

TRAN NHUAN MINH

THE DAY I LIVE

POEMS

English translation by Vu Anh Tuan and Ngo Binh Anh Khoa
Revised by Bob Chee



Rạng Đông xuất bản

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USA - 2023

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About the author:

TRAN NHUAN MINH

His published poetry books in English version:

For poet Tran Nhuan Minh, it is not the conflicts which are the center of poetry, but the way through and the way out of those conflicts... In this sense, Tran Nhuan Minh's poetry is a warning and awakening messages... it challenges the boundaries between left and right, right and wrong, orthodox and unorthodox, south and north, past and future... Anyday, there are still unhappy people in this world, who need to share their faith and unhappiness... they will still search to read Tran Nhuan Minh's poems.

NGUYEN DUC TUNG

Poet and literary critic in Canada

TRAN NHUAN MINH:

“My inspiration is coming from the fate of people in the terrible shocks: war, terrorism, natural disasters...”

Poet Tran Nhuan Minh was born in 1944 in Hai Duong (Vietnam), since 1962, he been living and writing in Quang Ninh, and already compiled and introduced 6 great poets Khuat Nguyen, Sergey Yesenin, Rasul Gamzatov, Yannis Ritsos, Nicholas Ghiden, Walt Whitman in a series of Selected world poetry books (2004). He received 26 literary awards. About Poetry: Vietnam Writers' Association Award 2003 (Wild Sonata); State Prize 2007 (Poet and Flowers, Wild Sonata); Mekong River Literary Prize in Cambodia 2020 (Over the Yangtze wave). About Prose: Second Prize of Fiction 2020 (Island on the Horizon). About Research: Dao Tan Prize 2023 (The voice of time – Finding the Truth – Literary Dialogue).



Photo portrait of Poet Tran Nhuan Minh

Dear Honorable Poet, please share your thoughts about the pandemic and the future of literature after the pandemic. *It is a big disaster for the whole humanity, which of course can be better mitigated. But at first, we didn't do that well. There have been a number of works written about this, but not enough to conquer readers. I set a hope on future. Because it has a profound impact on the fate of hundreds of millions of people, it is impossible not to have corresponding works.*

The Good and the Bad. Who is winning in nowadays? *The good thing is that it always accompanies people in the problems of today's life. But the bad thing is that it will hardly be able to conquer elite readers in the future. Because of certain limitations of the individual writer and the requirements of society. Who will be the winner? Great talents like Garcia Marquez, or as Yannis Ritsos is still being born.*

Tell us where inspiration is coming from for you? *From the fate of people in the terrible shocks of the times: war, terrorism, natural disasters... Only from 1939 to now, with more than 80 years, but its terrible fluctuations equal to thousands of years ago combined. It is the greatest common multiple of all nations. As a poet representing my people, I was forced to speak out from there. It is a creative inspiration of mine, which never falters.*

Are the people reading books or no? *Yes. Now and forever. I firmly believe so. Because of this simplicity: Reading is one of HUMAN attributes. Later, the HUMAN part is larger than the ANIMAL part. Therefore, reading books will be, still, an indispensable thing of HUMANS.*

How many books have you written? And where can we find your books? *I have published 62 volumes of poems in our country and abroad also. Both poetry and literature have been included in popular textbooks since 1980. In order for the world's readers to access their works, the greatest merit belongs to the translators. Many of my works have been reprinted 5 to 34 times. Prose has been translated into*

7 languages in 7 countries. Poetry has been translated into 16 languages in 19 countries. There are 4 poetry books published in English, French, German and Spanish, which are distributed worldwide. I am very grateful to the poets who translated my poetry and prose.

Do you believe that our life, our destiny is written or we can change it? *Sometimes I thought so too, so in two epics: *The Wild Sonata*, reprinted 15 times, I created the *Messiah*, and the epic of 45-monochord songs of the unknown, reprinted 6 times, I created the *Underworld*, to explain things that I can't explain, seem to be in control of my destiny. These two Saints are my own creation, not the Lord of any religion.*



*Portrait oil painting of Poet Tran Nhuan Minh, by FRANCO BARRESI –
the Italian artist who has Italian and Australian nationality*

Religion is the cause of many wars – a lot of people they say that. What do you think? *In the Middle Ages there were world-class religious wars that slaughtered millions of people in several countries. Now religion seems to be at the root of some ethnic wars. Therefore, it is harsh and more difficult to remove. The authorities must try to neutralize it from the beginning so that it does not happen, or if it must, it is not the main problem.*

Money brings happiness? *Money is needed to avoid hunger and cold, to get an education and to have medicine. That means having money will lead to a peaceful life. Happiness is higher than that, because it also lies in spiritual values that money in many cases cannot reach. Money is a means. The fool will see money as the goal. Isn't there in a rich, comfortable 5-star house, husband and wife, brothers and sisters still kill each other?*

The book. E book or Hardcover book. What will be the future? *I'm sure it's going to be time of e-book. Because it is light, the capacity is very large, meeting the utilities of many types of people. However, printed books still exist and in that situation, it is imperative to improve their value, including the content and art of the work. Of course, the structure of the book and the art presentation must also be more elaborate and attractive. That means the level must be higher. Personally, I work with e-books, but enjoying the art of works must be through printed books.*

What do you think about the year of technology? Are we lost ourselves inside the mobile phone, the computers... *I support technology and hope from then on, the more time goes on, the less time is spent on work, the better the result. It means that technology greatly increases the quality of life. We lived and worked for a few decades, but the result is sure that our ancestors are not as talented as it is. Whether it is "disappeared or not", that depends on the person. Some people will disappear on their own, that's fine. Many others will multiply themselves dozens of times. Overall, it's still better.*

Environmental issues. Is the progress the technology and the humans are responsible for all this disaster? Why? The more technology develops, the more the environment is destroyed, only more or less. That dosage is also man-made. Never before have we suffered the negative effects of the environment as we do now. Just for the climate change is already heavy. Therefore, there must be restrictive measures from the beginning, from every small thing of each person to each country. Causing environmental disaster must be considered as the greatest crime against humanity, more than war crimes.

A wish for 2023. *Peace, no war, no terror and oppression.*

His poems:

WISH

The first thing of the Government has is MORALITY

Is to bring people out of the war

For all families to reunite forever

And the battlefield is full of golden rice...

(45 monochord songs of the unknown)

THE FOUR SEASONS

Now I'm fed up with Spring itself

I'm in a fret for having to suffer from soakingly wet rains

Clouds don't look like clouds with their mouse's hair colour

O Summer! Please come fast

I don't like Summer with the sun that hair and beard

I don't like Summer

with the sun that whitens

hair and beard

It's so hot that I am even afraid of my old lover

Unexpectedly it pours fiendishly like rapids

O Fall! Just come along quickly...

O Fall what a fretfulness

My restless heart was filled with

a desolated sadness

Trees withered away and died in silence

O Winter! Just come to join me

Pitch dark was the dusty sky. Coldness raked our skin

Crows wail. Nothing delightful remains

One wishes to widely open all doors and gates

Chasing Winter away, then bustlingly welcome Spring...

And so, the four longed for seasons continued to come one after the other

Hating all of them, then loving all of them

And so

Carrying worries and meeting with difficulties

The earth continues to turn in endless HOPE...

Saigon April -1979

(The interview poet Tran Nhuan Minh in the Polis magazine of Greece in June/2023)

WITH FRIENDS

Nothing's sadder than no longer having friends
Friends will live with me even when I've left this world
Many good friends will eventually die before me
Having no friend is akin to living an orphan's life

Where's the "bag of wisdom"? How can I learn if
The friends whom I meet and deem good turn out to be bad?
The moment I love and trust them is when I'm easily fooled
Even when my hair's turned gray, I'm still very much naive...

Perhaps I should compose poetry? Throwing myself into
the battlefield with swords by letters formed
At times, I'm caught in the middle when my friends fight
But the wounds will heal. Death has yet to come
Because I've yet to start composing my last poem...

2017

WHEN PASSING THROUGH THE STREET, I ALWAYS SEE...

Oh trees, don't let too many leaves fall down

An old man sweeps the leaves from dawn to dusk

His back has long become hunched

But still having a job means still having the Heavens' blessings...

Oh trees, don't dump upon the streets

The leaves, the flowers...

And the trash that people often toss away

How pitiful the old man is

How can he sweep up all the TRASH that passes through his life...

He's still working in his old age

His loving kin...

where are they now?

2021

RETURNING TO MY PARENTS' HOUSE

The door is open. I hasten inside and softly speak

Mama! Mama! Your son Minh has returned

How quiet. I suddenly burst into tears

Shedding angry tears alone as though I've been unjustly struck

Henceforth, there will be no-one in front of me to care for me,

No-one to safeguard me

I'll have to weather every storm alone

My father passed away; eight years later, my mother followed him

The sea of hardship, for millennia, remains utterly unfathomable...

My parents always taught me to be kind and humble

Worried that I'd grow up to be savage like wild beasts

Life's always been filled with little good and fraught with evils

To be HUMAN is not a simple task...

The white clouds fly away only to return
But my parents are gone, never to come back
And the next time I come home, the door will still be open
And that which welcomes me is still an endless void

I'm still standing in the middle of the house, crying for my mother
Mama, do you recognize my voice?

I lower my head, bowing to you

Mama, please forgive me for my past mistakes
Mama! Mama! Your son Minh has returned...

2020

STEALTHILY LISTENING TO TWO LADIES'

CONVERSATION

*I'm very sad these days, sister
Without reason I've put on much flesh
Meat paste and grilled chopped meat
are real horrors for me
I'm fed up with "ca say"⁽¹⁾ and trionychid turtle...*

*I wish I could be thin
I would play badminton every evening
At times I told the driver
To drive the car to the countryside to breathe
the field air*

*In central and provincial committees' meetings
I asked the doctors and was fed up with looking
for medicines
I simply couldn't turn thin
I seem like... too ugly dear sister*

⁽¹⁾ *Cross-bred duck, a speciality.*

*I'm so afraid my husband might have girlfriends
No one can know what might happen
Dear sister, don't believe them
Well... I'll try to see what will happen...*

Stealthily listening to the two of them talking
What a sadness, anyway I'm feeling a little happy
I suddenly think of thousands of women harvesters
Who throughout the year were selling their backs
to the sky

Although working so hard, they still lacked food
and clothes

Wishing to be thin? Nothing is simpler!
I suddenly felt my poems have committed mistakes
Alone in a strange land, flirtatious
and I don't know what else...

1988

So many people were cowering and sounding
The house being beautiful while she herself
is more beautiful

Seeming like a wharfless lath-boat
Running adrift in her own room

From everywhere thronged in flirting guests
and friends
Every night was like uncontrollable sea lightning
and mountainous rain

Her eyes turned desolate little by little
She often forgot her kindred...

Is she pitiable or reproachable
O God! lucid explanation isn't necessary
A river will remain the same eternally,
Whether cloudy or clear, it will continue to flow...

1990

DESERTED HILL

The place in days of yore the King gave
his royal audiences
Was now razed to build a cow-house
Splendid was the day one starts working
Gong and drum sounds mingled with cheers

Then the cows turn thin and died
No none knows why
The cows' owner turned delirious
Shouting aloud in his dream

People drove the cows away
The row of cow-houses turn fallow
I stood solitarily in a blank silence
Suddenly my eyes were brimming with tears...

Fall 1987

WITH SISTER HONG TAM (ROSY HEART)

Well, just stop moaning out sister
Don't think too much and be too sad
Life consists of all good men
No one can be a bad lot with any other one

For what reason he was arrested
Then was suddenly liberated
Well, he's fortunate enough
Being paid a pension and given back the house

To meetings he was again invited
Near and far offsprings are reunited
His Party's forty years of age medal
The stamp of a faithful and staunch life

You should have been happy
To rejoice at his getting out of danger
Amidst so many ups and downs of life
It's quite normal that people can be mistaken

Meanwhile I've a bottle of foreign wine
Please bring it home for him as a gift from me
From time to time he can drink a cup
Rejoicing at being again safe and sound...

Bo Hon 1991

LIBERALITY

It's clear that it's no longer like in days past
Like the future maybe

One also doesn't know
Women wearing sedge bags, American glasses,
and shorts to go downtown
Drinking alcohol and cursing like men

To the guests the children always speak without
any polite form of addressing
It's real hard to order them to boil water or keep the dog
They come to school with hands smeared
with red and blue ink
Which they apply on jackets and tunics
of teachers and woman schoolteachers

The Temple gate turns showy because of formerly
prohibited books
In dark alleys one hears the tick tick of corsets'
buttons being opened
The escaped prisoner, convicted of beating people
and digging holes
Settled himself in the restaurant craning his foot
to drink steam beer

Well, it's quite liberal isn't it
O yes, it's actually different from the old days
Sad or happy. One also doesn't know
The green tea seller doesn't sell only green tea

She also sells rocket spare parts...

1987

RECALLING A PARTY MEMBER IN THE LAND REFORM

The farmers you've just liberated
Have dragged you beside the lime barrel
They shot you, but they missed you
Their hands being only familiar with the hoe

The first blow of hoe. Fresh blood smeared your face
In the most dangerous minute, you still have
confidence in the Revolution
You shouted aloud. An interrupted shouting
OH!

COMRADES...

Dien Tri 3-2-1980

WHITE CLOUD AT HOANH MO

It's difficult to imagine
That blood had been shed here
The cup of wine steeped in bitter nectar
Drunk with the flying cloud colour

Bamboo-like phyllostachys grow in succession
in a same neighbourhood
But it's actually two nations
Beside the half-filled up shelter gate
The white oil camellia was in full bloom

Hoeing up the field and peeling the cinnamon bark
In the peaceful evening's blue smoke
A quite simple dream
Sinks in me everlastingly

The coming hasn't come yet
The forgetfulness hasn't been forgotten
Feeling both ashamed and happy with the cup of wine
Feeling abashed we hugged and kissed each other

Upon being rather worn-out and clinking glasses
A stormy wind was roaring in the reeds forest
The tomb of the young soldier
Appeared beside the trenches

What to say to you
My turned upward face was full of white cloud
Bitter nectar could go ahead to be bitter
Fragrant cinnamon bark could just go on
being fragrant...

Binh Lieu 2-1989

SEEING A SOLDIER'S WIFE OFF

Her heart has stopped beating since nine days,
but her face remains freshly rose

Are you still alive or you have passed away?

***O warrior's wife! Obscure and tortuous
are the underworld roads***

***Just lean on the yang branch to come back
to man's world! (*)***

He doesn't come back and it isn't his fault
Your image had appeared for the last time
in writhing and under bombs' flashes
Time has covered him with a grass flower colour blanket
He's sleeping somewhere under the starry
sky beside a track

***O warrior's wife! The world is filled with
self-pity, sulking and retribution
Well you can go ahead to leave,
all the relatives are present!***

You never believed that he was dead
Although none of his brothers in arms has come back
Frail and desperate was the expectation
Half of the long night was restless with some dreams

(*) *The magician's vow: If you pray for someone who has been clinically dead for too long, you should hold on to a poplar branch (a bamboo branch tied to the*

Saigon 7-5-1992

BRAIN-WAVE

I SPLEENY

Now that you're already married
Why do you still wear the dress I've made for you?

II GONE AWAY SEASON

Trees swaying, giving the wind a soul
Birds waving their wings to let the season go far
far away

III LATE IN THE NIGHT

The dog relying vaingloriously on his master
barked noisily in the village
As for the moon, it silently shone

IV TURNING BACK

When heaven and earth suddenly turned strangely silent
Bind the house! A great storm is about to come!

OLD FRIEND

You have mounted explosive charge attacks
Opening the Dien Bien roads in days past
We've met after ten years
Beards and hairs have turned snowy

Through hundreds of bullet ranges
Your body doesn't have any injury
One thinks you had lied
Oh me? I'm a battlefield soldier!

Had you not played the role of a scholar
Then you must be at present in a very high
position and solitary
One hand carrying the money safe
The other hand holding the seal

The earth smeared overcoat
Wandering in strange land throughout
all four corners of the world
It's not sure that you can acquire
A little bit of golden Literary dust

Asking about wife *my wife left me*
Asking about child *he fled across the border*
Asking about house *my house was sold*
Asking about poems *no one publishes them...*

What do you want now?

I want to be a war-dead

Our nation doesn't have battlefields anymore

It's not so easy to sacrifice one's life

I go without needing to be seen off

The car silhouette has been far away,

sheltered from view

One suddenly feels that one is so agitated

In myriads of old-age worlds...

Cua Luc 8-1992

FAR INTO THE NIGHT

Sharing a same fate we both have hard luck in life
BAI JUYI

Denied by parents and shunned by friends
You didn't know how will you live the coming day
Men's eyes looking at you were deformed
At first you didn't know why

What's wrong with you if you happened
to be beautiful
If you refused to adopt people's will
All roads led to a blind alley
From a deity one can turn into a ghost

The land is narrow while heaven is narrower
Wherever you can hide mountains
and rivers remain indifferent
Which street corner doesn't have a Ngung Bich mansion¹
Which man's face doesn't have a So Khanh appearance²

¹ Place where Thuy Kieu had lived in the "Tale of Kieu" by Nguyen Du, namely a brothel house.

² A character in the "Tale of Kieu" by Nguyen Du a seducer of young women.

OLD MR VONG

He never knows how old he is
He looks as black as a burned iron stick
He went to villages to catch shrimps
Wearing only a pair of breeches all the year round

He often sold cheaply fish and shrimps
To people more miserable than himself
Upon getting some money, he bought a phial of wine
And ate fresh onions and green bananas over sips
of alcohol

Certain night when he just lay dead to the world
from exhaustion
In what direction fish and shrimps were hiding
He suddenly felt he was shining bright
Bringing about a whole starry night

He always vaguely believes
His life will have something
Barefooted, bareheaded and wearing breeches
There, he's again carrying away his bamboo shrimp pot...

Diên Trì 1988

PHUC

So it was Phuc
My God! That's my old friend
Who had ridden on a tricycle
Being actually comfortably off

How come suddenly
Phuc's house was sealed
Were he to burn his bank-notes in the toilet room
Three days aren't enough to finish

With quite insensitive eyes
Seeing me. Phuc begged
He had crow's nest like ruffled hair
And a desolate God-damned face

I shuddered in fear
While Phuc vaguely laughed
The Creator's trick
Just cannot be worst...

1993

THE POEM I DIDN'T INTEND TO WRITE

He's not my son. He's not my grandson
I have also never known him
Look at him. He's still completely a little boy
You've trodden on him enough. You've slapped
him enough

What crime did he commit? Dear uncle, dear sister
A theft? A sandwich
Well here let me pay for it. Is it too much or too little
Let him go. You've beaten him enough

His face swelled considerably and was purple
like the snail shell
His teeth got loose, a line of red blood oozed
from his mouth's corner
Maybe he doesn't have his mother or father
He's begging for cement bags at houses being built

Scrambling for a piece of food and be treated to
such a level
How can you be so wicked with a child
No one is cleared of all charges when a child
Up to today still runs short of bread...

1-6-1994

ONE HUNDRED YEARS IN...

I

MAN'S WORLD

Living with one's face turned upside down
to the ground
Dying with one's face looking upwards to heaven
Rich, poor, glorious or humiliated
Are all within a same circle...

Cam Ranh 4-1979

II

GETTING IT OFF ONE'S CHEST

I have pity of you because even your smile
was fading
Throughout the year, although not ill, you always
walked bentbacked⁽¹⁾
While I lie leisurely inside the window
Admiring the invisibility reigning over forms
and emptiness...

Dien Tri August -1992

III

I SUDDENLY SEE

People no one can replace
Have been lying all over the graveyards
I kept silent and trembled with fear
When the road surface shouted aloud:

⁽¹⁾from Nguyen Du's poetical inspiration.

There's another falling leave!

1987

IV

UTTERLY DESOLATE

Old trees are often cut off
Chicken can easily be stewed...
How old am I?
Do I have any bosom friend...?

1987

V

BESIDE THE LINE OF SAYINGS

The flower didn't say anything
Near the tree one isn't unfamiliar with the shadow
of branches
Women like artful guys
The saints like to treat simple people
A wiseman will suddenly turn silly
Formerly he belittled the sky as too low,
now he walks bent-backed
The square piece of wood couldn't be carved
to turn round
The old cat, upon meeting the mouse, saluted it...

Vung Tau 5-1992

OLD MR TU

He said He just got out of the Party
Never caring about life's matters and upheavals
Drinking wine and sniggering day after day
He only pays attention to pecuniary matters

How miserable was the budget subsidies period,
He said
Some came to inquire stealthily,
other worried about
Being afraid the next house's people might
suspect hearing the sound of knives
Chicken must be cut with sharp scissors

He said he married a youngster to be his
concubine
It's his character not to like dangling matters
He actually hired two rows of motorcycles
That paraded while firing fireworks...

With his cold hand as sticky as fish slime
He grabbed my hand and palavered
While taking me to the floor, he laughed like
Americans
His face emitted a smell of the night dew

Late in the night my heart was filled with gloominess
I stood in front of the verandah, washing my fingers
There might be a big rain tomorrow
In the shadow of the trees, the wind was all wet...

8-1989

Flying vaguely in the immensity of the Russian soul...

Riadan 6.1990

WHITE NIGHT

The dreamy rows of trees were so much
half-asleep half-awake

In the bride's gown
To such a point that the ancient houses
Were each night in love with one another...

Leningrad May 12, 1990

Who could know when the night lamp will die out

I looked in a flash the rows of trees
Far away in the field, the crescent moon
was hung obliquely
A night-bird's chirping vaguely resounded
And left so many innermost feelings amidst the sky...

Moscow 5-1990

ON THE SEREMECHEVO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Anyway it's a stranger's land
Well, you better not stand amidst the sky to cry
Real few feel pity of poor people
So ill-treated ... but it isn't through yet
How much merchandise did you get robbed
Your dress got wrinkled folds, your face swelled
with wounds
Thinking that a miserable life has come to an end
Against all expectations one sees over one's head...
a cudgel
Red or blue belongs to a same horizon
Wherever one goes it's a wage-earner's life
Well it's useless to continue weeping
Having crossed the searching gate, you better go home
Your folks have waited for you for several years on end
Although you've lost your goods you still have your
parents' kindness...

I've walked out of the external gate
And saw you standing stiffly
The air route was filled with deep sadness
Who knows what's reserved for your fate in the future...

11-6-1990

I WENT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND MET YOU

He laughed, his face turned more and more gentle

Did you meet him in the Soviet Union?

Was he in good health?

When will he finish his doctorate?

I have bought the bed and the wardrobe

That's enough for him when he comes back

and gets married...

A merrily animated glare resembling a rustling fire

Burning in the old wrinkled eyes that laughed...

It would be a crime to let that glare die off

I was suddenly choked and worried

It would be much better, were I not to meet you

Why should I know about the story,
as it was quite painful

Alas! What could I say

You've turned yourself into an exiled robber

Plundering property and beating people without fear

You're a holy terror on all the airports...

1990

A POEM FOR A FELLOW COUNTRYMAN IN GERMANY

Man's lonesome everywhere,
Adrift in life – will there be peace?
Life's sorrows shall not cease,
Let union's wine here be our home...

Frankfurt 14/ 7/ 2018

The more you love the REVOLUTION,
the more you'll feel painful
There still are near and distant family ties
Having pity of my nephew and grieving for him,
my eyes shed tears...

2-7-1998

**WORDS OF A FRIEND
HAVING A WIFE BEING CHOSEN
TO BE AN OSHIN IN TAIWAN**

*Thanks to the revolutionary martyr family's priority
You were chosen to be an Oshin⁽¹⁾
The coal branch is laying off workers⁽²⁾
We just don't know where to find a job*

*Well, be happy to go, my dearest
Were you to hesitate, someone else will take your place
With an eight-hundred-US-dollar salary per month
ThankGod, we still have a chance...*

*I'll let down my girlfriend, and give up drinking
I'll be well contriving to feed mother and teach
our children
Remember to come back in a few years, my dear
You look like being still single...*

He talked then laughed dazedly
Dazed with grief his face turned thin
The tears of a middle-aged man
To where must they be dropped...

1999

*(1)Name of a character in a Japanese film entitled OSHIN, that has become a Vietnamese word, designating a maid - servant.
(2)In 1999, the Vietnamese Coal General Company had had the policy of allowing the mines to rest in rotation, as well as the policy of laying off workers (later on these policies were abolished).*

**A POET-FRIEND INVITED ME
TO DRINK ON THE SHORE
OF TIEN RIVER**

Grilled snake is heavenly tasty
Rice brandy makes you so drunk that you feel
the earth is collapsing

It wasn't easy to meet each other
The Tien river is flowing in front of us

Though we might drink up one thousand cups
An innermost feeling still cannot be lessened
The dovetail tactical position
A half man's life of fire and sword

We say that's because of the enemy
The enemy say that's because of us
Life was hard at all time
We never had a peaceful life

Two little brothers died on the battlefields
The war was on both extremities
Cultic photos are blurred by smoke
Both sides still don't want to look at each other

The poem is like guts
Exposed amidst heaven and cloud
Each one has his own fate
Going across this century...

The country is a unified land
The yellow star flies throughout the four seasons
That makes our mind feel happy
Not minding the sufferings of days past...

The garden area with no sunlight
Leaves turn wet in the sound of bees' flight
The prodigal tune of music
Wine which one drinks continually
without being drunk...

Soc Trang - My Tho, 30.10.1999

IN THE HOUSE

Although the homeland has changed
Man's face remains the same
Going through a life circle
One again met one in one's infancy

The hawk eats duck ⁽¹⁾
Were old people also like that?
Looking at the offsprings' heart
One knows the source of ancestors

Honour is the property
I keep for you my child
You'll only grow up and become wise
When living for other people's welfare

Telling you, you don't understand
Teaching my nephew, he doesn't
 want to listen and obey
I had to talk to myself
I'm so fed up and I don't want to talk anymore...

Dien Tri 1998

⁽¹⁾*Words by Tran Khanh Du, famous general under the Tran dynasty.*

**STANDING ON THE HO CITADEL AT THANH HOA AND
REMEMBERING UC TRAI NGUYEN TRAI'S VERSE "ONLY WHEN
THE BOAT CAPSIZED, CAN ONE KNOW THAT PEOPLE ARE LIKE
WATER"**

When the dynasty no longer agrees with people's will
Then a stone citadel turns merely into pasty mud
The throne collapsed in a stormless season
Invaders' faces teeming throughout the capital

Who is the people?

I suddenly shivered
On the palace floor, oxen's faces fell scatteringly
At the Cam Ho mountain⁽¹⁾ raphia-grass flew flutteringly
Is that fate decided by heaven? No one knows whether
it exists or not...

Baskets of fingers were thrown into the river⁽¹⁾
The Ho dynasty ended, how could it resist?⁽²⁾
***Only when the boat capsized, can one know people
are like water***

Uc Trai shade walked away, strong winds flew
in all four directions of the world...

Vinh Loc 29-10-1998

(1) *Place where Ho Qui Ly and his son were arrested.
Feudal historians believe that's fate decided by heaven.
When the stone citadel was built, fingers of workers that were
cut off or crushed were thrown basket after basket into
the river.*

(2) *The Ho dynasty ended in 1407.*

THE CAT

The cat lay calmly
 on the velvet carpet in the house corner
She was chained up like a dog
Food was served on the spot

Seeing the rats, I freed the cat
The cat looked at the rat indifferently and coldly
Then lay slightly bowed on the velvet carpet,
 Resting her head on the chain...

Cua Luc 2-1999

WHITE CLOUD

If we don't have the verse

*For a thousand years white cloud
drifted solitarily*⁽¹⁾

Then the white cloud on the sky of China
wouldn't be so white

I travelled thousands of kilometres to His country
Only to look at that trail of white cloud

The trail of white cloud that once drifted across
the Hoang Hac Palace, and drifted
through Thoi Hieu's soul
Is eternally young and sad and lives on the blue sky
The deep aspiration for Freedom
and a very very deep loneliness
Have seeped into me since my innocent age

Were the Golden Crane to fly back,
it will have no place to alight

⁽¹⁾*For a thousand years white cloud drifted solitarily
(translation) of a verse in the poem Hoang Hac Lau (Golden
Crane Palace) by Thoi Hieu (701-754).*

LAO XA

He used to be a feeble-minded man,
 ready to shift a dead sin on someone else,
 provided he can save himself
But then He wasn't able to save Himself
He drowned himself at the bottom of Lake Thai Binh ⁽¹⁾
 in his dead fear
Children had once used a leather belt with iron hook
 to whip his face
Now they dragged his corpse up to dry it in the sun

*Such a pre-eminent literary man of a time
Didn't have anything left, after suffering
 from so many vicissitudes*

They burned **His Dromedary Wall**
But it will remain forever one of the greatest
 masterpieces
Thanks to such masterpieces the people of China
become immortal
 It's because of those masterpieces that I come here
Like me, so many other people also come,
 by roads and rails, by waterways, by air

*Fortunately, there were many days on which
The handful of thin bones had rested peacefully
under the thick ground*

⁽¹⁾Lake on Tan Nhai street, in the northern outskirts of Beijing.

HOW CAN IT BE SO?

The rivers and mountains are not as treacherous as the heart of man

It's safe to face a tiger but dangerous to encounter mankind...(*)

I raise my head to question the heavens. The heavens remain mute

The clouds fly away in haste toward a place nobody knows...

A sweet tree, once aged, produces bitter fruit

The prettiest flower in the world often blooms outside the wall...

I lower my head to question the earth. The earth offers no reply

Do the mountains, standing silently for millennia, feel no sorrow?

2015

() Based on Hồ Chí Minh's translated poem, which includes the lines: "Upon a high mountain, one remains unharmed when encountering a tiger / Upon an even road, one encounters mankind and gets thrown into prison."*

AN DƯƠNG VƯƠNG'S WORDS

I'm not concerned about Triệu Đà
Nor am I troubled by Trọng Thủy
I'm only wary of one person – my dear daughter
On whom I bestowed various gifts
For she shall inherit the throne one day
She, too, loves me dearly
But for reasons I cannot discern
She always wears
The robe made of white goose feathers... (*)

2019

() According to Vietnamese legend, the white goose feather robe, from the story of My Chau - Trong Thuy, is a mark for her lover to find her, and invisibly serves as a way for the enemy to invade and chase her father to the end.*

NARRATIVE

I had stood in all regions
 Went and lived everywhere
But I'll only lie and die on the H¹ Long ground...

The land that brought me up since I was 18 years old
The drop of sweat has the worker's salty taste
Fearless of nobody, in my soul was a sky
of wind and salt
That was constantly peaceful but also didn't have
 the least peaceful moment

I was dazed before the silent bird's wings
That flew solitarily not knowing where they
would fly to
I've cried under the bright moonlight
Up to now I still don't know why...

I've loved and worked with all my heart
As I know life is short and filled with mishaps
I constantly felt I was a sinner
Before an old mother turning upward the bowl to beg...

Being able to write a verse that is truthful
 and straightforward to the People
I've gone through forty stormy years
The whole society was exterminating evil
Evil still inconsiderately laughs and talks amid life

I've stood in all regions
 Went and lived everywhere...

8 – 2000

TO MY DEAR FRIEND

To Nguyễn Trịnh K.

If not busy, then stay with me
Abstaining from illnesses... beer and alcohol
I only invite you
While happy, let's forget Heaven and Earth
With your dewy hair, you're already sixty five ⁽³⁾
years old!

Still write means still alive
Literature is like blood, why so we have our heart rent
Speaking or laughing, we don't have to please world people
Not caring about whispers, we let the wind blows freely...

We still live under a strict control
Our heartfelt constancy remains as firm as before
Loving people, having pity of friends,
and caring about our professions
While speaking, nobody listens to, but we still say *Dear Sir*...

We ourselves give up so many ties
Not wanting to be renowned... not needing anything...
Glad for people who in day time are invited by friends
while, in night time, is messaged by someone
I sleep throughout the night, without having anything beside...

⁽³⁾ 65 years old.

Being so, I consider myself as lucky
What should I offer you when we part from each other...
Dear friend, are we still laughing
I don't know why my eyes turned dimmed...

Hà Long 2009

MORNING TIME

The Bird softlyperches beside the Flower
The Flower feels happy because the Bird visits it
But only the Insect hidden under the Flower
Knows the real reason why the Bird comes...

2011

COMMON SENSE

Faithful camaraderie
Bobbing on tops of one's lips
Friends with feelings of gratitude
Have flown along with the drifting water...

Now the only person that remembers me
I only my own enemy...

2010

DAILY AND ORDINARY THINGS
AT HOME

Cats and mice now eat together on a same plate
That's life and it's so simple
So many theories turn into white
For grass to turn greener up to a few lifetimes...

2016

**VISITING THE POET THAT HAS
TWO DAUGHTERS
LEARNING THE ART OF FIGHTING**

My friend, the old poet

Has two young daughters

Both of them are learning the art of fighting

Punching quickly and trampling strongly

Robberies happen everywhere

To whom should we rely on

We couldn't preserve ourselves

How to wish for anything from other people

There is a policeman who avoids

Being face to face with the killers

Oh Diplomat of Merit?- foolish

Causing worries to wife and children

There had been policemen
With faces full of traces of injuries
That's why while in presence of robbers
They wait until the robbers get out to enter...

The two daughters of the poet
So graceful and beautiful
Stricken with their fists repeatedly
I was so terrified looking at them...

The poet looking at his training daughters
I don't know he's sad or happy
His poetic sentence has died
In the peacefulness of Mankind...

2009

THAT QUESTION

Each man has to answer a question throughout his life
That question was born with himself,
And if one has a body, one must have that question
Who made that question
Throughout one's life, one doesn't know
What does that question mean
One can only equivocally recognize
When summing up one own self
And the hammer itself also knows the answer
When nailing the lid of the coffin
to terminate a Man's life

That question seems like existing,
while it also seems like not existing
And is applied to one's life
As loose as a hat
that could be flown off by the wind
As tight as an iron chain manacling one's feet
Welded
That couldn't be cut...

Dear friend, have you perceive that
That question manages our breath
Beats in our hearts
that turn into rhythms
It pushes you to throw yourself on this side
Or to plunge towards the other side
Amidst the dizzy whirlpool of the world situation
We have answered ourselves that question

While we still don't know
Only knowing that the rain drops that flows on our lips
suddenly has a salty taste ...

It's seems like it exists
It's seems like it doesn't exist
It's seems like it subsists somewhere
Inside our mind and out of our mind
Endless, bumpy is the road of fate
Unfathomable periods
That replace us to decide
We remain ourselves, but actually we aren't...

Dear friend
It leads us to come to one another
Then it causes us to take leave of one another

2010

The nation that six thousand years ago gave birth to
MasterK'ung
Erecting his statue at the Heaven's Gate ⁽⁴⁾
then taking it off
The ozone layer being holed, Nature has changed its calendar
Snow melts at the middle of the Winter,
the cold wind flowsthroughout a summer day

All conceptions relating to the question of death and life,
friends and enemies are now different
On the Bạch Vân (White Clouds) mountain,
the White Clouds of the time
of Old Mr. Trang still flow
The showy layers of paint of so many statues
have also flown away
The rivers quietly flow while abrading the shadows
of palacesand temples

One should believe only in the drop of sweat
that's still warm on one's hand
and in the rice that is ripening in the pot
Please give back to winds and clouds thousands
of canonicalbooks so infantile and false
Goods friends impatiently waiting for us to die putting
Sharpknives on our backs
An enemy throws us a piece of bread when we're hungry...

⁽⁴⁾ *Thiên An Môn (Heaven's Gate).*

All values have changed, including the mysterious matter
How should the Prophecies be read in the reflected light
of the post nuclear era
Even the chopping board is fishy, there will be no more
Flies to alight ⁽⁵⁾
One must please Heaven to have a good place to live... ⁽⁶⁾

2008

⁽⁵⁾ A verse of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm “The chopping board is fishy, flies alight”.

⁽⁶⁾ “A Hoành Sơn mountain range, a place to live forever”.

Legend has it that this is a Nguyễn Bình Khiêm’s advice reserved for Lord Nguyễn;
The Nguyễn collapsed in 1945

WILL YOU GO BACK TO HẠ LONG...

Will you go back to Hạ Long with me, to see that the rocks
also love each other, when amidst sea and Heaven
appears the Male and Female kissing rocks
Trees and grass fall into one another,
crafty under the latemoon
One minute has gone by, no one can find it again
Mountains have cuddled clouds,
the wind cannot separatethem

I'm sending back to you a little sadness of the Fall,
when the drop of dew falls on the eucalyptus
You've met me even though I was mixed in the blue sky
Like the Hạ Long Bay, the sunny sea has the beauty
of thesun, while the rain on the mountains
has the beauty ofthe rain
You're more beautiful than in the old days, and also
younger than before...

I'm always beside you. How can you know
That when your lips were vaguely and suddenly pouting
And gracefully, you feel warm on your palm
And that when the wind doesn't blow in, but the lap
of your dress flies...

Hospital K. Hà Nội 15/ 01/2012

TO MISS A BROTHER

*Respectfully remembering the sacred soul of Mr. D. H
To you, nephew*

Your father has the merit of exterminating the tyrants
On his altar a great lot of Medals are shown
Why have you become foolish
To constantly scream on the streets...

At times you catch a toad
And use a stick to pierce through its belly
And press it on faces of people passing by
While you laugh and talk nineteen to the dozen...

By dint of thinking. I feel pity for your father
Throughout a life devoting to show off...
With all hopes concentrating in only you
But how come this is like that...?

I raise my head looking at the high blue sky
It seems like your father high up there
Keeps on looking at you continuing to jump for joy...
The star seems like dripping wet with tears...

2009

MOUNTAIN OF FLOWERS

Respectfully offered to my Father

Tottering in the road of life at ninety three years old
Washing down with one half cup of alcohol and
forgetting his old age
One morning in October while the Fall isn't cool yet
You've lied inside a mountain of flowers...

*Điền Trì 20/10 of the year of the Dragon
(03/12/2012)*

UNBOSOMING WITH MY FRIEND UPON ENTERING THE AGE OF 70

We are old already, and don't have anything left
The verses written with two third per cent of tears
Striving our best to show our heart, to tell the truth
To have one's peace of mind, one is so lucky already!

We are old already, in what way should we think
Why it's so difficult now to live honestly
Just is a good friend, in a glimpse one has turned
into a devil
Whom should we believe? - Who can be our own Comrade!

We are old already, and no longer take interest in
fame and wealth
So many wishes have caused us to be faulty
Our whole life, we are ready to exchange
For a verse faithful to the People!

20/ 8/ 2014

MOTHER

Mother with her bent back still have to carry
by means of a shoulder pole
Tears fell down on the bowl of rice because
she loves her children
One sacrificed himself on this side, another
one died in a battle at the other side
While the house where her children were born
is always unchanged

You must not make mummy sad!
-The son on this side said
You must not make mummy sad!
-The child on the other side said
But both of them are similar to each other
As they both leave the pain in their mother's heart

Even at the time their mother lies in the coffin...

Binh Duong 4/ 2005

WHY THE DAYS I'M LIVING IN ARE SO STRANGE?

Why the days I'm living in are so strange?
Where do the Agricultural teachers go
To let the schoolboy of the 11th class go to the fields
To invent the machine for farmers to produce

Why the days I'm living in are so strange?
While retrograding one is proud of oneself,
 even when poor and hungry one is stillboasting
Selling "choi dot"⁽⁸⁾ while building a few villas
People who devastated Nature go to conserve
 the environment

Why the days I'm living in are so strange?
The person that exterminated injustices, is also
 the one who himself re-established them
This modern time Truth and the Morality of our Ancestors
All are measured by the value of money...

Why the days I'm living in are so strange?
The shortest way is from a meal to the cemetery
And the longest way is from the words to the action
Until when can that matter could be reversed?...

Why the days I'm living in are so strange?...

2015

⁽⁸⁾ "Choi dot" means "the broom made of the dot tree that is similar to the reed tree in a number of towns in the frontier of North Vietnam".

**WATCHING ON THE TELEVISION
A DOCTOR LEARNING THE ART
OFFIGHTING**

Never before... a doctor
Learning the way ... to beat people
And the national television
Projected for all people to see...

Learning to beat... to beat against
In case the patient's family members...
How fearful it is... striking directly on the face
Kick to toss one's body on the courtyard...

The children looked at and so liked it
They in unison clasped their hands and laughed
The old man sat silently
Listening in his heart... tears that fell...

Ha Long 07/5/2018

THE DESERTED LAND

Many people brought bluish mysteries
Hiding them under wild grass, and a few whitish reeds
Not a few wrong things, and also not a few crimes
They have done throughout their lives,
And only they themselves know about that...

The glories... people have welcomed and received
Many more than things that really exist
Have pity... amidst the stormy sea of life
They chose the waves to flow with...
to obtain their fate...

Such so great mysteries still live on, under the green
wild grass
Although white bones have rotten in the dark earth
Only the reed lightly trembled in the dim moon and
the blowing wind
Wanting to say something... that seems like existing
while it doesn't exist...

2019

The poet all by himself, brought pains to his head
The empty circle was considered ... as sickly
People loved him so they called him Friend
But when he was in danger, all they could do was
to give up...

The poet has been in the hospital for so many days
Is his illness decreasing?... Only Heaven could know
While Heaven is blue unendingly and everlastingly
Blue since thousands of years ago...
While not for anything useful...

Vietnamese-Russian Friendly
Hospital 15/11/2007

(* *Pham Tien Duat*)

IT'S POSSIBLE...

It's possible that in a few years... I'll not know
in what direction I'll go
Birds still fly on the river, clouds and water are still blue
Oh my children, and grand children, you're
just grown up and are so beautiful
At that time, who can know where I've been...

Having no wings to fly up like birds
and to tell the truth, I'm not very wise
I'm very unwise, but it simply cannot be different
Oh sons, I hope that when comes the time
of your grand children, the Truth will be crowned
There will no longer be anyone needing
wings to flow to heaven

When successful in whatever field
You'll have many true enemies,
And many faked friends
Although standing in the shadows of the trees,
you'll not break the branches, or pluck the leaves
Such is life, be patient to go up, leaving behind
a kind heart
Believing in one's own strength, one will
certainly be successful

I ONCE YEARNED FOR

I once yearned for
The food of the poor
 Will no longer be robbed by anybody
The happy and ripe yellow paddy
 Called for man's hands to reap together
The road leading to Freedom
 Is Freedom itself...

Alas!
 Until when
The talented and wretched people
Will turn into stars
To go and open the heavenly strata
That was the day Good was crowned
Violence and might
All
 Become meaningless...

2007

THE OLD MAN FORTUITOUSLY...

The old man fortuitously picked up a strange pen
Someone had let fall on the roadside
The old man took the pen home
Softly put it on the bookshelf
The pen was clearly clean and beautiful

But much to one's surprise
 Night after night
He was the only one
 to hear vaguely
And faintly
 a stammering sound
 ú ó ... (Onomat)

He examined the pen under the fire
The pen was always clean and beautiful
But it dimly shivered
And his two hands
 Were immediately smeared with red blood...

He remained silent
And buried the pen under the flowers' shadow
in the garden

The following morning
at that same place
A grave pushed up
covered by lushly green grass...

Through faint presentiments
He had recognized
This pen belongs to his son
The son he loved best...

2003

NOTING DOWN A HEART-RENDING STORY IN THE AGRARIAN REFORM

When people tied closely the buffalo rope to his
Dien Bien Phu leather belt ⁽⁹⁾
The Court passed a Death sentence
Two Cadres pursued hitting the rod on the back
of the buffalo
The male buffalo bolted ferociously
The rice fields have been cultivated,
The furrows turned whitish in the “gio ai”⁽¹⁰⁾ season
His body jumped up and down fastly... in the
people’s cheering sound...

When people blew the bronze clarinet and
covered with the stars flag
Two lines of soldiers in uniform welcomed him
to the Heroes Cemetery
In the oblong earthenware container
He still has only his head and the leather belt...

2016

(9/1) He’s a fighter who has fought the French Colonialists at Dien Bien Phu. and he still has the leather belt of the battlefield

(10/ 2) “Gio ai” Earth turned up by the furrows which people expose to the sun and wind (cold one) to be dried on both sides, then “do ai” (use the bucket for bailing out water to pour on the rice fields) to cause the “chiem rice” season to have a higher productivity in the previous years.

THE DOG'S BARKING...

The dog's barking was thousands of miles away
The mass of clouds flew around in the house
I asked The Madly Busy Genius:
What does a matter like that mean
He answered: *Like that is like that!*

The Fall went by the tree top
Left in the mid-air fragments of gold
 so flurried to the point of feeling perplexed
Summer went across Man's life
Leaving behind a halo on the hair
I asked The Madly Busy Genius:
 What does a matter like that mean
He answered: *Like that is like that!*

Birds flew in flocks towards the South
Were they ungrateful to the Northern homeland
The Eastern sea whale that roves freely
in the fierce waves
Would die whenever its belly touches the sand
Were they feeble and cowardly
The Madly Busy Genius asked me:
What does a matter like that means
I answered: *Like that isn't like that!*

2003

I carried two back-bending gourds of delirium
This side has shape and colour
 and the other side has no shape and colour
They weren't equal,
 And walked unevenly
 Labouring along
 throughout a life circle
Along with a vague sadness
 is a tottering happiness
The drop of tear silently wiped out in nighttime
 and the pale smile at the day's end
I asked to hand in everything to You, both principal
 and interest

O Madly Busy Genius
Now I'm clear of all worldly debts
Yes, dear Sir
 I'm clear of worldly debts
The happiness
 No longer makes me happy
The sufferings
 No longer make me suffer...

2003

THE FIRST MYSELF WAS DEAD

The First Myself was dead
Lying stiff dead inside the coffin
The Second Myself was still alive
And was the body
 That wasn't the body
The soul
 That wasn't the soul...
The Second Myself was surprised
 And didn't understand why
As He himself was dead
While his face still seemed to silently suffer
The worldly hardships
 Had not been dissolved
He listened closely to the noisy sounds
 of clarinet and drum
The cries and laments about His own life
Completely indifferent like crying
 for some unknown person
Heart-rending while at the same time not heart-rending

He didn't feel pity
For his own death
He came to each one of his kindred
And softly extended his hand to comfort
That was why they had the Calmness
Even when body and soul were lonely
They talked about giving birth to children
and grandchildren
And about building houses...

They felt they could hear His words
Through the mournful and pitiful
sound "hò" (Onomat):
- Please be cool-headed
In this world
There is nothing more beautiful than Death
Just think over
If everybody
From ancient times
Are living along with us
Then how frightful
This world would be...

2003

I FIND MY OWN SOUL

I find my own soul
 In the sound of the monochord
The monochord vibrated
The happiness and sadness of the country
So many waste and vague thoughts
 of the late in the night moon
All pitches of Paradise and Hell...

I find my own Homeland
 In the sound of the monochord
A three-compartment thatched house
The sound of the hammock swinging
 and creaking
Ponds and lakes turned dim with smoke and dew
The village banyan tree was charmed by the moon
Stood lonely for a hundred years
 and was still stunned...

I found You
 In the sound of the monochord
You were in a strange Land but you seem
to be somewhere around here
Very very far hedges of bamboo trees full
of falling bamboo leaves
Your dishevelled hair overflowing your two hands
Your skirt was so short, the blowing
 wind tossed it high...

2007

THE RIGHT HAND DOESN'T KNOW...

The right hand doesn't know the left hand
 When performing together a task
The lotus blooming on the lake
 Doesn't need a mirror
The best meal in the world
 Is often served to Ghosts and Devils
Money and Faith
 Hitherto are children of a same Mother...

Being constantly provident
 Misfortunes are approaching all the same
A vicious guy often has a good-looking face
A knife like sharp tongue is more frightful
than the knife itself
Today's intelligence
 Lies inside purses...

2007

2007

O my Beloved one!
The existing thing we must believe in is Beauty
Don't worry about the past and the future
I shall dive deep into the earth
 When the monochord sound dies away
Looking for me?
 Ask the colour of the apricot flower...

2007

**BE AT EASE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO
THINK ABOUT ANYTHING!...**

Our homeland has days like that
Fishes die full of the beach
Rice doesn't get stale after one month
Fruits after one year are still fresh as just plucked
I've heard "Eating maize is more nutritive than eating rice"
The beloved scientists constantly affirm
That they never lie
Be at ease, you don't have to think about anything!...

Projects of millions of billions are left unexploited
The deep areas still have people dying of hunger
In all towns and provinces one always sees
High officials' houses as big as communal houses

Bright yellow wardrobes for exposing gifts
So heavy iron gate with two persons closing and opening

ONE NEEDS A SOUND OF BELL...

The perfidious eye glare
 Words and their meanings are deceitful
The attractiveness of sins
Inebriated people like alcohol ferment...

One needs a sound of bell
 Stricken at midnight!

The tree trunks with roots grown upside down turning into a forest
Fragrant ripe yellow fruits that are full of poison
To what an extent the way snakes crawled
 in their holes was unfathomable...

One needs a sound of bell
 Stricken at midnight!

When going away one has stumbled
When going back one goes astray
And being too proud means
 one is committing suicide...

One needs a sound of bell
 Stricken at midnight!

2007

BLINK

A poem for myself upon reaching the age of 80

Within a blink of an eye, I've become an old man of Eighty

Oh red scarf, where are you fluttering now?

Gone are the days when we brought drums to a landlord's yard

And loudly beat them, crying out in protest till morning came

Within a blink of an eye, I've become an old man of Eighty

Oh notebooks' pages, where are the dried flowers that you pressed?

I'm like those flowers, dried throughout my youth

You did not love me, but I never stopped yearning

Within a blink of an eye, I've become an old man of Eighty

Oh friends, where are you lying down now?

The old songs are no longer being sung

And the moon overhead remains the same

Within a blink of an eye, I've become an old man of Eighty

Oh future, the future is approaching

Another protest? No. The drums once again sound until morning

Oh! Greetings to the six flower-bedecked stairsteps (*)

leading this old man toward the Heavens!...

2023

() 6 layers of an official's robe*

“FROM THE HORIZON OF ONE MAN TO THE HORIZON OF ALL MEN”

TRAN NHUAN MINH

*Speech that has been read
at the Festival of Asiatic and Pacific
Poetry for the second time in March, 2015*

From the last century, a great French poet, Paul Elouard (1895-1952), has said a phrase with a general idea as follows: **“From the horizon of one man to the horizon of all men,”** From that idea, I’ve understood that: *“Each poet has to walk with his own footsteps on the spot his nation is walking. But with regard to his destination, he must come to the whole mankind”*. The second meeting of the Asiatic and Pacific poets at this place constitutes a so lively emblem of that idea. Poets are creative persons, not only creating languages as people usually say. The creativities of the poets include creating the living substances and the souls, so as to recognize the spiritual deepness of a nation, as well as to contribute a heartfelt voice and a symbol of aesthetic to the flow of world poetry. Freedom and talent are the essential elements of creativity.

Character and skill and spirit combined are the contents of creativity. The image of arts and its effect, particularly the effects of the rhythm and languages, in the livelihood of the community, stirring everybody’s minds about the fate of the people, constitute the results of creativity.

Since hundreds of years, quite a great deal of people have discussed about there are several books that have become canons, in which there are so many great talented and intelligent persons that are wordly known, and that requires a few centuries to have one of them... We’ve thought that that’s the end upon reaching such a point. While who would have thought that isn’t the end at all.

Everything has just started. And people have to continue to discuss again. Poetry continues to be something mysterious, deeply blue in face of us like the sea,

with layers after layers like mountains and deep forests. For that reason, the more one studies and writes poetry. The more one perceives that poetry has something quite difficult to grasp and conquer. It seems like poetry can develop, so that each poet can be a different one, and in only one person, there are also phases that are different from one another, while all such elements are available thanks to this “particular” point. For that reason, the new high summits have the occasion to appear, while the new arguments about poetry can base themselves on that to be constantly supplemented... There will never be an end.

For that reason, were someone to say that he has completely understood poetry, then I would immediately say that that person is a liar.

In many cases, the most interesting poems were written by sentiment, not by arguments, and it's only when the author is “non-ego” that the poem can be natural and light and flowing. Just like the evenly soft sound of the country, the striped folds of tigers and panthers, who knows which one is the light that flows over their heads. There are poets whose capital in schools and classes is not much, but by means of naturally and deeply understood layers of culture of our country and of the whole mankind, their works are always a sudden brightness and liberality of the talent and intelligence of several generations which they unexpectedly become the representatives. At times, they walk in the dimness, filled with inspirations of their own souls, which might be by chance granted to them by Heaven, with tottering footsteps, while creating magnificent aesthetic values, that have never existed before, enriching to an unknown point the cultural values for the era they had lived their lives.

I lay down as a policy to write easy to understand poems, while the readers cannot understand at one time all that I wanted to say. They thought they have understood, but it seems like there still is something that obliges them to read a second time, and like that, each time they read again, they will see that they have discovered something, or know about some additional thing. Then when reading more, they will see the matter I only suggest to them. Finally, they might think of the thing I've never thought about... *The Tale of Kieu*, a world known work of the Vietnamese Literature, is one among the works like that. Up to the present time, 200 years have gone by, the ideas exchanged or even discussed... around problems of ideas and art of the *Tale of Kieu*, as well as the outstanding advantages and the restrictions, still not have a conclusion ... and that are mainly because of that reason. With me the greatest success of the Great Poet Nguyen Du is mainly due

to this matter, and when studying Nguyen Du, the most difficult thing, according to myself, is also studying this same matter.

And so like that, their ideas are outside of my works, and outside of my thoughts. My works and my individuality don't have to be responsible. Because I think that: It's quite possible that the most famous and interesting poem from the past to the present of all nations, from all countries, and all eras can be the poem on which the verses must be read between the lines. Poet Che Lan Vien of Vietnam has once written " *The verse I wrote one half only/ As for the other half, let's the Fall do it.*" And so like that. If my poems have only 300 readers, with such a depth who could also understand ... the matter I suggested and left half-done to them, then I'll have 300 books of poems that are different from one another, and my own book of poems will be the 301st one. There are also people who have discussed about this matter, as up to the present time there are still many persons who still waver over the polysemantic nature of poetry.

There are people who have a divided mind on the way to resolve the problem of poetry. I think that it's not the duty of poetry. Formerly, at the present time, and even later on, poetry has only one duty, that of being *interesting*. As for the poet, he has only one mission, that of writing quite *interesting* works. There are many different models of interesting works, the more the work is interesting – the more the works are interesting differently, the more they are good. Only interesting poems can save poetry. Only interesting poems can have readers. Without readers, the poems die and the poet also dies. But being able to write interesting poems is constantly a very difficult matter.

A poet considered to be talented must have *artistic solutions* to concretely settle the poems, not permitting any of them to be similar to another. And that is his own creativity, relating to the means, but not to the purpose. Is that right that you're a poet? Then you must think of a certain means to express the poetic idea *in an illusive manner with regard to realistic matters which many people have seen clearly*. The illusiveness will create the attractiveness. Were you to be unable to do so, your poems will fall down to simpleness, while in the poetry, *simpleness means suicide*. Then you must also have a certain action relating to languages to make very clearly and very easy to understand *the matters that are unclear and difficult to understand, which you are the only person that could think of and understand clearly*. Not being able to do that, your poems will have a unique reader who simply is yourself.

I've a profound consciousness about studying the traditional Eastern Poems, particularly the Tang Chinese poems, as I always strive to make my poems suggestive and could be read between the lines... I've also strived my best, by means of artistic methods which I've learned from the artistic Eastern and also Western poetries, to unify opposite sides and to create a sudden mutation in the expression of the people's fate as well as mankind's fate before the unceasing percussion of the world situation to include also the thought of people before the circumstance and the universe. Throughout my poems writing life, I've strived my best to study and have adopted that artistic and ideological tendencies, but to what point I've reached, is another matter. The more I study and write poems, the more I recognize that : Each poet must go from the spot his nation is going, while his destination must be the whole mankind.

Anything that comes to life and can exist must have its legitimate reason. The unceasing researches of the poets are aimed at exploiting and sublimating the part that is still latent in the creation of spiritual values of mankind. And to follow and support this matter, one should never boycott or give up elements such as religion or skin colors as they need to co-exist and to be equaled in all values. I think so and have never been frigid, or have a prejudice with works written with artistic tendencies different with mine, or even contrary to me. As poetry belongs to all people, and comes from thousands of different ways, not only from realistic life, as with realistic life, each man is different from the other, each place is different from the other place, and each period is also a different one... and so poetry is also from the far away spiritual world... from the soul of each man, and from each nation... But I have two requirements: *One*, You can write in what manner you like, and all your researches are good, but the most important thing is that your work must cause men to live with other men in a better way, and men to love men more than usual.

And the ruler to measure your work's values must always be the humanistic theory. *Two*, your work must cause our culture to be enriched, and must not fight against it.

And so, poetry will have various different kinds of poetry, and the interesting poetry also have different kinds of interesting ones, but, with me, the most interesting poetry must always be the kind that can vibrate the souls of everybody with regard to the fate of people. Two geniuses that I extremely admire : Do Phu and Nguyen Du, have taught me that matter.

I mostly fear the kind of poetry that has no thought and has only “pressure” that’s only an agent of thought, while pressure in itself isn’t thought. Thoughts always appear in poetry. Calm, natural, and even kind, while very fine, mild and warm through each one of the verses, or through a whatever mode of conclusion of the languages and of the image of poetry, even though each work or all the works and finally through the senseorgans of the author. Thoughts constantly exist. both concretely or dreamingly, vague but filled with impressions, and also have particular characters like the perfume of a type of flower. Every flower has its own color, and it’s the content, while the flower’s perfume constitutes the thoughts. With the poets that are considered great, the first thing is that their poems have thoughts. Often the great thoughts. Such thoughts are the most profound part that automatically becomes the system of reference, gathering all subjects and contents. And the pressure of thoughts oblige the poem to come to life, just like the baby who is obliged to be born from his mother’s belly.

At the present time, we are living in a flat world following the cold war. That’s the greatest success mankind has obtained. Peace, friendship, collaboration, and development are the common aspirations of all peoples and nations, while at the sametime all such aspirations are also the greatest common multiple of poetry.

More than at anytime, poetry must be elevated from the greatest common multiple of all peoples and nations, through the particular heartbeat of each one of the poets, even though they might be different in the spoken languages or skin colors, they still have to fight for a world without war and terrorism as well as without oppression and distinction of skin colors or sex. These are also the specific traits of The True, The Good and The Beautiful of poetry, among which, according to me, The Good is the most basic one.

I have the following verse:

“That’s the day The Good is crowned

Violence and cruel power

All

Become non-sensible...”

I do think that, this isn't my own and personal aspiration...

About the author:

TRAN NHUAN MINH



Photo: *Statue of Poet Tran Nhuan Minh, realized with monolithic altraxit, adopting a man size, and carved and offered as a gift to the author by a worker at the Quang Ninh coal mine in 1993.*

Born on August 20, 1944 in Dien Tri, Hai Duong province, North Vietnam, living and writing in Hong Quang Mine since 1962 (now it is Quang Ninh province); graduated from the Faculty of Literature of Hanoi University; Participated in founding the Literature and Arts Association of Quang Ninh province in 1969. For many years, he was appointed Chairman of the Literature and Arts Association of Quang Ninh province, member of the Poetry Council, Vietnam Writers Association, member of the National Committee of the Union of Literature and Arts Associations. His poems were published in newspapers since 1960.

Has published 63 books in Vietnam and abroad, including 36 volumes of poems.

Many of his works have been reprinted from 5 to 34 times in his home country. Received the Vietnam Record award for the poet whose works in the Doi Moi (Renovation) era (since 1986) being reprinted the most times in Vietnam. Both his poems and essays have been published in high school textbooks from 1980 till present. His prose works have been translated into 7 languages, published and released in 7 countries, his poetry has been translated into 16 languages, published and released in 19 countries around the world. Especially in 2022 and 2023, a volume of poems by Tran Nhuan Minh was published in Canada in 4 languages:

English, French, German, Spanish, and released globally and displayed at the International Book Fair in Frankfurt, Germany in 2023.

For poetry, he was awarded the Vietnam Writers Association Award in 2003, the State Award for Literature and Arts, phase II, by the President in 2007, and the Special Award for epic from the Vietnam Writers Association in 2011, Mekong River Literature Award in Cambodia 2020.

Regarding prose, he was awarded the Second Prize by the Vietnam Writers' Association in 2020 for Vietnamese novels (1975 - 2020) about borders and islands.

Regarding Critical Theory Research field, he was awarded the Dao Tan Award in 2023 by the Department of Research, Preserve and Promote Vietnamese National Culture... and many other awards; won 3 Labor Medals: Third class, Second class, First class, 8 Medals, 4 Commemorative Medals and 3 Creative Labor Diplomas... (For his creative achievements in cultural and artistic values).

His published poetry books in English version:

- 1 – The poet and the flowers of grass, *2008*
- 2 – The desolate and waste sonata, *2008*
- 3 – 45 pieces of monochord by an unnamable author, *2008*
- 4 – Leaving behind along the way, *2008*
- 5 - The white cloud popular area, *2011*
- 6 - The Truong Giang river, *2018*
- 7 – On Goethe’s native land, *2022*
- 8 – Flared up subconscious, *2022*
- 9 - People and the world they’re living in, *2022*
- 10 – Epic one hundred last steps, *2023*
- 11 – The day I live, *2023*

* * *

Thơ

THE DAY I LIVE

TRẦN NHUẬN MINH

* * *

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phát hành