# TRAN NHUAN MINH

# THE DAY I LIVE

# POEMS

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





# THE DAY I LIVE

# POEMS

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

USA - 2023

### **Table of Contents**

**TRAN NHUAN MINH:** 

"My inspiration is coming from the fate of people in the terrible shocks: war, terrorism. natural disasters..." WISH THE FOUR SEASONS WITH FRIENDS WHEN PASSING THROUGH THE STREET, I ALWAYS SEE ... **RETURNING TO MY PARENTS' HOUSE** BA KIM (Villager KIM) STEALTHILY LISTENING TO TWO LADIES' CONVERSATION AUNT HUU DESERTED HILL WITH SISTER HONG TAM (ROSY HEART) LIBERALITY **RECALLING A PARTY MEMBER** IN THE LAND REFORM MS BONG WHITE CLOUD AT HOANH MO SEEING A SOLDIER'S WIFE OFF BRAIN-WAVE OLD FRIEND FAR INTO THE NIGHT OLD MR VONG NEW YEAR' S EVE PHUC THE POEM I DIDN'T INTEND TO WRITE ONE HUNDRED YEARS IN... OLD MR TU VISITING THE KONSTANTINOVO VILLAGE, HOMELAND OF RUSSIAN POET SERGUEI ESSENINE WHITE NIGHT MEETING BY CHANCE A FRIEND ON THE SEVASTOPOL-MOSCOW EXPRESS BESIDE THE URAL THINKING OF SAPAEP ON THE SEREMECHEVO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT I WENT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND MET YOU A POEM FOR A FELLOW COUNTRYMAN IN GERMANY

TO MY NEPHEW WORDS OF A FRIEND HAVING A WIFE BEING CHOSEN TO BE AN OSHIN IN TAIWAN A POET-FRIEND INVITED ME TO DRINK ON THE SHORE OF TIEN RIVER IN THE HOUSE STANDING ON THE HO CITADEL AT THANH HOA AND REMEMBERING UC TRAI NGUYEN TRAI'S VERSE "ONLY WHEN THE BOAT CAPSIZED, CAN ONEKNOW THAT PEOPLE ARE LIKE WATER" IN THE MIST OF CAO BANG THE CAT WHITE CLOUD LAO XA HOW CAN IT BE SO? THANKING THE PEOPLE FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL AN DƯƠNG VƯƠNG'S WORDS NIGHT FEAST NARRATIVE OLD MR. CHIEN SAW HIS NIECE OFF TO WORK AS A MAID-SERVANT ABROAD TO MY DEAR FRIEND THE CALL MORNING TIME COMMON SENSE DAILY AND ORDINARY THINGS AT HOME VISITING THE POET THAT HAS TWO DAUGHTERS LEARNINGTHE ART OF FIGHTING THAT QUESTION GOING INTO THE SẤM (THUNDER) VILLAGE WILL YOU GO BACK TO HA LONG ... THAT ERA TO MISS A BROTHER MOUNTAIN OF FLOWERS UNBOSOMING WITH MY FRIEND UPON ENTERING THE AGE OF 70 MOTHER WHY THE DAYS I'M LIVING IN ARE SO STRANGE? WATCHING ON THE TELEVISION ADOCTOR LEARNING THE ART

OFFIGHTING THE DESERTED LAND THERE IS A POET... (\*) IT'S POSSIBLE... THE WISE MAN... I ONCE YEARNED FOR THE OLD MAN FORTUITOUSLY ... NOTING DOWN A HEART-RENDING STORY IN THE AGRARIAN REFORM THE DOG'S BARKING... ONE EVENING... O THE MADLY BUSY GENIUS I'VE BEEN FOOLISH ENOUGH... THE FIRST MYSELF WAS DEAD I FIND MY OWN SOUL THE RIGHT HAND DOESN'T KNOW ... ON THIS PLACE SOMEONE... THE EARTH BREATHES BY THE WIND BE AT EASE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT ANYTHING!... ONE NEEDS A SOUND OF BELL... BLINK "FROM THE HORIZON OF ONE MAN TOTHE HORIZON OF ALL MEN"

#### 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).

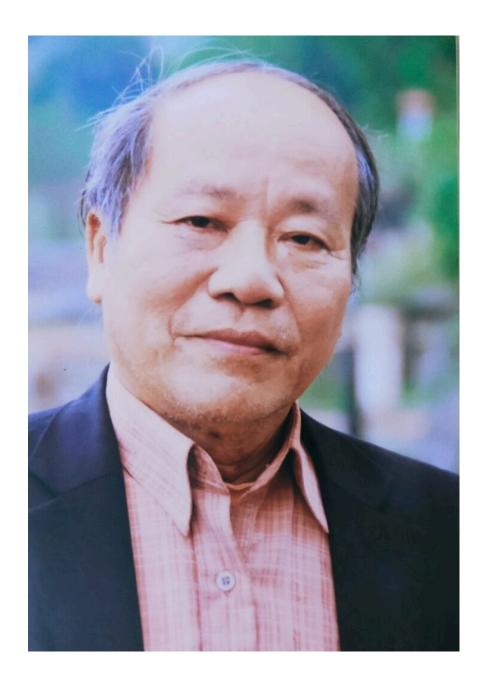


Photo portrait of Poet Tran Nhuan Minh

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

# **BA KIM (Villager KIM)**

His house was hidden behind a large sugar-cane garden He sat on the verandah chewing leisurely a quid of betel An earthen pot for cooking rice, and a bamboo bed Were all what he needed

His eldest son died upon occupying the De Castries underground shelter His second child sacrificed himself when regaining Saigon The "*Country's recognition*" diploma isn't pasted on the female bamboo wall The altar also doesn't show the photos of his two children

He's the only one to know about the mournfulness When night after night under the blue light of a small lamp He sat counting each one of the war-dead's coins Then silently put them inside a glazed terra-cotta pot

He doesn't ask for such or such thing He caught crabs in the past and now he's still catching them The back of his hand is criss-crossed with scratches The creel was hung beside the lattice screen

On each Lunar New Year Day the committee used to offer A packet of the Dien Bien cigarettes and a Chinese tea pack He burned the joss-sticks and left the gifts untouched He simply didn't know how to use such things He has a bent back and short hair like a girl He sold crabs in all lanes and alleys of the Dinh market district Upon having small change, he bought popcorn For little schoolboys to freely enjoy it...

Then one early morning, while the lamp was still lit Beside a jar... He passed away! So gentle and untroubled was his face Not being preoccupied with worldly sufferings

His fragrant and generous soul has dissolved into heaven and the earth He seems like still existing somewhere... while inexistent I clasped hands before the eternally green colour That has always been green over hamlets and ricefields...

1988

### STEALTHILY LISTENING TO TWO LADIES' CONV

**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"<sup>(1)</sup> 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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(1)</sup> 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

# **AUNT HUU**

Uncle finished building the three-story-house He turned emaciating little by little Then an early morning He silently passed away

From the countryside the whole connection came to visit Finding aunt so gentle and gracile While the house is so big and so nice Later on who knows to whom will it belong to?

Her husband's little sisters with scowling eyes showing ill-will towards her Free from care, she didn't see anything Regretting her husband, aunt didn't know how to weep At times, she only had a "he" hiccough...

She has suffered eversince her childhood Never hoping for white storey and blue floor Uncle dies, aunt becomes a stranger Homeless in her own house So many people were cowing 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 faithfull 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...

# 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

### **MS BONG**

I have several times Voted for you to attend the higher general assembly Once retired, people elected you To burn joss-sticks and sweep up the temple courtyard

In early spring I'm asking you for a prophecy To think over and see how my future will be You're always staidly and steady High and deep your voice is now ascending now descending

White hair and speckled skin so portly You still carried your bag as in days past I didn't know what did it hold before Now I only see tablets and amulets

I raised my eyes looking respectfully at you As for you, I don't think you remember me Adopting idleness as a small bamboo boat Seeing how to be carried through old age...

I suddenly see myriads of grass and trees Dimly tinted with dream colour In the affairs of this world happiness and sadness are mingled Who is the one that could understand why...

1990

# 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

altar) to come back to life. If you can't live, then pray for your dead relatives to quickly pick you up. (according to ancient Vietnamese customs).

Suddenly someone that looked like him appeared in the shop's window frame You stunningly shouted for joy, then fell lost in the dark abyss The client bought a box of matches and left immediately, he didn't have any fault *O warrior's wife! Just lean on the yang branch to come back to this world!* 

Her heart has stopped beating since nine days, but her face remains freshly rose She seems like meeting him in very far and very deep smoke and dew The drop of tear vaguely stagnated under eyelashes that had not been completely closed Bitter joy doesn't belong to only one person

The coffin was painted with dusk's pale violet colour Why it was dripping wet with wax over nine high storeys Up to your face's level, the war was ended Following countless fortitude and self-pride...

Deceiving you to go, he didn't have any fault However, green the grass can be, it cannot cover all human sufferings O warrior's wife! The fading yang branch forgets the way back Then just go ahead to leave! Don't let him wait with eagerness O deities! In the night-like dark world Don't let her lose her husband once again... 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!

### V FLEETINGLY APPEARING

Things mundane, though one thousand years of age, are still like a baby who learns to turn over on his back While human sentiment takes only one minute to give way

VI VAPID SOIL

Well I don't know what the wind has told me But the tree continues to shake its top and nods

VII EVENING SEA

Albatrosses continue to soar into the mountainous land The boats lying on the beach miss the high and far sky

VIII TWO FRIENDS

EVIL slaps GOOD on the shoulder Both of them laugh and walk towards the future...

*Bo Hon 1986* 

#### **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 narrrow while heaven is narrower Wherever you can hide mountains and rivers remain indifferent Which street corner doesn't have a Ngung Bich mansion<sup>1</sup> Which man's face doesn't have a So Khanh appearance<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Place where Thuy Kieu had lived in the "Tale of Kieu" by Nguyen Du, namely a brothel house.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> A charater in the "Tale of Kieu" by Nguyen Du a seducer of young women.

No longer daring to send gifts to your mother So deep was your fearful loneliness Upon seeing a fire lit in someone's kitchen Or upon fleetingly hearing children laughing somewhere

I should at least hold your hand So that you can receive the money without being ashamed The Ha Long's moon never has a landing The Hong Gai's wine can be drunk everlastingly without being dead drunk...

6-1991

### **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...

Điền Trì 1988

### **NEW YEAR' S EVE**

When in every house the Tet Greetings were resounding Fireworks were beaming from all balconies The wandering children picking up rubbish Were driven away from their last abodes

Where could one find the legendary heart Opening the merciful door to welcome them With their smeared faces, their clothes that smell the dark corners As human beings, how could they be in such a wretched situation?

There is a place they might not be driven out That's the jutted wall at the seat of the Writers' Association The restlessness flying in the intellectuals' mind May, by chance, provide them with a refuge

But don't say that I've told you They will blame me for not caring about preserving the environment I, Nhuan Minh, strolled sadly alone amidst the frost Listening to heaven and earth's modulation when declaiming about hope and love...

1-1990

## 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 <sup>(1)</sup> 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:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(1)</sup>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

# VISITING THE KONSTANTINOVO VILLAGE, HOMELAND OF RUSSIAN POET SERGUEI ESSENINE

The evening was hanging on the inlaid with gold tower peak The river indifferently flew hidden under the trees' shade The garden was tinted with an ancient sadness You opened the umbrella and walked in the flying rain

The iron cock stood guarding the wooden house Its roof still had the pleasant sweet smelling of fresh pine resin The flock of cranes flew across the silent water lake Casting a vague sadness over the tops of some oak-trees...

Years and months rolled up on restless oxen horns The old lover, people have forgotten The rain-colour eyes, the soft and white breast Do people remember? There remains only me...

I threw my hat at the thorny bush and showing great warmth

Greetings!

Where are you wandering about? The lips were bloodily struck with very pure poems Which up to now still harass our minds...

The bell sound was lost into the dark dense forest Awaken at the near end of the field, afar away dot of light

I was like the trembling fading moon

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

## MEETING BY CHANCE A FRIEND ON THE SEVASTOPOL-MOSCOW EXPRESS

How come we met again here At first sight, you looked a bit thinner than before Is it because sometimes it rains, sometimes it's sunny The climate of our friendly country doesn't like us

Your pale laugh was deprived of all prettiness Seeing your worries, I really felt pity of you For what reason you didn't mind life's hardships Why a girl like you must travel so far?

In daytime you went to Moscow, at night-time you came back to Leningrad Your face is foolish but money's face is wise Is it useful to exchange happiness for sadness Whatever one is trading, one must know how to do it to get profits

Speaking in tortuous words and chatting for a moment It came out that you have become an exile Burying your child, quitting your job, and having no husband The life's ties, who will undo them for you

Someday when I'll return home What could I tell your old parents Loving their children like the trace of consumed oil 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

## **BESIDE THE URAL THINKING OF SAPAEP** <sup>(1)</sup>

Your blood had once reddened this river portion Does your soul still live in the winds that shook the trees Shivering at the horizon was the silvery river Whitening the shore the flowers sobbed and flew

Wars and battles had sunk in the purple coloured cloud To where the ancient red blood drop had flown Late in the evening the sunlight had not died off in the platan-trees forest Couples of young men and young girls stood hugging one another

No one knows whether among so many warm and cold faces Is there any of them that still remembers You The young girl kissed and soothed the Japanese puppy Her completely indifferent eyes looked at the river smoke...

Ukraine May 9, 1990

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(1)</sup>A Sovietic hero.

## 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* 

#### **TO MY NEPHEW**

Written after my nephew, a district committee chairman, got his house robbed at night and he himself was badly injured

#### Hey my nephew

A mandarin's house must be far away from the road The door must be closed, the wall must be high What people do inside the house Don't let other people know, don't let them come in and get out The love of classes with its noble signification When talked about in a conference, is only for talking sake Fortunately, the gist of the matter had been so The wound must be mended while the face is... intact Although you've lost more than one half of your fortune You still have your hands, and money will come around as usual

#### Hey my nephew

Being a high official, one has to be on one's guard Upper room, lower room, inner room, outer room At the present time Mobile is everywhere The problem is who to trust and who not to be trusted... One startles when seeing that a lot of things around Could be thought about, but just couldn't be spoken out Don't expect your friends to be faithful They might throw flowers in front but behind they might betray The official circle has its vicissitudes 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<sup>(1)</sup> The coal branch is laying off workers<sup>(2)</sup> 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

<sup>(1)</sup>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* <sup>(1)</sup> 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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(1)</sup>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 ONEKNOW 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<sup>(1)</sup> 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<sup>(1)</sup> The Ho dynasty ended, how could it resist?<sup>(2)</sup> *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

(2) The Ho dynasty ended in 1407.

<sup>(1)</sup> Place where Ho Qui Ly and his son were arrested. Feudal historians believe that'sfate 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.

### **IN THE MIST OF CAO BANG**

The Hien river was missing The Cao Bac peak flowed totteringly at shoulders' level The bowl of duck Chinese soup I was eating, my hand groped for but didn't find the chopsticks The sun was white and gentle as a small cent I didn't condescend to spend Mirroring myself I didn't find my face Somewhere around here was the citadel of the M<sup>1</sup>c dynasty that drifted and bobbed in wartime The Giang pass with its burning smell of horses' sweat was made silvery by reeds O mist and smoke! The suffering souls Are craving for what when they flew in agony Is it Freedom? Well just fly to heaven!

*Well...* A sea of blurred clouds, with limited colours Suddenly filled up the sky In an instant I kept silent to converse with the Endlessness...

Cao Bang 7.12.1998

### 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 slighty 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 <sup>(1)</sup> 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

> <sup>(1)</sup>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).

Sharp-pointed houses grew like bamboo shoots on the green grass land of yore The place Thoi Hieu inscribed his poem is at the present time only a place to collect tourists' money Were the cloud to be extremely white, people would still be quite indifferent...

After one thousand and two hundred years, how can Thoi Hieu figure out There is a poet who came from the very end of the South, to admire the trail of cloud that drifted through His poem, and to be stunned, while feeling a sympathetic pain And remained awake throughout the cold Fall night Listening to the sounds of boats and ships that noisily threw themselves across the Truong Giang's waves..

Beijin 18.9.1999

### 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 <sup>(1)</sup> 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

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

He greeted me on the rest-carpet at the staircase On the right side was a Tea Inn and on the left side was The Stage <sup>(1)</sup> Inside the glass, His eyes laughed gently As if His country has never been on the brink of destruction

As if He has never had a death

Who of us can understand His feeling At his last minute in this life

Out there, on the Thien An Mon (Heavenly Gate) square, colour lights projected up to the sky Under the *Long Tu Culvert* so much water flow People hustled in the Metro, a time has quickly gone by On someone's face the sufferings were fading What to think today, what to say later on...

The music flew from the Great Restaurant I go, my hair wetted with the shade of the late moon...

Beijing 18.9.1999

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(1)</sup> The bust of writer L·o X, (1899-1960), author of the novel Dromedary Wall and the play The Long Tu Culvert. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968. Upon learning that he had committed suicide in the Cultural Revolution on August 28, 1965, the prize was then awarded to the next Asian writer after himself, i.e. to Japanese writer Kawabata.

## **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

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>(\*)</sup> Based on HồChí 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."

#### **THANKING THE PEOPLE**

Small ambition taking care of great matters Poor talent occupying a high position In days past such people would suffer from great misfortunes But at the present time they are unhurt

Life is so compassionate and upright Well, why should one be sad The full moon will turn waning A mandarin might be wealthy and elegant for a certain length of time...

The people are giving so many fringe benefits How can one be poor and hungry So many people with no reputation Are glorifying the nation

At present one can easily be a mandarin As people are generous and magnanimous People are like leaves Which the wind blew to the road side

The cup of wine to thank the PEOPLE I found it bitter when drinking it all alone The earth is very, very high Heaven is immensely deep...

Written on the night of the 30th of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month i.e. the Mậu Dần Lunar New Year's Eve.

#### **FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL**

Standing on tiptoe one can't reach heaven Wrestling with animals Men would lose Haft a life looking for the sun in the rain Haft a life advancing towards things that haven't been formed Each day has its separation Loving you when young and meeting you again when already old From time immemorial flowers are always flowers Don't expect heaven to collapse to catch birds...

1 - 2000

## AN DƯƠNG VƯƠNG'S WORDS

I'm not concerned about TriệuĐà Nor am I troubled byTrọngThủy 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 madeof white goose feathers... (\*) 2019

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>(\*)</sup> 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.

### **NIGHT FEAST**

You're the Chairman for this term You walked out amidst a resounding round of applause One feels tipsy after drinking late in the night The joy was fluctuating and sweat smeared your shirt...

There was something quite innocent When you devised your impractical dreams The faces of everybody were dazzling bright Showing their utmost respect, talking about their utmost confidence

This is a river section Later on no one knows which one is turbid and which one is clear Matters in this life simply cannot be figured out For how long can we clench our fists... and when will we stop clenching...

Hoping that once you've fallen from honour There will still be someone from this audience that will still welcome you...

Thành Nam (Southern city) 1-1988

#### NARRATIVE

I had stood in all regions Went and lived everywhere But I'll only lie and die on the H<sup>1</sup> 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

# OLD MR. CHIEN SAW HIS NIECE OFF TO WORK AS A MAID-SERVANT ABROAD

You've gone through a class Learning to mop the floor, to sew buttonhole stitches To wait upon the young grandpa at meal time Giving the toothpick you had to kneel down...

Learning to eat table leavings in the kitchen Learning to cry without letting anybody know... The lesson of the days our country was ruled by foreign aggressors It's not expected that it's used today...

Thirty years of victory over the enemies Raising high his head in bullets and bombs Hungry and poor with his trembling hand holding a stick He stood on the side of the path...

6. 1988

## **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<sup>(3)</sup>

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 ourprofessions 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 messagedby someone I sleep throughout the night, without having anything beside...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(3)</sup> 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...

Hạ Long 2009

#### **THE CALL**

Oh friend Have you ever heard The vague and far away call of the World Up from the high blue Causing you to raise your head And look deeper into your own self

Oh friend Is there anytime when you silently walk In the calm quietness of late night But you suddenly heard the resounding Of the silent lament of the earth Causing you to unexpectedly stop walking And your heart beat more bustlingly With endless aspirations of the stars...

Oh friend Is there any evening Listening somewhere The regretful evenly soft sound of Old Fall From the golden leaf falling from the vault of green trees On the river banks of the old deserted river That had forgotten the brown sail at the end of the North-east wind To very deeply grieve for a person... Oh friend Have you ever had a special restless night for an unclear reason With your whole body vibrating Strangely trembling with excitement You wanted to shout aloud for only you to hear But you couldn't And recognized All things you've had are insignificant, ordinary and tasteless...

Alas! If you hadn't a time Yes, if you hadn't a time Heard such a fluttering and vague sounds While your soul remains peaceful Then how can you demonstrate That your life is so lovely and beautiful...

## **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...

## **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 Isonly my own enemy...

# DAILY AND ORDINARY THINGS AT HOME

Catsand 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...

# VISITING THE POET THAT HAS TWO DAUGHTERS LEARNINGTHE 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...

## **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 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

# GOING INTO THE SẤM (THUNDER) VILLAGE

Trang Trinh Nguyen Binh Khiem is a great poet under the Mac. Sam Ky (The Book of Prophecies) is his most famous work, annotated by posterior people, and consisting of mysterious and strange prophecies relating to Mankind and the World. It's quite difficult to distinguish which ones are his words, and which ones are added by posterior people. Lang Sam or Thunder Village is the name I give to Co Am village, Li Hoc village, Vinh Bao district Hai Phong, native country of the Book of Prophecies of Nguyen Binh Khiem.

Walking in the Sam (Thunder) village while extremely Keepingsilence Listening to the cascading sound of eucalyptus leaves falling onthe concrete road Thinking that old Mr. Trang is still there, with ready-to-wearturban, chasuble, and wooden shoes Flapping gently the bamboo tape fan, strolling out to the field ...

What did old Mr. Trang think, we all almost know His five hundred years old poems were bright and wholly dedicated to a good cause As for his Book of Prophecies, no one knows which Prophecybelongs to him Who can decode the mystery Who can determine the Man's heart... The nation that six thousand years ago gave birth to MasterK'ung Erecting his statue at the Heaven's Gate <sup>(4)</sup> 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 Bach 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 warmon 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...

<sup>(4)</sup> 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 thepost nuclear era Even the chopping board is fishy, there will be no more Fliesto alight <sup>(5)</sup> One must please Heaven to have a good place to live...<sup>(6)</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(5)</sup>A verse of Nguyễn Bỉnh Khiêm "The chopping board is fishy, flies alight".
 <sup>(6)</sup> "A Hoành Sơn mountain range, a place to live forever".
 Legend has it that this is a Nguyễn Bỉnh Khiêm's advice reserved for Lord Nguyễn;

The Nguyễn collapsed in 1945

## WILL YOU GO BACK TO HẠ LONG...

Will you go back to Ha 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 Ha Long Bay, the sunny sea has the beauty of thesun, while the rain on the mountains has the beauty of the rain You're more beautiful than in the old days, and also younger than before...

l'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

## **THAT ERA**

They need people's blood to maintain their throne The hostilities are ended. People will lose also their cookedrice balls while they were sharing the wealth Were you to stand on the side of the People? You will beimmediately exterminated The Mandarins are hawks, People are only ducks...<sup>(7)</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(7)</sup>Words of Tran Khanh Du, a famous military leader under the Tran:
 "Mandarins and military leaders are hawks, people are ducks. Using the meat of ducks to nourish the hawks, is normal, there is nothing strange". (Complete Dai Viet historical records)

## **TO MISS A BROTHER**

*Respectfully remembering the sacredsoul 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...

## **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 oftears Striving our best to show our heart, to tell thetruth To have one's peace of mind, one is so luckyalready!

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 ownComrade!

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 theirmother'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 goto 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" <sup>(8)</sup> 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 ourAncestors 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 theaction Until when can that matter could be reversed?...

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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>(8)</sup> "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 ADOCTOR 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 andlaughed 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 fewwhitish reeds Not a few wrong things, and also not a fewcrimes They have done throughout their lives, Andonly 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 theirfate...

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...

## THERE IS A POET... (\*)

There is a poet lying in the hospital His injury is submerged in the spirit corner After all consultations, the illness is not found Were there a medicament that can heal the People's pangs...

The People's mind in him means the unfortunateones That have given to the country the last drops of blood of their children And have offered also to the country the last grain or rice in the torn closely woven basket Hoping only to have a warm and well-fed life, and a peaceful country...

Now here and there are all well-fed and warm, while the whole country is peaceful They were thrown to cities, and were selling themselves in the markets As no one wanted to buy them... They thought of their own miserable fates And dared not blame anybody... while silently bowed their heads... 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 couldknow While Heaven is blue unendingly and everlastingly Blue since thousands of years ago...

While not foranything 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 arestill 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 bedifferent Oh sons, I hope that when comes the time of your grand children, the Truth willbe crowned There will no longer be anyone needing wings to flow to heaven

When successful in whatever field You'll have many true enemies, Andmany 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've vaguely heard, so far away the sad sound of the thousands leagues Fall So far away and high up, are the sounds of stars flickeringly inviting... The key of the house, I leave it here, the pages of 60 years of verses, I leave them there It's possible...when you come, I had *flown* away...

## THE WISE MAN...

The wise man often conceals what he knows The thought is in the east His mouth talks in the west His feet are in a countryside alley His hands have gone downtown Hiding attempts under full cups of wine...

I am already old I don't know where to conceal My foolishness Learned at the time everything were Fully Satisfactory The bunch of incence sticks dies out when I haven't completely gone through my existence Holding the joss-stick base To go to the end of this life...

## **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...

## 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 ớ ...(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...

# NOTING DOWN A HEART-RENDING STORY IN THE AGRARIAN REFORM

When people tied closely the buffalo rope to his Dien Bien Phu leather belt <sup>(9)</sup> 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"<sup>(10)</sup> 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

<sup>(9/1)</sup>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!* 

## **ONE EVENING...**

One evening, I raised my head and look up to the firmament And saw an old mass of clouds fondling a young mass of clouds To regenerate in the Infiniteness I understood why the rain drops fell down to the trees' sunshade The leaves awkward1y looked at one another Then spoke in a whisper about wicked things... Everything were being born and moving Stone was mutating itself into earth Earth is transforming itself into trees Trees are transforming themselves into air... It might very well be that I'm the vague echo of far away commitments Which our forefathers in ancient days often left half-done between pages of books I hugged closely the thoughts vague misty

I myself didn't see clearly the shape Who knows on a certain dreamy night I will also be regenerated It might very well be among the fire-flies Flying out as swift as an arrow from the darkness of the water-fern pond...

# **O THE MADLY BUSY GENIUS**

O The Madly Busy Genius I came asking to meet You To pay tax Please measure and weigh by whatever value

Well, please see here, my chrystal clear bloodstream flowed meandering from the cliff of the Con Son stream profusedly deserted and cold *The guests were two thousand green mountains* <sup>(1)</sup>

Well here, my heart is hung outside my chest The fate of living beings caused it to be self resounding bing bong (Onomat) Very very far sounds in a fall evening on a strange land *Thousands of reeds were silver tinted*,

golden maize leaves fell <sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup>A verse by Nguyen Trai. <sup>(2)</sup>A verse by Nguyen Du. 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...

## I'VE BEEN FOOLISH ENOUGH...

I've been foolish enough to show off Before The Madly Busy Genius The poetical stringed instrument I had stolen From the sad moonlit nights The wild finger of the wind Had played The choked sounds of blue stars That died bluish green on top of the grass The quivering sound of the wild race Silently shouted from joy in the chest of foetuses...

The Madly Busy Genius told me About your Non-Poetic stringed instrument If wanting to look at it One has to close one's eyes If wanting to listen to it One has to stop one's ears The lushly green enigmas Overflowingly spurted down from high heaven Chrystal clear and colourless There was neither moon nor wind Mixing up night and day Man wears the soul of grass and trees Grass and trees think like a man My body resounded With sounds that were soundless And I suddenly flowed wanderingly To far away and gloomy countries Right at the place I was standing silently...

#### 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...

#### **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...

#### 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...

## **ON THIS PLACE SOMEONE...**

On this place someone was sent to the stake On that place someone was pushed into an abyss Everywhere there are people that were humiliated... O dear Hero! The world isn't peaceful Even though each morning the heavenly birds still chirped...

The strength of cowards The will of the night shadow Always ambush under bunches of ripe fruits...

A cruel guy sometimes does charitable works Poisoning even laughters Appending a real seal to fake files And walked into a radiant beam of light...

Even with a blue eye It wasn't easy to recognize the cruel guy Washing clean the blood from a killing The towel was still white... Calling for mercifulness They turned their faces away pretending not to see O Hero! When walking at night Remember to bring along your Sword As for Me I bring along my Verse...

#### THE EARTH BREATHES BY THE WIND

The Earth breathes by the wind Speaks by thunder Heaven keeps silent I don't know by what I can breathe, by what I can speak When the Earth loves Me And has passionately hugged Me...

The Spring flowing from a deep cleft might still be turbid Only the sound of the monochord is always chrystal clear O Someone! Please play for Me for the last time The millenary piece of music of the bamboo hedge and the thatched roofs The curved corner of the roof of our village communal house was inclinedly bent like a crescent moon...

I recognized You Standing quiveringly awaiting for Me The thin flap of your dress flying in the late of the night dew Vaguely visible were the sacred and illusive mountains and hills Skin and flesh fragrant like ripe fruits... 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...

# 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 asjust plucked I've heard "Eating maize is more nutritivethan eating rice" The beloved scientists constantly affirm That they never lie Be at ease, you don't have to think aboutanything!...

Projects of millions of billions are leftunexploited The deep areas still have people dying ofhungriness In all towns and provinces one always sees High officials' houses as big as communalhouses

Bright yellow wardrobes for exposing gifts So heavy iron gate with two persons closingand opening A herd of ferocious dogs... Functional organs don't discover corruption Our homeland has days like that Be at ease, and don't think about anything!...

Everywhere people are welcoming medals Achievements are almost the same ones Loudspeakers of wards and villages twicea day Each time 2 hours The voice broadcasted is stentorian

Not having pity of people's houses under the speakers That have people dying and suffering frommental disease People have right to have information Be at ease and don't have to think about anything!

Our homeland has days like that The court judges the son that kills his father The grandson that violates his grandmother The reason found is that it's because of the excitement of foreign films Be at ease and don't have to think about anything!

#### **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!

#### **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 TOTHE 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 witha general idea as follows: **"From the horizon ofoneman to the horizon of all men,"** From that idea, I'veunderstood that: *"Each poet has to walk with his ownfootsteps on the spot his nation is walking. But withregard to his destination, he must come to the wholemankind"*. The second meeting of the Asiatic and Pacificpoets at this place constitutes a so lively emblem of thatidea. Poets are creative persons, not only creatinglanguages as people usually say. The creativities ofthe poets include creating the living substances and thesouls, so as to recognize the spiritual deepness of anation, as well as to contribute a heartfelt voice and asymbol of aesthetic to the flow of world poetry. Freedomand talent are the essential elements of creativity.

Character and skill and spirit combinedare 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 peoplehave discussed about there are several books that havebecome canons, in which there are so many great talentedand 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 have just started. And people have to continue discuss again. Poetry continues to be something mysterious, deeply blue in face of us like the sea,

withlayers after layers like mountains and deep forests. Forthat reason, the more one studies and writes poetry. Themore one perceives that poetry has something quitedifficult to grasp and conquer. It seems like poetry candevelop, so that each poet can be a different one, andin only one person, there are also phases that are differentfrom one another, while all such elements are available thanks to this "particular" point. For that reason, the newhigh summits have the occasion to appear, while the newarguments about poetry can base themselves on that to beconstantly supplemented... There will never be an end.

For that reason, were someone to say that he hascompletely understood poetry, then I would immediatlysay that that person is a liar.

In many cases, the most interesting poems were written bypresentiment, not by arguments, and it's only when theauthor is "non-ego" that the poem can be natural and lightand flowing. Just like the evenly soft sound of the country, the striped folds of tigers and panthers, who knows whichone is the light that flows over their heads. There are poetswhose capital in schools and classes is not much, but bymeans of naturally and deeply understood layers of cultureof our country and of the whole mankind, their works arealways a sudden brightness and liberality of the talent andintelligence of several generations which they unexpectedlybecome 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, withtottering footsteps, while creating magnificent aestheticvalues, that have never existed before, enriching to anunknown point the cultural values for the era they hadlived their lives.

I lay down as a policy to write easy to understand poems, while the readers cannot understand at one time all thatI wanted to say. They thought they have understood, butit seems like there still is something that obliges them toread a second time, and like that, each time they read again, they will see that they have discovered something, or knowabout some additional thing. Then when reading more, theywill see the matter I only suggest to them. Finally, theymight think of the thing I've never thought about... *TheTale of Kieu*, a worldknown work of the VietnameseLiterature, is oneamong the works like that. Up to thepresent time, 200 years have gone by, the ideas exchangedor even discussed... around problems of ideas and art of the *Tale of Kieu*, as well as the outstanding advantages and therestrictions, still not have a conclusion ... and that aremainly 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, andoutside of my thoughts. My works and my individualitydon't have to be responsible. Because I think that: It'squite possible that the most famous and interesting poemfrom the past to the present of all nations, from allcountries, and all eras can be the poem on which theverses must be read between the lines. Poet Che Lan Vienof Vietnam has once written "*The verse I wrote one halfonly/ As for the other half, let's the Fall do it.*"And so likethat. If my poems have only 300 readers, with such a depthwho could also understand … the matter I suggested andleft half-done to them, then I'll have 300 books of poemsthat are different from one another, and my own book ofpoems will be the  $301^{st}$  one. There are also people whohave discussed about this matter, as up to the present timethere are still many persons whostill waver over thepolysemantic nature of poetry.

There are people who have a divided mind on the way toresolve the problem of poetry. I think that it's not the duty of poetry. Formerly, at the present time, and even lateron, poetry has only one duty, that of being*interesting*. Asfor 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 – themore the works are interesting differently, the more theyare good. Only interesting poems can save poetry. Only interesting poems can have readers. Without readers, thepoems die and the poet also dies. But being able to writeinteresting 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 tobe similar to another. And that is his own creativity, relatingto the means, but not to the purpose. Is that right that you'rea poet? Then you must think of a certain means to express thepoetic idea *in an illusive manner with regard to realisticmatters which many people have seen clearly*. The illusivenesswill 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 certainaction relating to languages to make very clearly and very easyto understand *the matters that are unclear and difficult tounderstand, which you are the only person that could think of and understand clearly*. Not being able to do that, your poemswill have a unique reader who simply is yourself. I've a profound consciousness about studying the traditionalEastern Poems, particularly the Tang Chinese poems, as Ialways strive to make my poems suggestive and could be readbetween the lines... I've also strived my best, by means ofartistic methods which I've learned from the artistic Easternand also Western poetries, to unify opposite sides and tocreate a sudden mutation in the expression of the people'sfate as well as mankind's fate before the unceasing percussionof the world situation to include also the thought of peoplebefore the circumstance and the universe. Throughout my poems writing life, I've strived my best to study and haveadopted that artistic and ideological tendencies, but to whatpoint I've reached, is another matter. The more I study andwrite poems, the more I recognize that : Each poet must gofrom the spot his nation is going, while his destination must be 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 workswritten with artistic tendencies different with mine, or evencontrary to me. As poetry belongs to all people, and comesfrom thousands of different ways, not only from realistic life, as with realistic life, each man is different from the other, eachplace is different from the other place, and each period is alsoa 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 themost important thing is that your work must cause men to livewith 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, andthe 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 concretly or dreamingly, vague but filled with impressions, and also haveparticular characters like the perfume of a type of flower.Everyflower 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, peotry 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 isthe 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 booksin 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 Prizeby 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

\* \* \*

Biên tập

#### Lê Thanh Minh

Trình bày, bìa, tạo Ebook

matthoigian2001@

\* \* \*

Copyright © Tác giả và Rạng Đông giữ Bản quyền

