Middle School Diploma in a competitive examination. He pursued a private teaching career after this accomplishment.

Che Lan Vien began writing poetry when he was twelve or thirteen, and by seventeen, had published his first collection, which he named *Devastation*, and in whose preface he proclaimed the artistic manifesto of a poetry movement called "The Rebellious Poetry School."

In 1954 he became a leading figure of the Vietnamese Writers Association, and a Deputy to the National Assembly. He spent decades writing poetry, essays, fiction, and literary criticisms. After 1975 he moved to Saigon, and took up residence in the Tan Binh District, where he died on 19 June 1989.

His literary legacy includes the poems *Điêu Tàn* (Devastation) (1937), a collection of prose pieces *Vàng Sao* (Gold Star) (1942), *Gửi Các Anh* (To My Friends) (1954), *Ánh Sáng Và Phù Sa* (Light and Alluvium) (1960), *Hoa Ngày Thường -- Chim Báo Báo* (Everyday Flowers -- The Storm Herald) (1967), *Hoa Trên Đá* (Blossoms on the Rock) (1984).

Che Lan Vien's fame derived from his anthology *Devastation*, one of the outstanding chefs-d'oeuvre of the pre-war era. These poems lead readers into the infernal, weird, macabre and mysterious world of spirits. From them emanate fantastic images immersed in painful groans, angry lamentations, pent-up hatred and unspeakable enmity deeply felt for a people subjected to extinction, expressed in veiled and discreet references to a patriotism that had no issue except through this artifice.

Ngủ Trong Sao - Sleep Among The Stars

The poem *Ngủ Trong Sao* (Sleep Among The Stars) stands out as a fanciful, whimsical musing of a poet in search of the mystery of love, one that only the fabled beauty of a Chiem fair maiden of a lost people could kindle in the heart of men. His journey began among the stars in the awe-inspiring universe, and found her for an ephemeral moment only to see her evaporate into the misty land that no longer was. Before fading, she let her tears fall on his cheeks, as if to signify that the bliss was ending. Then one night on the seaside as he was facing his own vulnerability and insignificance before the immensity of space and time, he found the fair maiden again, in her distant pained cry that came through loud and clear, beckoning and insistent, because she was still around.

On a symbolic level, the poet expressed the romance, the love of his land that came naturally to him in an idyllic setting where his land was still his. But this romance, this land was not to last as it was slowly being carried away by force of circumstance, just as his fatherland was being ravished and carried away by force of arms. He remembered the tears that were shed during the brief moments of happiness when the land he loved was slipping from his grasp. As he was contemplating his powerlessness before great odds, a

distant call was suddenly swelling in his ears. His land was calling him, beckoning to him. The land was in pain, but it was still alive.

Ngủ Trong Sao

Ta để xiêm lên mây, rồi nhẹ bước
Xuống dòng Ngân lòá chói ánh hào quang
Sao tán loạn đua bơi trên mặt nước,
Tiếng lao xao dội thâu đến cung Hằng.

Rồi trần truồng, ta nằm trên điện ngọc,
Hai tay cuồng vờ níu áo muôn tiên
Đầu gối lên hàng Thất tinh vừa mọc
Hồn giạt trôi về đến nước non Chiêm.

Ta gặp Nàng trên một vì sao nhỏ
Ta hôn Nàng trong bóng núi mây cao
Ta ôm Nàng trong những nguồn trăng đỏ
Ta ghì Nàng trong những suối trăng sao.

Nàng không nói, không cười, không than
thở
Theo ta về sao Đẩu ở chân trời
Trên má ta lệ Nàng đâu bỗng nhỏ
Ôm má ta, Nàng sẽ bảo đôi lời.

Nhưng mà trăng ! nhưng mà sao ! nhưng
mà gió !
Ồn ào lên, tán loạn chạy quanh ta
Phút hồn độn qua rồi. Trời ! Đau khổ !
Bóng Chiêm nường dần khuất dưới sương
sa.

Đêm hôm nay ngồi đây trên bờ bể
Ta lặng đếm thử bao nhiêu thế kỷ
Đã trôi trong một phút vội vàng qua
Ta lắng nghe những thế giới bao la
Tụ họp lại trong lòng muôn hạt cát,
Dòng tư tưởng lặn trôi trong Lầm Lạc
Hồn say sưa vào khắp cõi Trời Mơ,
Ai kêu ta trong cùng thăm Hư Vô ?
Ai réo gọi trong muôn sao, chói với ?
-- Nàng, nàng, nàng, thôi chính nàng
đương mong đợi.

Chế Lan Viên

Sleep Among The Stars

Hanging my clothes to the clouds, I tiptoed
away
To the Silver River awash in brilliant light.
The scattered stars swam around on the
waterway
Sending the commotion clear through to
the Moon bright.

Lying naked I lazed around the jade palace
Feverishly grabbing the dresses of fairies,
Resting my knees on the fresh rising
Pleiades.
To Chiemland far my soul flew back in
ease.

I met the Maiden fair on a small star
And kissed her lips within the lofty clouds.
I grabbed her tight bathed in moonlit
shower,
And held her fast behind the starlight
shrouds.

Without a word, a smile, a teeny plaint
She followed me clear to the North Star
yond.
Then sudden drops of tiny tears fell faint
On my wet cheeks, she whispered some
words fond.

But O! the moon, the stars, and the wind
too
Arose in great tumult around poor me.
When all quiet, my pain boundlessly grew,
The maid of Chiem fading in far misty.

Tonight I sit hither on the beach sand
To quietly count up the centuries
That flitted by just as a swift clock hand.
I listen to the vast universes
Curl up into the tiny grains of sand,
My thoughts enmeshed in great Missteps,
My soul ensnared in rapt immense
Dreamland.
Who called me from the depths of
Nothingness?
Who cried in pain among the myriad stars?
-- It's her, it's her, it's her, waiting from
very far.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
13 August 2004

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Bích Khê

Born Le Quang Luong on 24 March 1916 in his maternal village of Phuoc Loc, Son Tinh District, Quang Ngai Province, Bích Khê issued from a family of scholars. Educated at the Huế High School, then later at a Hanoi high school, he left before graduation to take up private teaching in Phan Thiet and Huế. His life was cut short by tuberculosis on 17 January 1946 before reaching his thirtieth birthday.

The only poems published during his life were collected in *Tinh Huyét* (Pure Blood) in 1939. Among his unpublished poems are *Máy Dòng Thơ Cũ* (Old Verses), written during the period 1931-1936, *Tinh Hoa* (Quintessence) during 1938-1944, and *Đẹp* (Beauty) in 1939.

Bích Khê 's poetry follows three strands of artistic orientation: the symbolic, the supernatural and the libertine. To the new poetry he brought a refreshing creative imagination, a unique modern tone, a spirit of exploration and discovery into artistic imagery, construction, diction, and sensations. Unhindered among the stars of the New Poetry Movement, Bích Khê 's bold and masterful handling of various motifs, especially those touching upon human sensuality, sets him apart and ahead of his generation.

Chế Lan Viên had this to say about Bích Khê:

If Nguyễn Bính is the familiar scene of rustic life, Bích Khê is an exotic mountaintop. There are poets who make poetry. There are poets who, while making poetry, push it one more step toward modernism. There are poets who bring in a harvest of food. And there are poets who hold a bunch of novel seeds in their hands. Bích Khê belongs in the second group.

Tỳ Bà -- The Lute

In the following poem, *Tỳ Bà* (The Lute), listen for the haunting rhythm and the low-tone endings of each verse, a stylistic device which must rank among the most daring experimentations in poetic style. In Vietnamese, which is a tone language, the low tone group includes the neutral tone (denoted by no diacritics) and the *huyền* tone (or low-falling tone denoted by the grave accent mark over the vowel). Normally, Vietnamese poets instinctively vary the tone pattern of verse endings according to received prosodic practices or according to an intuitive sense of tonal harmony, specifically to avoid the deadening drone of a languishing monotone. Even among modern poets whose spirit of audacity, modernity and emancipation is the imprimatur of their personal worldview, such as Xuân Diệu, the temerity of pushing verse tone patterning to its limit was not particularly popular.

Not so with Bích Khê. His is a spirit so free and unconstrained that he flouted tradition in a highly idiosyncratic and iconoclastic way. All the verses in the poem *Tỳ Bà* end in a low (even) tone. It is as if Bích Khê dared his reader to fall asleep during the recitation: You have to read it aloud to appreciate the difficulty of maintaining a sense of excitement and anticipation when every single verse brings your voice to a vanishingly low pitch. Yet, for some inexplicable reason, you keep reading because you keep finding the words and

emotions strangely woven, intriguing, and captivating. They relentlessly push you ever deeper into his world, and farther forward until you feel fully engaged. In a sense, you feel dizzy and excited, as if intoxicated from an ever-increasing dose of liquor that stealthily insinuates into your system with every verse that impinges on your eye and ear. This two-tone poem speaks an idiom irredeemably antithetical to joy.

Tỳ Bà (The Lute) grabs me from the start with its incantation-like flow, and holds me mesmerized till the last monotonous verse. At the last verse I was left with a sensation of bizarre befuddlement and bewilderment. I have just left the region of the fantastic (or so I thought), and of the monotonous lute, which in the midst of fall spun tunes of melancholy loneliness for a man's lost sweetheart. The lovesick man spoke of spring and of winter, but his mood was dominated by the pervasive dreariness of golden fall. He grasped at the vision of happiness while in the throes of despair, yet refrained from begging her because of her unfaithfulness: She had forsaken her vows of fidelity in the face of his steadfastness. He longed for her with his waiting lips, which he knew she would never touch again. Yet he would never stop loving her, nor would he ever seek her out. His life was now made insipid and disoriented, for she had taken his paradise with her, and buried it in her bosom, from which it now remained to him unreachable.

Everywhere he looked he saw sadness, on the peach, on the conifer, on the wood-oil tree. Everywhere he looked, he saw the golden hue of fall, the endless golden hue of fall, the boundless color of fall, the color of despair. A doleful repetition that trails off into immense broken-hearted dejection.

Tỳ Bà

Nàng ơi ! Tay đêm đang giăng mềm
Trăng đan qua cành muôn tay êm
Mây nhuộm pha màu thu trên trời
Sương lam phơi màu thu muôn nơi.

Vàng sao nằm im trên hoa gầy
Tương tư người xưa thổi qua đây
Ôi ! Nàng năm xưa quên lời thề
Hoa vừa đưa hương gầy đê mê.

Cây đàn yêu đương làm bằng thơ
Cây đàn yêu đương run trong mơ
Hồn về trên môi kêu: em ơi
Thuyền hồn không đi lên chơi voi.

Tôi qua tìm nàng vay du dương
Tôi mang lên lầu lên cung Thương
Tôi không bao giờ thổi yêu nàng
Tình tang tôi nghe như tình lang.

Yêu nàng bao nhiêu trong lòng tôi
Yêu nàng bao nhiêu trên đôi môi
Đâu tìm Đào Nguyên cho xa xôi
Đào Nguyên trong lòng nàng đây thôi.

Thu ôm muôn hồn chơi phiêu diêu
Sao tôi không mượn kêu: em yêu

The Lute

My love! The arm of night extends its
sweet touch soft
While 'mongst the trees the moon weaves
its silky web sheer.
With velvet clouds embedded in fall sky
aloft,
The mist of autumn spreads its color far
and near.

The golden starlight calmly sleeps on
spindly flowers;
I feel such loneliness for my old
sweetheart fair.
Sweetheart! Why hast thou fain forgot the
oath of ours?
And here I am enthralled with blossoms'
fragrant air.

The lute of love sings its tune made of
verse;
In dreams the lute rings clear its song of
love.
My soul cries out, 'My love', on my lips
pursed.
An empty boat, my wits aimlessly rove.

I seek her out to borrow tunes of bliss,
And take them up to my palace cozy.

Trăng nay không nàng như trăng thiêu
Đêm nay không nàng như đêm hiu.

Buồn lưu cây đào tìm hơi xuân
Buồn sang cây tùng thăm đông quân
Ô ! Hay buồn vương cây ngô đồng
Vàng rơi ! vàng rơi: Thu mệnh mỏng.

Bích Khê

Never would I my love for her surcease.
This lute sounds like a lover's voice to me.

How much do I love her deep in my heart!
How much do I adore her on my lips!
No need to find Eden so far apart;
Eden is here lodged in her bosom's depths.

Fall grasps all souls in its ethereal hands.
Why do I not want to call out: 'Darling!' ?
Without my love the moon's but wasted
lands;
Without my love the night is such sad
thing.

Sadness on the peach roams for spring's
breath,
Seeks out Sun God o'er at the conifer.
Why such sadness on the wood-oil tree's
breath?
O! golden fall, golden, boundless fall 'stir.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
17 August 2004

Tranh Lỗ Thế - The Nude Painting

Pygmalion fashioned a perfect statue of a maiden, named her Galatea, then fell in love with his life-like creation. He implored the goddess Venus to give him "one like his ivory virgin" as bride. She breathed life into Galatea. And the two lived in blissful matrimony ever after.

Bích Khê neither created the nude painting nor married the lifeless image on canvas. But his devotion and passion were no less intense, and his feverish mind churned and burned with desire for the flesh that he saw softening and enticing right under his gaze.

He mused and raved and longed achingly, with a vengeance, with all the strength of his anatomy, with all the raw power of his imagination, with all the bitterness of his ungratified prurient interests.

Bích Khê reveals here a personal, intimate glimpse of his inner soul, and the tension and conflict of a man with his libido, which sinks him to bottomless depths from which the only escape is to soar phoenix-like to the loftiest heights of deliverance from the sway of the flesh.

Given the traditional milieu in which Bích Khê lived, this is a remarkable piece of erotic creation in modern Vietnamese poetry.

Tranh Lỗ Thế

Dáng tằm xuân uốn trong tranh Tố Nữ,
Ô tiên nương ! nàng lại ngự nơi này ?
Nàng ở mô ? Xiêm áo bỏ đâu đây ?
Đến triển lãm cả tấm thân kiều diễm.

The Nude Painting

A curvaceous body in the To Nu painting.
O goddess of beauty! 'T is hither that you
reign?
Where are you now? Yet here your clothes

Nàng là tuyết hay da nàng tuyết điểm ?
 Nàng là hương hay nhan sắc lên hương ?
 Mắt ngài châu rung ánh sáng nghệ thường;
 Lệ tích lại sắp tuôn hàng đũa ngọc.

Đêm u huyền ngủ mơ trên mái tóc.
 Vài chút trăng say động ở làn môi.
 Hai vú nàng ! hai vú nàng ! chao ôi !
 Cho tôi nút một dòng sâm ngọt lộng.
 Ôi lồ lộ một tòa hoa nghiêm động !
 Tôi run run hãm lại cánh hồn si...
 Ó hai tay rơi chén ngọc lưu ly;
 Ó hai chân nở màu sen ẽo lá;
 Cho tôi nàng ! cho tôi nàng ! tất cả...

Tôi miên man uống lại mộng quỳnh dao
 Cho đê mê, chói với, hồn lên cao,
 -- Một tinh cầu sẽ tan ra biển lệ.
 Tiên nương hỡi ! nàng sống trên thế hệ,
 Bóng thời gian phải quy dưới chân nàng --
 Xuân muôn đời di dưỡng giữa vùng tang !
 Gương phép tắc suốt soi ngàn mộng ảnh !

Cớ làm sao nâng niu bầu giá lạnh,
 Ấp tranh người, lơ đãng ngắm thi nhân ?
 Hay nàng nhớ nhung các phượng đèn lân ?
 Hay nàng ước mơ tình trong trắng ngọc ?
 Ôi ! nàng ôi ! Làm sao nàng chẳng khóc
 Người thi nhân, vẽ đẹp của khiêu dâm --
 Trăng thanh tịnh còn lóng trong thơ câm,
 Nhạc vô minh hăng sôi trên nét chữ ?
 Ôi ! Nàng ôi ! thốt lên, lời ngọc nữ,
 Lời trần châu rúng cả phiếm lòng tôi...

Ngọc Kiều ! Ngọc Kiều ! Đến cặp song
 đôi
 Cho tôi đọ vẽ hương trời sắc nước;
 Vẽ huyền diệu ú men say lướt lướt;
 Vẽ yêu tinh dồn giận thâu vô gan;
 Ta thiếp đi -- trong một phút mê loạn
 Xuống muôn đợt rồi bay lên tột bực...

Bích Khê

still are.
 Whence came you to show your shapely
 body?
 Are you the stuff of snow or snow-
 adorned?
 Are you perfume-sweet or beauty-
 endowed?
 Your pearl-lustrous eyes shimmer with
 heavenly hues
 Dammings teardrops about to burst in ivory
 flows.

Mysterious night sleeps soundly on your
 hair
 While sheaves of moonlight linger on your
 lips.
 Your two breasts! Your two breasts! Oh
 my! Oh my!
 Let me suck the mellifluous nectar.
 What an engaging blossom uncovered!
 Shaken I rein in my demented soul...
 Oh! Those hands let fall the twinkling jade
 bowl.
 Oh! Those spread legs lascivious lotus-
 pink.
 Give me you! Give me you! Give me you
 whole....

I took a long quaff of the dream potion
 To reach the giddy height of ecstasy,
 And drown the world in vast oceans of
 tears.
 O my Beauty! You dwell across all time;
 E'en dreaded Father Time kneels at your
 feet.
 There lies eternal spring in seas of change!
 All rules of life are but mere illusions!

Wherefore do you cuddle the bitter cold
 Of mere painting, and fail to prize the
 bard?
 Or you so miss life in palatial home.
 Or you so long for the whitest pure love.
 O my Beauty! Why shed you not your
 tears
 For this poet, with all your lewd beauty?
 The silent moon rests in mute lines of
 verse,
 A soundless melody that boils in words.
 O my Beauty! Speak up your words of
 jade
 And tones of pearl that pluck my fond
 heartstrings.

Ngoc Kieu! Ngoc Kieu! Come here with
your double.

Let me portray your preternatural beauty
So wondrous it drowns me in tipsy daze,
So devilish it rams my wrath deep in.
I blacked out...for a delirious moment;
From the deepest depths I then flung
skyward.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
26 August 2004

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Hoàng Cầm

Hoàng Cầm, whose birthname Bui Tang Viet came from the Village of Phuc Tang, Viet Yen District, in the province of Bac Giang (now Ha Bac), was born in 1922 and grew up in the midst of *quan họ* country (See note below) in the Kinh Bac area, known as the cultural cradle of the Northern delta.

The rich oral and performing tradition of *quan họ*, which has nowadays evolved almost beyond recognition thanks to modern electronic and performing technologies, has left an unadulterated mark on its native son.

Hoàng Cầm's representative poetry was collected in two volumes entitled *Bên Kia Sông Đuống* (Across the Duong River), and *Về Kinh Bắc* (Return to the Northern Capital). He also wrote several plays in verse: *Viễn Khách* (The Wayfarer), *Kiều Loan* (The Mad Woman), *Lên Đường* (En Route), and *Men Đá Vàng* (The Yeast of Yellow Stone).

His poetry bears all the polish, musicality and romance of the *quan họ* song of his native land. He took his inspiration freely from such great place names as Kinh Bac, the Duong River, Thuan Thanh and Bat Trang, from which he fashioned for himself a distinctive poetic style based on the traditional idiom of his locality and its customs and mores.

The critic Đặng Tiên characterizes Hoàng Cầm's poetry as "a felicitous marriage between the traditional folk culture and the modern way of life that expresses traditional beauty in a language of novelty, modernity and youthfulness."

Note on Quan họ. *Quan họ is a traditional antiphonal singing performance emanating from Bac Ninh-Bac Giang Provinces, and consisting of alternate and responsive singing by groups of men and women during formal festivals and certain informal communal occasions. In traditional Vietnam, the quan họ session started with a pair of women singing their extemporaneous "challenges" for several minutes, prompting a pair of men to respond with a comparable-length composition of their own following the same melodies. Then the roles were reversed, with the men throwing down their challenges for the women to respond. Quan họ singing was performed often from a known repertoire of melodies. And the more elaborate lyrics were not infrequently written by poets. Though the themes might vary from homage to the village guardian spirits to more mundane topics, the main thrust of the quan họ was a courtship ritual between eligible singles of the traditional village, during which they could openly express their desire with the sanction of the notables and villagers.*

Tình Cầm - Cam's Love

Tình Cầm (Cam's Love) is the voice of distress of a grizzled lover (himself) whose erstwhile sweetheart is now bound by matrimony to another man. Though knowing his love is hopeless, he still nurtures the hope that someday she will come back to him, silver-haired, to be his for the rest of their lives.

Tình Cầm

Nếu anh còn trẻ như năm cũ
Quyết đón em về sống với anh
Rồi những chiều vàng phơ phất lại
Anh đàn, em hát nín xuân xanh.

Nhưng thuyền em buộc bên sông hận
Anh chẳng quay về với trúc tơ
Ngày tháng Tỳ Bà vương ánh nguyệt
Mộng héo bên song vẫn đợi chờ.

Có mây bàng bạc gây thương nhớ
Có ánh trăng vàng soi giấc mơ
Có anh ngồi lặng so phím cũ
Mong chờ em hát khúc xuân xưa.

Nếu có ngày nào em quay gót
Lui về thăm lại bến thu xa
Thì đôi mái tóc không xanh nữa
Mây bạc, trăng vàng vẫn thướt tha...

Hoàng Cầm

Cam's Love

If I were young as in the days of old,
I'd take you in fore'er to live with me.
On each golden sundown that gently
rolled,
You'd sing to my lute as in younger days.

But your boat's fast moored on spite's
riverside,
And I can't back to earlier romance.
Always each night my lute sings to the
moon
In faded hope I still by you abide.

Those spreading clouds beget the thought
of you
While yellow moon lights up my nights of
dream.
Still I sit here and play old songs anew
Hoping you'd sing old tunes as in past
springs.

Should there be day when you turn back
your steps
To see again the harbor of the autumn old,
Our hair would bear no more its dark
freshness,
We'd see white clouds, gold moon,
romance untold.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
7 September 2004

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Hồ Dzếnh

Born Hà Triệu Anh in 1916 at the village of Dong Bich, Quang Xuong District, Thanh Hoa Province, Hồ Dzếnh had a Vietnamese mother. His father was a Cantonese who had settled in Vietnam since 1890. After graduation from high school in Hanoi, Hồ Dzếnh embarked on a teaching and journalism career while writing poetry. Active from 1931, he went to Saigon in 1953 as a journalist only to return to Hanoi the following year to continue writing poems. He died on 13 August 1991 in Hanoi.

Among his works must be cited poems collected in *Quê Ngoại* (The Maternal Land in 1942), and in *Hoa Xuân Đất Việt* (The Spring Flowers of Vietnam, 1946). His short stories were published in 1942, assembled in the volume *Chân Trời Cũ* (Old Horizons), and two novels, *Một Truyện Tình 15 Năm Về Trước* (A Fifteen-Year-Old Love Story) and *Những Vành Khăn Trắng* (The White Head Scarfs) appeared in 1942 and 1946 respectively.

His mixed culture showed through in his works. *The Maternal Land* made its mark in poetry with his delicacy of taste, and pervading genuine love of his mother's land, wrought in supple, serene, light, and luminous verses.

Muôn Trùng

Tình vạn dặm, tên người yêu chắc đẹp,
 Người và tôi xa quá đôi -- muôn trùng;
 Tôi với người chưa một giấc mơ chung,
 Đồi viễn xứ nên tình không thấu hết.
 Hoài mộng cho tin, nghi ngờ để biết,
 Hỏi người duyên, người xa cách muôn
 trùng,
 Đến bao giờ nằm ngủ giấc mơ chung
 Cho thơ sáng diễn quanh hồn thắm thiết ?
 (1)

Hỏi người đẹp chưa bao giờ quen biết,
 Mắt người lo hay đôi mắt người buồn ? (2)
 Tóc tơ dài, hay dáng bước thôn thôn (3)
 Người có khóc những khi trời rất đẹp ?
 Rồi một buổi nghe tin người bỗng chết!
 Rũ hồn sầu trong một thoáng mong manh,
 Tôi về đây, đường ngập bóng thu xanh,
 Đem thơ thắm, ủ thiên tình bất diệt !

Tôi hỏi hết lòng sầu hay mắt đẹp ? (4)
 Xưa tuy xa, nay lại quá muôn trùng !
 Hỏi người duyên, người thương nhớ tôi
 không ?
 Tôi yêu lắm, dấu tình chưa giải hết.
 Và... tôi khóc những khi trời rất đẹp...

Hồ Dzếnh

Trong Hồ Dzếnh, Tác Phẩm Chọn Lọc bài
 này có một số sửa đổi:

- (1) Cho thơ sáng tỏa quanh hồn thắm thiết.
- (2) Mắt người vui hay đôi mắt người buồn ?
- (3) Tóc tơ dài, hay dáng vóc thôn thôn.
- (4) Tôi hết hỏi lòng sầu hay mắt đẹp ?

Infinity

So far away my lover's name must be
 lovely.
 How great a distance is 'tween her and me.
 We never had a common dream to share
 Or understand our love so far apart.
 I longed for news to quell traces of
 doubt.
 O dear sweetheart from way yonder you
 are
 When will we be sharing our common
 dream
 So my love verse may brighten up our
 souls? (1)

O fair maiden mine that I never knew!
 Were your eyes care-worn or tinged with
 sadness? (2)
 Was your hair long, or your demeanor
 lithe? (3)
 And did you ever cry on splendid days?
 So then one day I heard of your demise!
 My soul deep grieved for such a fragile
 life.
 And here I am walking the road of autumn
 blues
 Letting my verse sing praises of eternal
 love.

Should I dwell on my grief or your swell
 eyes? (4)
 What was only far is now forever!
 My destined one, do you miss and love
 me?
 I love you much, with love
 unconsummate,
 And now I weep on days that are
 gorgeous.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 10 December 2004

The "Ho Dzenh's Selected Poems" shows the following variants:

- (1) So my love verse may shine light on our souls?
- (2) Were your eyes happy or tinged with sadness?
- (3) Was your hair long, or your figure lissome?
- (4) Should I stop querying my grief or your swell eyes?

Màu Cây Trong Khói

Trên đường về nhớ đây...
Chiều chậm đưa chân ngày,
Tiếng buồn vang trong mây...
Chim rừng quên cất cánh,
Gió say tình ngậy ngậy,

Có phải sầu vạn cổ
Chất trong hồn chiều nay ?
Tôi là người lữ khách,
Mâu chiều khó làm khuây,
Ngỡ lòng mình là Rừng,
Ngỡ hồn mình là Mây,
Nhớ nhà chầm điếu thuốc,
Khói xanh bay lên cây... (1)

Hồ Dzếnh

(1) Ở đây chúng tôi chép theo bản in đầu tiên của Quê Ngoại năm 1942. Trong những lần tái bản, bài thơ được đổi tên là *Chiều* và câu cuối được đổi thành:

Khói huyền bay lên cây...

The Tree Colors Through Smoke

Laden with memories on my way home
I saw the dusk slowly snuff out the sun.
A mournful cry echoed amongst the clouds.
And the birds still lingered in the forest
While tipsy winds were filled with blissful love.

Is this the age-old fit of angst
That drives my soul deep down tonight?
Just as a wayfarer I am
I find no comfort in the dusky hues.
Taking my heart to be the woods,
Thinking my soul must be the cloud.
Homesick I then light up a smoke
Letting blue puffs rise to the trees. (1)

Translated by Thomas D. Le
10 December 2004

(1) This version comes from the 1942 edition. Later editions changed the poem's title to *Eventide*, and the last verse reads,

Letting black puffs rise to the trees.

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Vũ Đình Liên

Vũ Đình Liên, born 15 October 1913 in Hanoi, received his education at the College of the Protectorate, then at the Law School.

His career encompassed a variety of endeavors, teacher in private schools, managing editor of the *Tinh Hoa* (Quintessence) Journal, founder of the *Revue Pédagogique*, and a civil service position as Customs Inspector in Hanoi.

His poems had appeared in the reviews *Phong Hoá* (Culture), *Loa* (Megaphone), *Phụ Nữ Thời Đàm* (Women's Times), and *Tinh Hoa*.

The poem *The Calligrapher* (1936) depicts with particular pathos the passing of time, whose corrosive effect works indiscriminately, as if peeling off the gilded veneer of an old temple. The Calligrapher embodies the demise of an era, once perhaps glorious, but now discarded to the attic of oblivion.

(From *Thi Ca Việt Nam Hiện Đại* (Modern Vietnamese Poetry), Volume I, by Trần Tuấn Kiệt, reprinted from an edition of Sóng Mới Publishing.)

Ông Đồ

Mỗi năm hoa đào nở
Lại thấy ông đồ già
Bày mực tàu giấy đỏ
Bên phố đông người qua.

Bao nhiêu người thuê viết
Tám tắc ngợi khen tài
Hoa tay thảo những nét
Như phượng múa rồng bay!

Nhưng mỗi năm mỗi vắng
Người thuê viết nay đâu
Giấy đỏ buồn không thắm
Mực đọng trong nghiên sầu!

Ông đồ vẫn ngồi đấy
Qua đường không ai hay
Lá vàng rơi trên giấy
Ngoài trời mưa bụi bay.

Năm nay đào lại nở
Không thấy ông đồ xưa
Những người muôn năm cũ
Hồn ở đâu bây giờ?

Vũ Đình Liên (1936)

The Calligrapher

Just as the pink cherry blossomed each
year
The old scholar was sure to reappear
With China ink and red paper in scrolls
Amidst the swelling crowds that surged
and rolled.

So many people paid him handsomely
For his talent that they admired dearly,
The flourishes of his accomplished hand
That wrought dragons and phoenixes on
end.

Each passing year saw fewer people come.
Where were they all who paid him so
handsome?
Now his paper had lost its crimson red,
His ink dried out in its sad forlorn bed.

At his old place sat the calligrapher
Amidst the hustling crowds without a stir.
Some yellow leaves fell dead on his paper,
And from above drizzle flew in a whirl.

This year the cherry blooms light pink
again;
The old scholar is found nowhere in vain.
Of all those people lived in days of yore
Where are they now, where'er
forevermore?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
12 January 2005

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Huy Thông

Phạm Huy Thông, whose last two names became his nom de plume, was born in Hanoi in September 1918. Educated in a Catholic grade school, he attended the Albert Sarraut High

School in Hanoi, where he graduated with a Baccalaureate degree. With a law degree from the University of Hanoi under his belt, Huy Thông went to Paris in 1945 to further his education. There he obtained his Doctorate of Jurisprudence, and at Sorbonne, he was awarded the Bachelor's and Master's (agrégé) degrees in French literature in 1952. Because he had served as secretary to Hồ Chí Minh, he was expelled by French authorities while he was still working toward a doctorate in French literature.

Back in Vietnam in 1953, Huy Thông was the target of French Sûreté, who put him under house arrest in Saigon. Thanks to an article he published in the newspaper the French released him. In 1954, he was arrested by the Ngô Đình Diem government for having participated in a peace movement, and sent to North Vietnam. There in 1955 he became Dean of the Teachers' College, vice-chairman of the Social Science Commission and President of the Institute of Archaeology. Until his death on 23 June 1988, he devoted his research entirely to history and archaeology.

Huy Thông had joined the ranks of poets at the tender age of 15, and quickly became a published author. His works included *Yêu Đường* (Love, 1933), the play *Anh Nga* (Dame Anh Nga, 1934), the epic poem *Tiếng Địch Sông Ô* (The Flute over the River O, 1935), *Tần Ngọc*, (Lady Tan Ngọc, 1937), *Tây Thi* (Lady Tay Thi, 1937), *Người Dong Xe* (The Rickshaw Man, 1938), *Thơ Phóng Túng* (Libertine Verses, 1938). All these works had secured his reputation by the time he reached age 20.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Huy Thông continued publishing poems in various journals: *Con Voi Già* (The Old Elephant), *Hận Chiến Sĩ* (The Soldier's Wrath), *Huyền Trân Công Chúa* (Princess Huyen Tran), *Những Người Điên* (The Insanes), *Chàng Lưu - Kinh Kha* (Sir Lưu and Kinh Kha), *Lòng Hối Hận* (Remorse), *Tần Hồng Châu*; the last three works appeared in Hanoi News. His tireless activities extended to regular contributions to a number of periodicals, including *Tiểu Thuyết Thứ Bảy* (The Saturday Novel), *Phổ Thông Bán Nguyệt San* (Popular Semi-Monthly), *Trung Bắc Chủ Nhật* (North Central Sunday), and *Ngọ Báo* (The Midday News), among others.

Driven to a poetic career as a teenager with the irrepressible urges of sexuality and endowed with an acute poetic sensibility, Huy Thông was vulnerable to the stirrings of his own awakening. The slightest sight of a young woman, the fleeting appearance of a female tunic, the reflection of a nubile face in the water would set his soul flying into daydreams and reveries. This incurable romantic adolescent was constantly obsessed with love, as his debut into the world of poetry was aptly named, *Love*.

Yet his obsession and yearnings would remain so in all of his lyrical works. Though stirred and aroused, and painfully conscious of his manhood's effect on the female, Huy Thông was unable to consummate a relationship, and vented his longings and frustrations in verse after verse replete with repressed feelings of powerlessness. Thus our poet was on a perpetual search for the elusive love that escaped his grasp the closer he came to it. In the drama *Anh Nga* Huy Thông acted out his insatiable thirst for love, and reached out for the spirit of Anh Nga, the beauty in the world of phantoms who just might respond to his yearnings. But he was fated to live an illusion, a self-deception, for Anh Nga was never to be had by a mortal.

Huy Thông was a complex personality. On the affective level, he was a frustrated lover given to despair and perennial emotional chaos. Unable to bring a relationship to fruition regardless of how close he was to success, he felt condemned to pursue dreams in place of reality and fantasy in place of fact. It is in this poignant aspect of his emotional conflict and turmoil that so many male lovers recognize themselves. They can identify with Huy Thông in his vain quest for the Holy Grail of requited love. And so, no one would suspect the other, paradoxical side of his personality. Because of his romanticism no one would

expect his sentimental temperament to be compatible with the spirit and disposition of an epic poet. Yet epic poet he was. His long narrative work, *The Flute over the River O*, reaches heights of nobility and sweeps of exaltation of which few would think him capable. In its tragi-heroic reach, the play fills the audience alternately with a spectrum of lofty emotions aroused by gallantry, courage, valor, triumph, sacrifice, self-abnegation, duty, compassion, and honor.

As a poet, Huy Thông preferred the French rules of prosody. His rhyming patterns strike a Westerner as thoroughly familiar: *abab* or *aabb*. And his preferred verses consist of eight-syllable lines that are suited for both lyrical and heroic themes. His versification therefore follows the spirit of the new poetry revolution although eschew classical or historical allusions he would not.

Gió Chiều

Khi hơi gió bên mình anh tha thướt,
Niềm ái ân tim bỗng thấy chan hòa.

Vì anh tưởng gió êm đêm nhẹ lướt
Du dương ca một khúc ái ân ca...

Nên, em ơi ! Lòng anh hằng ao ước
Ngồi bên em nghe gió cuốn, chiều chiều.

Nghe gió qua như ca lời mây nước,
Như khuyên ai đắm đuối trong tình yêu !

Huy Thông

Evening Breeze

When the wind wrapped me in its limber
arms,
I felt my heart swelling with impassioned
love.

For meseemed its sweet music full of
charms
And melodies did my tender soul move.

My sweet! Deep in my heart I always wish
To be with you at dusk and hear the breeze

Sing its love song soulful and feverish
To drown us in love's deep and lustful
seas.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
28 June 2005

Tiếng Ái Ân

Lời thiếu nữ:

Em không muốn mơ màng trong cảnh
mộng,
Nhìn trăng lên sương tỏa với mây trời,
Nghe đàn chiều nơi đầu dây trâm bông
Văng đưa sang theo hơi gió xa xôi.

Em không muốn du chân bên hồ vắng
Ngắm vầng ô xa phai ánh dần dần.
Em không muốn trông hoàng hôn yên
lặng,
Lặng ngồi nghe như vang tiếng ái ân...

Vì, than ôi, tiếng ái ân đắm thắm
Chỉ chờ khi em thơ thẩn bên rèm,
Ngắm mây vẩn trên không gian thắm

The Voice of Love

The maiden spake:

I want not to ramble the world of dreams
Nor see the rising moon in misty clouds,
Nor hear eve's melody in sweetest streams,
Wafting on wings of breeze from distant
shrouds.

I want not to set foot on forlorn lake
To watch the orb of day slow disappear,
And stand in awe of dusk stillness does
take
To hear the echoes of my love's voice
clear.

For, my sweetheart, the sound of love is
sweet

thăm,
Là êm đềm réo rắt bên tai em !

Em sợ nghe, khi chiều tàn đêm hết
Vẳng bên tai tiếng gọi của ái ân,
Là vì rằng lòng yêu đương tha thiết
Em đã trao tất cả cho tình quân.

Em đã thiết tha trao, tình quân hỡi !
Lòng yêu đương tha thiết trong tay ai
Mà vì đâu bao ngày em mong đợi,
Luyến phòng vắng, ai nữ lặng yên hoài...

Em quyết không bao giờ thềm tường tới
Kể khi xưa em mong đợi ngày đêm
Và bao phen lòng kiêu căng sôi nổi,
Em bắt lòng khinh kẻ đã khinh em !

Nhưng, luôn luôn, tiếng đàn chiều van vì,
Suong lam tan, mây thăm, liễu yêu kiều
Như khuyên em chớ vì ai bỏ phí
Ngày xuân sanh, nhan sắc với tình yêu.

Muôn ngày xưa trong ngày xuân rực rỡ
Em có yêu kẻ khác...nhưng than ôi !
Không bao giờ em yêu ai được nữa ;
Không bao giờ được nữa, tình quân ôi !

Cho nên đã bao ngày, em không muốn
Nhìn liễu xanh mơn trớn nước rung rinh,
Nhìn mây êm nơi xa xa nhẹ cuốn
Như mang qua tiếng gọi của ái tình.

Huy Thông

Waiting for me idle behind the drape.
I gaze at yonder clouds in far retreat
Hearing the peace settle from the
skyscape!

I dread to hear, when dusk breaks into
dawn,
The call of love echo throughout my heart,
For all the love that comes from my heart
drawn
Has been given to you, my love,
sweetheart.

I have given my all, O lover dear!
To you; my great passion is in your hands.
Yet for all the days I pine away in fear
You keep silent; whoever understands!

I decided never to think ever again
Of one for whom I used to long all day.
Many a time I keep my wrath in vain
Repaying your scorn, an eye for an eye.

Yet always music keeps haunting my day
Through misty clouds amidst the lithe
willow
To whisper that I should not waste away
My youth, beauty, and love that do not
grow.

In days gone by, in the spring of my time
I tried to love someone... but, nay, alas!
There was no use trying a different clime.
I could not love, sweetheart, I let it pass.

And so, my love, I simply cannot stand
To see the green willow reflect upon the
pond,
The weightless clouds float in yond
wonderland
As if to sound the call of my love fond.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
28 June 2005.

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Hàn Mặc Tử (1912-1940)

Đây Thôn Vỹ Dạ (Here Is Vỹ Dạ Hamlet) is one of the most anthologized poems by Hàn Mặc Tử (1912-1940), whose short tragic life has enshrined him as a legend surrounded by an aura of prestige seldom conferred upon poets of modern Vietnam. This twenty-eight-year-old master of the verse had only about ten years of his life to produce a poetic legacy that bewitches the country and secures him a revered place among the romantics of the

New Poetry generation and beyond. He is credited with the creation of a genre of poetry called Crazy Poetry, which is a outcry of pain and suffering characterized by extremes of morbidity, shocking expressions, surrealist images, strong emotions of despair and love, and hallucinatory visions.

Written at the beginning of the Period of Suffering (1936-1938) in his life, after he was diagnosed with Hansen's disease, *Đây Thôn Vỹ Dạ* figures among his earliest crazy poems.

While working as a minor civil servant in the Office of Land Survey in Qui Nhon, Hàn Mặc Tử met a young, delicate, well-born girl, Hoàng Thị Kim Cúc (better known as Hoàng Cúc), whose father was a high-ranking official in the same Office. A discreet love sprang in the hearts of the young couple, but it was destined never to be consummated. The gulf between a well-to-do girl from a Buddhist family and an impecunious Catholic low-level functionary on the verge of unemployment was virtually unbridgeable. In 1935, as Hàn left for Saigon in search of new opportunities, Hoàng Cúc's family removed to Vỹ Dạ hamlet near Huế;. With his health beginning to deteriorate in 1936 Hàn returned to Qui Nhon, always assuming that Hoàng Cúc had by then got married and gone forever. In reality she never did, as if to remain faithful to him and his memory until the end of her life.

According to his closest poet-friend Quách Tấn, around the year 1937, having learned of Hàn's incurable disease, Hoàng Cúc sent him a postcard, with a note mildly reproaching him for not paying a visit to Vỹ Dạ, him having been an alumnus of Pellerin High School while she was attending Đông Khánh High also in Huế. Others held that Hoàng Cúc sent her own photograph as a student, in which she appeared in a white dress. As far as we know these conflicting accounts never got resolved although Hoàng Cúc did not die until 1989 (or 1990?) and could very well have provided the needed clarification if asked.

This note on the postcard triggered in Hàn a memory of days gone by that resulted in this short *cri de coeur*. By this time, Hàn had already sunk into self-imposed isolation due to his disease, then diagnosed as leprosy, an isolation which was at once physical, mental, and emotional, and had an air of finality about it. To him, life was dichotomized into the world out there and his inner world of self-exile. In the world without, there was joy, love, light, music, hope, happiness; in the world within there reigned longing, desire, darkness, silence, despair, suffering.

Typical of the second period of his works, the so-called Period of Suffering, is the presence of a disconnect within his poetic thoughts. Images and thoughts seem a disorganized and incoherent jumble consciously or most plausibly unconsciously thrown together with no logical links among them. The juxtaposition of incongruous and incommensurable images, the rapid succession of opposing emotions, the almost psychedelic *mélange* of kaleidoscopic visions, the relentless battering of powerful motifs, and the haunting musicality of his verse are all the salient features of his poetic inspiration. We are inexorably drawn into his world of fantasy, of half-dream half-wake consciousness, of horror, of fright, of phantasm, where the macabre, the lugubrious, the phantasmagoric, and the bloody elbow one another in a surreal atmosphere.

The poetry of this period has also been known as crazy poetry. In *Here Is Vỹ Dạ Hamlet* elements of Hàn's inner world, the inner sanctum of the dreary existential consciousness, follow in quick succession those of the outside world of everyone else's consciousness.

Though the poem has not yet exhibited the most surreal of his visions, it has already given us a glimpse of the extent of his unfettered imagination from which issue outlandish images and thoughts that escape the control of consciousness, logic, and reason.

Đây thôn Vỹ Dạ

Sao anh không về chơi thôn Vỹ?
Nhìn nắng hàng cau, nắng mới lên,
Vườn ai mướt quá xanh như ngọc
Lá trúc che ngang mặt chữ điền.

Gió theo lối gió, mây đường mây
Dòng nước buồn thiu, hoa bắp lay...
Thuyền ai đậu bến sông trăng đó,
Có chở trăng về kịp tối nay?

Mơ khách đường xa, khách đường xa,
Áo em trắng quá nhìn không ra...
Ở đây sương khói mờ nhân ảnh,
Ai biết tình ai có đậm đà

Hàn Mặc Tử

Here Is Vỹ Dạ Hamlet

Why aren't you back to Vy Hamlet
To watch the sun rising over the areca
trees?
Whose garden is so lush in jade-like green
And bamboo leaves cover whose firm
square face?

The wind and cloud each follows its own
way;
The stream is cheerless, the corn flowers
sway.
And that boat moored in yond moonlight
river
Can it lug its load of moon back tonight?

I dream of one so far away, oh far away;
Your dress is so pure white it's hard to
recognize;
Here fog and smoke obscure so much of
the landscape.
How could one tell who is the passionate
lover?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
16 February 2008

In this poem rises the voice of a man desperately in love of the unattainable, whether it be a woman or simply the normal everyday world, for the realm in which he exists is anything but normal.

The first stanza depicts a typically peaceful and friendly country corner where the lush green garden is likened to precious jade and where the sun rises over the areca trees and the bamboo grove, spreading its glory across the abode of the sweetheart. Here the poet makes use of one of his favorite motifs, the sun, to symbolize the object of his desire, which is the life that is being denied him. The sun to Hàn represents light, hope, intense activity, energy, in short, life or rather life out there for the rest of mankind.

Lurking behind this bucolic charm are at least three characters: the questioner, the owner of the luxuriant garden, as denoted by the indefinite pronoun *ai* (someone), and the one with the square face. Who are they? It is common to assume that the poet is distinct from the speaker or persona although in many cases we can discern the poet hidden behind the persona to lend it at least a partial voice. It may be possible in some poems even to assume that the speaker is the reader, as the latter can identify himself or herself with the unknown speaker in emotions and in thoughts. But *Here Is Vỹ Dạ Hamlet* is a dramatic monologue, in which only the poet's peculiar character speaks. It is this character that holds the various strands of the poem together and provides essential information with which to construct an intelligent understanding of its meaning.

To start, we need to sort out who the characters in the first stanza are. Under one reading, we can assume that the person posing the question, "Why aren't you back to Vy Hamlet?" is no other than the young woman with whom the speaker is in love, i.e., Hoàng Cúc, who lived in Vỹ Dạ at the time of the poem and who very plausibly would love to see the poet.

Now who is the owner of the garden? Since the speaker asks about “whose garden?” we have very little clue for guessing. But we still need to know in order to determine the role this lush garden plays in the development of the poet's thoughts. Obviously, reference to the garden that is as precious as jade continues the metaphor of the brilliant sun to convey the image of a desired object. That is the real world to which Hàn so avidly aspires, but about which he can only dream. Knowing this, the garden's owner can be anyone in the coveted world out there, including his beloved, but most likely the latter. Finally, who is the individual with the square face partially concealed by bamboo leaves? Although we do not know the reason why such a character is introduced here, we can see some continuity in an exposition that lays out a consistent setting for the rest of the poem to unfold itself in. Thus we conjecture that this individual is either Hoàng Cúc or someone else, including the poet himself. If we lean toward Hoàng Cúc, again for continuity and consistency, then all three characters in this stanza refer to her. This allows the speaker to portray an idyllic scene amidst benign nature inhabited by the one being that the poet values the most. Now we can also claim that the square-faced character is some indefinite person, which is quite plausible considering the Vietnamese fondness for the indefinite pronoun *ai*. On the other hand, if we think the square-faced character is the speaker, then we will have to deviate from normalcy to explain why someone far away can be in Vỹ Dạ at the same time. This scenario is not so refractory to rationalization as it may seem. In a creative process such as Hàn's, where the unconscious plays a vital role, almost any goes. And if logic and reason are violated and the writing is automatic (as André Breton proclaims in his first Surrealist manifesto), then so be it. In any case, this backdrop sets the stage for a reversal to come in the next stanza.

Under another reading, the questioner and the speaker are one and the same. The indefinite *ai* in line 3 stays indeterminate, and the square-faced character merges with the other two. In this case, the entire first stanza may be seen as an extended self-interrogation by the speaker himself, who then proffers all the enticements for a visit: the natural beauty of Vỹ Dạ, its pastoral setting, its gardens, areca trees and bamboos. The woman is not even in the picture; her presence is felt not in any lines but between the lines. Yet she must be in the background to listen in. It is as if the speaker is thinking aloud, knowing she is within earshot, querying himself about the reasons for staying away from the locale of desire, and at the same time trying to remind himself of the world beyond his pale.

I tend toward the latter interpretation of a dramatic monologue. On this view the entire poem is just a monologue by the speaker, who is trying to explain why he never visits Vỹ Dạ. And that reason may be inferred in the second stanza: Vỹ Dạ Hamlet, where Hoàng Cúc now lives, embodies the cheery but off-limits world of others. By this stratagem Hàn projects his longing for the outer world onto a humble hamlet. Furthermore, we can from this point on almost identify the speaker with the poet in flesh and blood. He loves Vỹ Dạ, a metaphor for life and normalcy, where a young man can enjoy being a young man, with love and hope foremost on his mind. And so he reaches out or rather up, much like Tantalus, who strives for the fruit to allay his hunger only to see it recede beyond grasp. Both feel the insufferable pang of defeat and frustration knowing that every time they try, failure is the inevitable price. The important difference between their fates is that whereas Tantalus is serving a sentence handed down by Zeus, Hàn is serving his own self-imposed sentence. It is true that even in his sequestration he continues to receive friends and admirers. But Hàn knows his own limits and can only yearn to be in the world of the wholesome since the reality of his unwholesome being holds him at bay, denying him the enjoyment and the normal existence to which he is entitled. The sun that showers the tops of areca trees, those ramrod-straight slender trees that poke high into the sky as a symbol of high aspirations, is part of the world of normality. It sheds light everywhere, to all corners except his own dark refuge. For Hàn is very much immured in his psychological

hermitage, albeit one dictated by his self-exile from the wider world and from which he finds no escape. Therein lies the tragedy of his condition.

To the sunny landscape of the first stanza is contrasted the dreariness of the second. The speaker is starting to turn inward, first by noticing that the wind and the cloud each follows its own path, a rather implausible event in the natural world since the cloud normally goes where the wind blows. But why should his imagination follow any rules of logic or obey any laws of nature? Unshackled by convention or logic, his mind drifts freely in and out of reality during the Period of Suffering, in which strong emotions are expressed in startling diction and bizarre images or combinations thereof. The wind and the cloud are no more than symbols. It is this symbolism that endures in the remainder of Hàn's poetic career, becoming more and more accentuated as he descends deeper and deeper into the abyss of despair. In fact, he speaks more in symbols even though his images are stark and vivid. Here the real-world objects symbolize himself and his sweetheart, each heading in a different direction so that meeting is well nigh impossible, be it physical, emotional or otherwise. The stream in the second verse can from the setting be identified as the legendary Perfume River that waters the dreamy city of Huế and its surroundings, including Vỹ Dạ, in the midst of which Oyster Isle sways with cornfields. The melancholy river sets a mood of gloom. The sun suddenly gives way to the moon. Unlike in the real world, light yields to darkness without transition. Here we see how Hàn's mind works in times of overheating, with unconscious thoughts bubbling up like geysers from their thermal depths.

Rather incoherently he asks whether that boat moored on the moon-bathed river would have enough time to carry the moon back to him tonight. Why convoke a moored boat to convey the moon to him? Because he so yearns for love, so wants to be loved. The moon is Hàn's predominant motif since it surfaces in about two-thirds of his poems of insanity. It does whatever he wants it to do. Here he personifies the moon and makes it his sweetheart. Since he cannot reach her, his only option is to hope that the moon-cum-beloved would try to come to him in his own world in a boat whose way the moon lights up on a river the moon bathes. This strange "moon-of-all-trades" image so totally bereft of logic or verisimilitude can only be the product of a fevered mind that obeys no laws of rational thinking. Will she make it in tonight before the sunrise breaks up his dream? We can discern a sense of urgency, a sense of yearning for the fulfillment of a dream in this poignant question. Yet in all levels of consciousness, including the unconscious, he knows that his condition is hopeless and that his dream inevitably turns into a nightmare. This is precisely what his supersensitive soul has to contend with in the abyssal despair of his existence. We encounter this theme of star-crossed love and of unfulfilled yearning repeatedly in Hàn's work. And it is this consciousness of the unbridgeable chasm between him and the world of his longing that constitutes the tragedy of his life. Young, desirous, lustful, enamored of life and love, he reaches out only to be pulled back into his cocoon of emptiness. Not that women shun him; they adore his poetry and probably fantasize about being with him. But given his physical condition, they cannot afford to be too close. And he is keenly aware of it.

The last stanza returns him to the universe of his own making. Here he can only dream of his beloved in that far-off land with just the image of her pure white dress. The repetition of "far away" in the first verse can be understood as more than mere distance; it measures the gaping gulf of his inner space as well. That distant land is the land of the clean, of the unsullied, of the normal. Yet his interior space is filled with dark thoughts and weird images. It is the realm of the unclean, of the morbid, and of the pathological, which is so far removed from the world of everyone else. And he is painfully aware of it.

Whiteness is another motif in Hàn's thought. It serves a variety of functions, one of which being the only ray of hope he could cling to while his whole being is imprisoned in the fog and smoke of hopelessness that obliterate the world around. But what does he mean by not recognizing her for the whiteness of her dress? Can it be that the white dress, a typical schoolgirl's dress, represents the essence of purity, the paragon of chastity, the highest virtue a woman can possess? And if so, then there is no hope for him. Being impure, he knows it as a Catholic, he is denied association with the pure. He must be banished, quarantined, as is legislated in Leviticus. He knows he must be sequestered from life itself. In his isolation, hope is dead. The world is dead. Yet, he tenaciously fights on with the fierceness of one in love with life. He has to because he is still young and he refuses to give up and let go. With all the strength born of despair he wants to live and claim his rightful place among the living. He loves with a passion and wants so much to make his heart known to the world, especially to the young woman he loves.

Does anyone, including her, know who is more passionately in love than whom? Asked rhetorically, the question is really an assertion of Hàn's desperate love, to which he expects no response, if he still has any scintilla of sanity left. It is heart-rending to realize that Hàn is fully aware of the fact that only on the brink of death does one know to love passionately.

Thomas D.Le
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